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THE END OF THE AMERICAN AVANT GARDE, 1930-1965

DISSER TATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In 1935, David Bernstein, editor of the American literary magazine, The New Talent, characterized the avant garde as writers motivated by the "spirit of revolt...against artificial boundaries of so-called good taste, against hypocritical 'sweetness and light,' against formalistic strictures of language." As a result of this revolt, members of the avant garde heralded and to a great extent created unprecedented changes, not only in art, but in all areas of intellectual and material life in the West. The powerful impact of the movement appears today not only in museums and libraries but in advertisements and popular culture.1

Yet, by the 1960s, many critics, scholars, and artists began proclaiming the death of the avant garde. "Truth is," wrote composer Virgil Thomson in 1966, "there is no avant-garde today. Dada has won; all is convention; choose your own. What mostly gets chosen...is that which can be packed and shipped...[for] a conditioned public." In 1967, critic Irving Howe argued that it seems greatly open to doubt whether by now, a few decades after the Second World War, there can still be located in the West a coherent and self-assured avant-garde.... Bracing enmity has given way to wet embraces, the middle class has discovered...
that the fiercest attacks upon its values can be transposed into pleasing entertainments, and the avant-garde writer or artist must confront the one challenge for which he has not been prepared: the challenge of success.

An important cultural development had taken place, which was not, on the surface, given the cultural impact of the movement, to be expected. Why the dissolution of the avant garde occurred will be the subject of this work.

DEFINING THE AVANT GARDE

The term avant-garde was originally a military one, referring to troops in the lead, or vanguard. In the eighteenth century, the word began to be applied metaphorically to politics. For example, in 1794 the word appeared in the title of a French periodical addressed to intellectuals in the army, urging them to continue the defense of the principles of the revolution. The social and political connotations of the term grew increasingly important in the next century. French socialist Henri de Saint-Simon was one of the first, Donald Egbert argues, to apply the idea of vanguard to art and politics. Saint-Simon, in his Opinions littéraires, philosophique et industrielles, wrote a dialogue between an artist and a socialist in which the artist declared that "It is we, artists, who will serve you as avant garde: the power of the arts is in fact most immediate and most rapid: when we wish to spread new ideas among men, we inscribe them on marble or on canvas;...and in that way above all we exert an electric and victorious influence." Saint-Simon believed that he lived on the eve of the greatest period of intellectual and artistic
development in human history and that artists had a "priestly"
mission to lead the way into that future.3

By the 1840s, French radicals regularly described themselves as avant-garde, and the term had become a political cliché. Indeed, after 1848 the term lost the older artistic connotations, a meaning that had always been subordinate to politics, even in Saint-Simon. In the early 1860s, Baudelaire knew avant-garde only as a military-political word. Not until the 1870s did cultural and political radicalism come together once more as the avant-garde. Literary historian Renato Poggioli argues that the crises of the Franco-Prussian War and the suppression of the Communards gave innovative artists and political radicals a sense of common purpose that brought them together, if only for a short time. It was during the 1880s that avant-garde took on the modern sense of a synonym for artistic innovation. Exactly why the change occurred is not clear. Egbert suggests that the dissociation occurred because, at the turn of the century, most members of the avant-garde were divided: political radicals tended to be Marxists, and cultural radicals tended to be anarchists.4

THE CONCEPT OF THE AVANT GARDE IN AMERICAN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

The avant-garde might be described as a vanishing topic in American intellectual history. The writers of the classic works of intellectual history, such as Oscar Cargill and Merle Curti, described the intellectual rebellion of the first decades of the
twentieth century in some detail, typically describing the event as something of a coming of age, an "end to American innocence," as Henry May put it. In more recent surveys of American intellectual history, the first phase of the avant garde in America was given some attention, but after the 1920s the avant garde largely dropped out. Thus, Lewis Perry, in his 1984 survey of American intellectual life discussed the avant garde rebellion against Victorianism that took place in the 1910s and 1920s and created modernist culture. The subject largely disappeared from subsequent chapters in the book. Perry, like other contemporary intellectual historians, made brief reference to the "beatniks" as a precursor to the counter culture of the 1960s, but neither in the work of Perry, nor of most other intellectual historians of the postwar years, does one learn that an avant garde community persisted in America from the twenties through the late fifties.5

In the seminal anthology, *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, the avant garde did not figure in the discussion. John Higham noted in the introduction that the contributors showed a marked turn away from literature and psychology, two staples of earlier discussions of the advance guard. Clearly, the focus of intellectual history was changing. Contributors showed an interest in the social and institutional basis of knowledge and in the history of mentalities, important subjects, but areas that took historians away from the issues raised by the avant garde.6
Since the 1960s, researchers in modern American intellectual history have tended to focus on two areas. One group has examined the professionalization of the sciences from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. Another group has explored the New York intellectuals. These authors do show that the intellectuals in the New York community sometimes described themselves as avant garde or mourned the passing of that vanguard, but that identity is incidental to the history of ideas and relationships in the group. Many historians are more interested in the New York group as anti-Communists than as modernists, however.7

The postwar American avant garde has not been completely ignored in historical scholarship. In 1965, Anthony Linick wrote a pioneering study of the postwar literary avant garde. Based on the plethora of little magazines published by avant gardists from 1945 to 1965, Linick described a coherent community of intellectuals alienated from a society they described as materialist, violent, excessively rationalism, and conformist. The goal of members of the avant garde, Linick argued, was to replace negative values with creative, life sustaining ones, which vanguardists extolled in their writing and the way in which they lived their lives.8

More recently, Michael Davidson's 1985 study of the San Francisco Renaissance, while not drawing on Linick's work, emphasized many of the same themes of alienation and regenerative innovation aimed at establishing a more humane future. Davidson presented close readings of key texts by the central figures in Bay area poetry in the 1950s
and 1960s. He also emphasized the strong sense of community that united writers whose poetic practices were often very different. Davidson argued that these writers understood their community to be an "oppositional sign" that expressed their own hope for a new culture.⁹

Art historians have described an abstract expressionist vanguard community with intellectual and personal connections to the literary vanguard. Irving Sandler's work in the 1960s, and that of Ann Gibson and Stephen Polcari in the 1980s that built on Sandler's approach, all combined a close study of the artists' iconography and stated purposes with an examination of the intellectual milieu in which the artists worked. These scholars described how the avant garde created an art expressive of mythological and religious themes that affirmed life, and would, members of the van hoped, contribute to the regeneration of Western culture.¹⁰

A small group of scholars have returned to the origins of the American avant garde and described how vanguard innovations served as the leading edge of a new modernist culture. This dissertation builds on that work (discussed in the next section) by carrying the story forward. The present study, integrating the work of literary, art, and music historians with a fresh examination of primary source materials, is intended to return the avant garde to a central place in twentieth century American intellectual history. This study demonstrates that the avant garde had a continuous history during the middle decades of the twentieth century, and that the avant garde
created a mature modernist culture in the United States by the 1950s.11

More important, the work shows how the avant garde and modernism came to an end by the middle 1960s. Destroyed by a combination of external forces and internal weaknesses, the end of the avant garde set the stage for the present period of postmodernist culture and poststructuralist thought.

The primary sources on which this work is based are the little magazines published by members of the avant garde, letters and diaries by vanguardists, and publications of the mass media. The "little" in little magazine refers, of course, to the small circulation of the usually short-lived, low-budget publications that cultural radicals produced as forums for their ideas and creative work. Though little magazines proliferated in the years after World War II, few historians have made use of them. Likewise, the papers of postwar vanguardists, many of them only recently available, have been used by biographers, but less often by historians of the avant garde. In the little magazines and their private writings, vanguardists presented their critiques of American culture and their hopes for the future. These sources are invaluable for understanding the cultural meaning members of the avant garde attached to their work. In mass media publications can be seen both the progress of cultural integration and the (mis)interpretations that defined the mainstream side of that integration process.12
THE AVANT GARDE AND CULTURE

Culture is that complex combination of values, ideas, myths, and institutions that enables a social group to interpret their environment and organize their society. Culture functions to establish order and stability. Historian Warren I. Susman has shown that culture and culture change have historically been the focus of the "liberal-radical" tradition in the United States. In particular, Susman contends, liberal and radical critics have been concerned with cultural restrictions on individual self-expression and self-fulfillment. Self-fulfillment through the integration of art and life was the goal of members of the avant garde. Thus, while avant gardism was at least partially rooted in Europe, there were significant intellectual connections with American traditions of social criticism.13

The resistance of cultures to change explains the extremely innovative quality of avant-garde creativity. With their innovations, members of the avant garde expressed both their alienation from their culture and their desire to transform that culture to create a new future. Three themes, then, explain the relationship of avant gardists to their culture: alienation, innovation, and the future.
ALIENATION

The first theme that characterizes the avant garde is alienation. Marx took this term from Hegel and from legal terminology to describe a sense of uselessness and isolation felt by people estranged from their work and ultimately society. Others applied the idea as a description of modern people in general and intellectuals in particular.14

The alienation of the avant garde was rooted in the social and economic changes that took place in Europe in the nineteenth century that transformed the status of the artist. With the rise of the modern middle class and industrial capitalism, the old system of patronage disappeared. Artists were no longer artisans but laborers, selling their products on the open market, and subject to all the economic risks of laborers. And they had to compete against the new mass-produced culture. In this context, artists could either join the culture or define themselves by their opposition to their culture. Alienation was the beginning, therefore, of self-definition.15

The result of this economic change was the creation of a new model for the artist, the bohemian. No longer the artisan, artists became intellectual vagabonds, living in poverty, on the edge of society and defying the conventions of the middle class. The idea of bohemia was idealized from the beginning, but the model remained both the stereotype and the reality for artists until well into the twentieth century.16
The avant garde was an opposition culture. They emerged directly to counter the values of the new Victorian middle class that rose to cultural dominance with the industrial revolution. The Victorian world view of the English and American middle classes emphasized innocence. The Victorians desired to separate themselves from corruption and create a harmonious world. In the United States, this Victorian culture has also been referred to as the Genteel Tradition. Promoted by a group of literary publicists centered in cities of the northeast, the Genteel Tradition was an attempt to civilize the emerging industrial order by encouraging graceful manners, strict morality, and respect for cultural tradition, especially that of England.17

Avant-garde critics experienced their society as over-civilized, inauthentic, formalist, and artificial. They believed that the genteel tradition smothered creativity and individuality. They rejected Victorian culture in the name of "real humanity." Thus, in 1930, the editors of the American little magazine, Blues, the poets Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler declared in an editorial that

the hideous genteel, the sham culture of the admirers of William Lyon Phelps...comprise the elements in American life which are...hostile to the experimental enterprise of Blues's artists; and by experimental enterprise we mean simply: freedom of the spirit and the imagination.

Vanguardists sought to integrate that which the Victorians had tried to separate: the human and the animal, the civilized and the savage. Drawing on the new biology, physics, and social sciences, cultural radicals created a new culture based on ideas of ideas of relativity, contingency, and process without a final closure.18
Alienation was the fuel for avant garde creativity. The emergence of avant garde art from this negative ground explains the dark, and often destructive, quality of many avant garde works. One should not, however, characterize avant gardism as mere negativism. Alienation provided the creative energy for the constructive characteristics of avant gardism: innovationism and futurism.

**INNOVATION**

Innovation is the characteristic most closely identified with the avant garde. Poggioli points out that the very word "avant garde" focuses attention on this theme. He argues that the image suggested by the term is one of soldiers on reconnaissance preparing the way for the advance of the main body of troops. While most observers tend to make innovation the defining characteristic of avant gardism, Poggioli maintains that innovationism, this activist quest for the new, is the least distinctive quality of avant gardism and thus much less important. Since avant gardists are not the only intellectuals involved in innovative activity (scientists come to mind as counter examples) Poggioli's point is well taken. What sets avant garde innovations apart from other innovations is the connection with cultural transformation.¹⁹

Cultural radicals sought to change the perception of people so that art and life could be integrated and culture renewed. Members of the advance guard believed that by creating new expressions in art, literature, music, and other creative areas they could transform the perceptions of their audiences. Vanguard artists constantly
asked "what is painting?" or "what is music?" In answering these questions advance guard artists both broke down and extended the formal boundaries of art. Often the results shocked people, but the point of innovation was not just to "épater le bourgeoisie." By ridiculing the rules of genteel society, vanguardists hoped to liberate others from the confines of that culture. Radical innovators believed that the way art was perceived and the way people perceived the world around them were much the same. Therefore, avant gardists believed that by changing perception in one area they could change perception in another and create a new order.20

Avant gardists shared the Romantic belief that human creativity is the way to liberation. Members of the avant garde believed that cultural renewal came through the fresh integration of art and life. This concern derived from the alienation of the artist in capitalist society. Peter Bürger notes that art in the Middle Ages, for example, was integrated into the church, the most important social institution of that time. In the capitalist order of the 19th century, Bürger argues, art and the aesthetic existed in a sphere separate from the everyday reality of economic competition. Art provided an escape from that harsh reality, a realm of joy, truth, and humanity. The avant garde emerged, Bürger maintains, to challenge this separation of art and life. Avant gardists accomplished this goal in a variety of ways: by questioning the whole idea of art, most extremely in the work of Dadaists; by responding to technological innovation; and by searching for a new mythological system in which to frame human experience.21
Avant garde innovation was, moreover, characterized by extremism, a sometimes reckless disregard for tradition and standards. More importantly, this innovation was defined by teleology. Alienated from the prevailing aesthetic and social values, the avant garde pursued the new in order to create the future.\textsuperscript{22}

**THE FUTURE**

Members of the avant garde believed that human creativity could be an avenue to a better tomorrow. This theme is especially important in the American context, for the American avant garde, for a variety of reasons, was more optimistic than the European. Vanguard belief in the future was the counter to alienation. Cultural radicals believed in a future in which art and life were integrated and human beings experienced self-fulfillment.\textsuperscript{23}

Cosmopolitanism was also an important related theme for American vanguardists. The cosmopolitan ideal was of a future in which the particularisms of class, ethnicity, political ideology and religion were transcended. Instead, a universal, secular, rational vision united people and enabled them to experience their individual lives more fully as well as to appreciate more sympathetically the experience of others.\textsuperscript{24}

The avant garde, then, was a movement of creative intellectuals, alienated from the emerging industrial order of Western Europe and America. These intellectuals, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, rebelled against the cultural values of their society and
pursued innovations in a variety of areas in order to create a future in which art and life would be integrated. The avant garde functioned as the leading edge of modernist culture. The extremism of the avant garde rejection of the immediate past and of their pursuit of the new can obscure continuities with the past. For the avant garde can be altogether described as an unstable combination of the Enlightenment notion of progress with the Romantic emphasis on human creativity.25

THE END OF THE AVANT GARDE

It was this avant garde that struggled heroically for several decades and then ended as a movement in the 1950s. No one has offered a complete explanation for this development, although the work of a number of scholars suggests some of the reasons. In general, several interrelated developments within American culture and within the avant garde caused the death of the movement: the integration of the avant garde into the Cold War, the movement of intellectuals into the university, the rise of the consumer culture and the transformation of art and ideas into commodities, and the avant gardist's loss of faith in the future. These are the themes that will be the subject of this work.

The avant garde became integrated into the culture of the Cold War. Members of the van felt alienated from the politics of the Cold War and sharply criticized these policies. But many Cold Warriors believed that avant-garde creativity and individualism made members of the movement the perfect demonstration of the superiority of
American society over Soviet society. Much vanguard rhetoric supported this interpretation, with the result that cultural radicals became tools of the cultural Cold War. In the process, the movement gained respect and prestige that furthered the process of cultural integration and dissolution.

The academization of the intellectuals, from the 1950s forward, fatally transformed the movement. The postwar expansion of higher education in America gave colleges and universities an all-but-insatiable appetite for young intellectuals. The new opportunities provided by these institutions led most postwar intellectuals to reject bohemianism. Cultural outsiders became cultural insiders. The specialist who spoke to other specialists replaced the free-lance intellectual who addressed an educated public and led the public into the future.26

In the 1950s, as a consumer culture based on the sale of life-style images reached maturity, avant gardeism became a commodity. Gallery operators, critics, and museum curators all promoted vanguard art to a prosperous middle and upper-middle class. Writers in the mass media converted avant garde rebellion into fads and fashion, encouraging innovation for the sake of innovation. The result was a pluralist culture in which no coherent vanguard movement could be discerned.27

In addition to these external causes for the dissolution of the avant garde, this work adds to our understanding of what occurred by showing how changes in avant garde self-understanding contributed to the end of the movement. In particular, it is argued that the idea
of the future is the key concept for understanding how the avant
garde came to end. As vanguardists turned away from their historic
understanding of the future and their role in creating the future,
they lost an understanding of culture as a coherent entity. This in
turn stripped advance-guard innovations of much of their meaning.
Innovation for the sake of innovation created a situation of
pluralism in which no one style or movement could be clearly
discerned as in the vanguard. As a result, while many post-vanguard
innovators still felt alienated from their society to at least some
degree, this alienation was balanced by the security of integration
into other institutions of commerce or culture. The spirit of the
avant-garde had been lost. Moreover, a central concept that defined
modernist culture, and indeed Western culture since the Renaissance,
no longer had meaning for many American intellectuals. An important
intellectual change had occurred.  

The coming together in the 1950s of several social, political,
economic, and intellectual currents, therefore, caused the
dissolution of the avant-garde. A movement that for seventy or
eighty years had decisively shaped thought and culture in the West
was gone. In the 1960s, artistic innovation continued, and there was
no surfeit of radical activism. But these movements quickly gained,
if not universal acceptance, at least a place in middle-class
culture. Radical chic was not avant-garde. Moreover, intellectual
developments after the 1960s were characterized by an inward turn.
Not only did intellectuals speak only to a select group of specialist
colleagues, but what had been for an older an older generation
artistic and intellectual self-consciousness became so extreme in postmodern thinkers that they focused on mere surfaces and images. For a new generation of intellectuals, ideas about civilization, culture, and the future became meaningless. In these events lies the significance of the end of the avant garde.\textsuperscript{29}
Notes to Chapter I


7. For recent histories of the sciences, see, for example, Daniel J. Kevles, *The Physicists: The History of a Scientific Community in Modern America* (New York: Knopf, 1978); Alexandra


22. In the American context, Susman identifies the preoccupation with history and with standards of quality and behavior with conservatives and the concept of civilization. See Susman, Culture as History, pp. 68-69.


INTRODUCTION

As the 1930s generation of American avant gardists sought a specific direction for cultural advance, many increasingly came to believe that the answer was to be found with the Communist Party. Cultural and political radicalism have often been linked. It was no accident that the term avant garde had political connotations before artistic ones, and Lenin himself referred to the Communist Party as being the political vanguard. In this chapter, the appeal of the Communist movement to members of the avant garde as the answer to alienation, the context of innovation, and the promise of the future will be discussed. The relationship between the Communist Party and the avant garde in the end proved unstable, however. Differing conceptions of the dynamics of social and cultural change led many avant gardists to leave the party. These intellectuals redefined their role as vanguard in terms of cultural preservation. They
achieve this goal through the canonization of the work of the avant
gardists of the first decades of the twentieth century as
"modernism."

In the late 1940s there emerged a new avant garde the members of
which rejected Communist ideology and modernism. This vanguard will
be introduced in this chapter and their specific ideas defined in
subsequent chapters. This avant garde movement would be the last in
America: by the 1960s they were integrated into institutions of
commerce and culture.¹

THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE AVANT GARDE

Before the 1929 stock market crash, the American Communist Party
was one of many small, sectarian, political parties on the left.
Only after the onset of the Great Depression did the Communists
emerge from obscurity to become, during the 1930s, the most prominent
radical political movement in the United States. Even so, the
organization remained small, never attracting more than 100,000
members at one time, although during the course of the decade more
than twice that number may have joined the party, if only for a short
time.²

The Communist movement appealed to many of the intellectuals who
defined themselves as avant garde. The members of America’s pre-War
rebellion against the Victorian producer culture desired the
transformation of American culture: social, political, economic,
intellectual. These avant gardists linked what critic Waldo Frank
called "the political and cultural currents of advance." Randolph Bourne, in particular, exemplified the integration of political and artistic radicalism and for this reason had been greatly admired by the young American avant garde. But Bourne's untimely death in 1919 serves almost as a metaphor for the separation between advanced art and politics that would occur in the 1920s. The destructiveness of the World War and the failure of Wilson's peace plan caused many young intellectuals to become disillusioned with politics. They turned from integrating art with life to an emphasis on art for art's sake.3

The depression changed the attitudes of intellectuals about their relationship to their society. They moved once more to an avant garde position, assuming responsibility for the state of American culture. Many intellectuals believed that they had acted irresponsibly in the 1920s because they had retreated from "reality" to Parisian aestheticism in the 1920s. Fanya Foss, a poet, short story writer, and member of the New York John Reed Club, wrote in 1934 that, "the spirit of exile here or abroad is the spirit of an escapist, which consciously or unconsciously is dangerously near Fascism." Leftist theater critic John Gassner remembered that "a great fear of social acedia, of evading or having evaded one's social responsibility, pervaded the world of the artist and the intellectual as the Depression grew deeper and the fortunes of fascism in Italy, Spain, and Germany rose higher. The one thing the artist and the intellectual feared most from an embattled leftist critic was the
charge of 'escapism.' As painter Peter Blume succinctly concluded, "the artists didn’t really descend from...their ivory towers—they were thrown out!"4

The Depression radicalized many intellectuals, and the Communist Party exploited the situation to get members in the party and in numerous affiliated organizations established for artists and intellectuals. If the bohemians of the 1920s were not concerned about their society and culture, most members of the Communist Party cared little for them. One activist from the thirties remembered that he and his colleagues "despised the intellectuals." Michael Gold, the editor of the party’s unofficial literary magazine, the New Masses, fought a lonely battle during the 1920s, trying to persuade party leaders that intellectuals were important to the Communist cause and trying to persuade intellectuals that the Communist Party was relevant to them. This background of mutual indifference explains the surprise of many Communists at the radicalization of bohemia. As one Marxist editor exclaimed, "Even Greenwich Village has succumbed!"5

During the 1930s, the Party leadership began to take an interest in artists and intellectuals. The party established a variety of cultural organizations of which the John Reed Clubs are probably the most well known. The John Reed Clubs, like the other organizations, were "dedicated to advancing the interests of the working class...to the defense of the achievements of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics [and] the development of new working class writers and
artists, as well as alignment of all artists, writers and intellectuals to the side of the revolutionary working class, stimulating their participation in revolutionary activity." Most of this activity was centered in New York City, but John Reed Clubs in several cities from Hartford to Hollywood managed to publish at least a few issues of local literary magazines and sponsor art exhibits. The Worker’s Music League established, at least on paper, local Pierre DeGeyter Clubs around the country, and the party associated New Dance Group also had branches outside of New York City. After 1935 the Party disbanded many of these decentralized and local groups and replaced them with national organizations such as the League of American Writers and the Artists’ Congress. In all of these institutions, art was closely linked to politics, if not subordinate to the political.6

COMMUNISM AND THE AVANT GARDE: ALIENATION, INNOVATION, THE FUTURE

The ideology of the Communist Party addressed, in a variety of ways, the themes that defined avant gardism, namely, alienation, innovation, and the futurism. The feeling of alienation from bourgeois culture was, of course, basic to avant garde self-understanding. Cultural radicals interpreted the Great Depression as a sign of the failure of bourgeois capitalism and as a confirmation of their rejection of the bourgeoisie. Samuel Putnam, for example, writing in New Hope in 1934, declared that “society today is a poisoned well.... Painting, literature, every form of
art... reeks with the stench of bourgeois decay." Editor William Phillips wrote in the *Partisan Review*, in 1934, that alienation was forced on creative intellectuals as a result of the depression:

> the gravity of the economic crisis has levelled most of us (and our families) to a meager, near-starvation existence. Opportunities for cashing-in are gone, and we have no illusions about their return. The kind of reputation which used to bring jobs as editors, lecturers, and readers in publishing houses, holds no lure for us, because those jobs have been whittled down to a few sinecures for stand-patters and tight-robe walkers. The bourgeoisie does not want us, and we could not accept the double-dealing which these jobs require.

In response to the economic crisis, composer Wallingford Riegger said, "As an artist, I feel impelled to continue my creative work, but I also feel, as an artist, that I must help oppose those forces which would deny humanity its heritage of culture and freedom." The Communist Party possessed of both a counter-bourgeois ideology and an organization dedicated to carrying out ideological goals, seemed to many cultural radicals to be an answer to their alienation and their uncertainty about the work they should be doing.\(^7\)

Members of the advance guard believed that through innovation they could change peoples' perception of reality and in this way bring about cultural renewal. In the 1930s many avant gardists believed that Marxism and the Communist Party provided both an intellectual framework for innovation and a community that modeled the integrated society of the future. But by the mid-thirties, divisions among radical intellectuals appeared. The basic issue was between the use of Marxism for cultural revolution or social revolution. Some intellectuals maintained that art should serve the
revolution of the political economy. Other intellectuals believed that the new perceptions of the European and American avant garde of the teens and twenties, when combined with the social and economic insights of Marxism, provided the surest way to cultural renewal. This division would ultimately lead most members of the avant garde to reject the Communist Party and orthodox Marxist interpretations of the relations between art and society.⁸

Since the 1920s, Communist Party literary theorists, such as Joseph Freeman and Michael Gold, argued that innovation needed to be guided by specific ideological goals and social content. In a 1930 essay, Gold, editor of the Party literary magazine, The New Masses, described the purpose of proletarian art in functional terms: "Every poem, every novel and drama, must have a social theme, or it is merely confectionery." He rejected innovations in literary technique as "another form for bourgeois idleness," declaring that in proletarian writing there should be "no straining or melodrama or other effects; life itself is the supreme melodrama. Feel this intensely, and everything becomes poetry—the new poetry of materials, of the so-called 'common man,' the Worker moulding his real world." Writers who adhered to this creed tended to use conventional literary forms to describe the life of workers. Thus, the technique of one contributor to the New Masses was described as "to make words rhyme and syllables come in exact order, to poetically exalt the proletariat out of its misery."⁹
The proletarian aesthetic, partisans argued, made it possible for the artist to avoid the false conscience of commercial popular culture and the irrelevance of aestheticism. Painter Louis Lozowick declared that the capitalist system "degrades the human personality, science and art to cash payments." Composer Hans Eisler argued that musical innovations of the first decades of the twentieth century had succeeded in "isolating modern music from life." Rather than communicating to their society, Eisler argued that "the modern composer has become a parasite, he is supported by private connoisseurs and the benevolence of a few wealthy people, and he produces no sensible, social work." The solution Eisler advocated was for musicians to recognize the crisis facing modern society and contribute their talents to the struggle for change. "In a period of great struggle for a new world, why should the musician be a skulker?" He urged composers to "ally with those others who suffer under the present system of society and fight against it. Here is the tie between the progressive intellectual, scholar, doctor, engineer, artist and the workers."10

Vanguard intellectuals, in contrast to the advocates of proletarian art, interpreted Marxist philosophy as a universal theory around which a unified culture characterized by social and economic equality and avant garde aesthetics could be created. Cubist painter Stuart Davis, for example, argued that abstract art, not realist art, addressed the social reality of the modern world. Davis believed the stylistic innovations of abstract art reflected the dynamism of
modern technology and the relativism of modern thought. Davis wrote that "Abstract art is a contemporary expression of the new lights, spaces, and speeds of our time.... It is the only art that concerns itself with the material world in motion and not as a world of absolutes and static entities." Davis also believed that Marxism was "the only scientific social viewpoint." In particular, Davis argued that the dialectical emphasis in Marxist thought paralleled the dynamism of the modern world. The influence of jazz in Davis's work perhaps best illustrates what he was trying to do. In his 1940 painting, *Hot Still-scape for 6 Colors--7th Ave. Style*, Davis conveyed the rhythms of jazz, the modern American urban milieu that produced the music, and the dialectic of history through the use of bold colors, overlapping geometric shapes, and swirling forms. In this and other paintings of the time, Davis wanted to express, as he wrote in his notebook, "[The] Progressive spirit of democracy; individual freedom; wonders of science; new light, space, speed."\(^\text{11}\)

The editors and contributors to the little magazine *Experimental Cinema* declared that motion pictures presented a new way of seeing in terms very much like those of Davis. For example, writer Seymor Stern, with the montage technique of Soviet director Serge Eisenstein in mind, described film as "a new instrument of human consciousness. As the form of consciousness itself." He maintained that film required a new kind of creator, "the scientist-artist laborer" who was a "dialectic-minded thinker" and could join "radical-revolutionary science" to attain "an ultimate exposition of
radical revolutionary world-meaning." Indeed, Stern concluded that the cinema would transform western civilization more profoundly than the Bolshevik revolution because as cinema advanced, "all bourgeois conceptions of esthetics and creativity [were] being forever swept away."12

In 1934 William Phillips and Philip Rahv launched the Partisan Review with the explicit purpose of combining the precepts of proletarian art with innovative techniques of previous generations of vanguards.13 In a 1934 essay entitled "Three Generations," Phillips presented a literary genealogy for proletarian literature, proceeding from the first generation of naturalists, such as Drieser and Anderson to the "lost generation" of the 1920s. The work of this expatriate generation, Phillips argued, needed to be integrated with the first. Phillips assigned this task of integration to the "third generation," the proletarian writers of the 1930s. "The spirit of the twenties is part of our heritage," Phillips wrote, "and many of the younger revolutionary generations are acutely conscious of this." Phillips noted that most of the important figures in revolutionary literature, men such as Joseph Freeman, Michael Gold, and Joshua Kunitz, were of the same generation as Hemingway and Cummings. These older radical writers were not expatriates and had kept alive the sociological tradition of Dreiser while "side-stepping" the innovations of their peers. Writers like Gold and Freeman had thus "carr[ied] the line of revolution forward," according to Phillips. But they left a task for the third
generation, the "proletarian generation," to tie the threads of the past together, "to use whatever heritage there is at our disposal for our revolutionary tasks." Phillips did not say outright that Gold and the others were wrong to ignore contemporary literary developments, but he clearly rejected the leftism of those who would argue that proletarian writers had nothing to learn from modernism. On the contrary, Phillips evaluated the quality of past writing on aesthetic grounds, not social or political grounds. "T. S. Eliot," he wrote, "is one of the strongest literary influences on us. This is so[,] probably, because he is the only really important poet of the immediate past." By 1935 and 1936, Rahv and Phillips had set for themselves a clear program: to meld modernist aesthetics with Marxian revolution.14

Despite differing interpretations of the relation between art and social change, a common vision of the future united the Communist Party and avant garde intellectuals. Communists seemed to share the vanguard vision of a future in which art and life were integrated and human creativity liberated. Marx and Engels envisioned a communist community in which specialization was eliminated and all were laborers and all were artists: "In a communist society," Marx wrote, "there are no painters, but at most men who, among other things, also paint." Leon Trotsky described the new human of the future as "immeasurably stronger, wiser, subtler" than people of the present. "The average human type," Trotsky declared, "will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, a Marx. And above this ridge, new peaks
will arise." Painter Stuart Davis described the new, post-revolution human beings as a new breed of perceptually sophisticated "Color-Space People." This belief in the new person, the liberated, authentic human being who was the true destiny of all people, linked the Communists and the avant garde.15

Furthermore, members of the Communist Party did not just talk about the future: they described the Soviet Union as the place where the community of the future was being built. American avant gardists used the Soviet Union as a model for their vision of the future. For example, Kay Rankin, a member of one of the Communist Party associated dance groups in New York City, declared that "Dance must be used to teach workers’ children that they belong to the working class...[and] use themes of nature to teach children to dance together in harmony, just as workers on a Soviet collective work together." According to the idealized picture of the Soviet Union that many American vanguardists held, the great cause of building the socialist state had inspired unity among diverse people and a willingness to sacrifice and suffer for the good of the whole. As this community was built, art and life became integrated. Soviet music critic Grigorst Schneerson described in Modern Music in 1936 how "Soviet music is sharply distinguished by a purposeful ideology, a truthful realism in the aspirations of Soviet composers who are stirred by the life surrounding them."16
The Communist Party represented to American vanguardists the fulfillment of the cosmopolitan ideal. The revolutionary new society would be rational and progressive. Ethnic and class hostilities would be replaced by cooperation. Human creativity would be liberated to make possible self-fulfillment. Capitalist society, in contrast, produced only poverty, economic crisis, fascism, and war. To intellectuals of the 1930s, as critic John Gassner remembered, Marxism presented "the other side of despair and the alternative to a passiveness disgraced by the appeasement policies of the government."17

BREAKING WITH THE COMMUNIST PARTY

In the last half of the 1930s, avant gardists began to reconsider their relationship to the Communist Party. Political events were generally the ostensible reason for the break. The hypocrisy of the Moscow trials of 1937 caused many intellectuals to reject the party. Such was the case of the Partisan Review editors Phillips and Rahv. Others rationalized the purges but could not rationalize the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact. Such was the case of painter Stuart Davis. Confronted with the choice of supporting the policies of the Soviet Union or their own moral and intellectual integrity, most vanguardists broke with the party. But beneath the immediate cause of the break, in most cases, there lay a deeper reason: avant gardists and Communists believed in different dynamics of cultural change.18
What was the cause of cultural change? For the Communists, the clash of different interests created by inequalities in the political economy generated conflict and change: the bourgeoisie rejected the authority of a feudal aristocracy and exploited proletariat would revolt against their capitalist exploiters. The result, in time, would be a humane new society. For the avant gardist, power came through ideas, and especially through perception. By presenting people with new ways of looking at reality, cultural radicals expected to change their audience's perception of reality.

Confronted with new uses of language, of visual medium, of sounds, vanguardists believed, people would recognize the limitations of the conventions of their culture. Recognizing these limitations, people could then proceed to envision a new, more fulfilling way of life.

These two models of culture change proved irreconcilable. The Depression focused the attention of radical artists on economic issues. The Communist Party addressed that problem with a theory (the writings of Marx, et. al), an organization (the Party), and a model (the Soviet Union). Always short on specifics themselves, it is no wonder that cultural radicals gave Marxism and the Communist Party serious attention. The primary interest of the Communists, however, for reasons both pragmatic and theoretical, was politics. Creative activity had to be subordinate to political goals. This policy conflicted with avant-garde insistence on creative freedom.
In the United States, creative freedom was the essence of authentic vanguardism because freedom was the opposite of the bourgeois conformity that alienated the avant garde. Artistic innovation was predicated on the free imagination of the creator. Avant-garde self-expression was the means to the cosmopolitan, liberated future envisioned by vanguardists.19

Communist Party leaders emphasized the artist's social responsibility rather than his or her creative freedom. Responsibility meant socially relevant art. Furthermore, the political agenda of the Soviet Union came into conflict with both avant garde and American values. American individualism, with its emphasis on political liberty, and avant-garde cosmopolitanism, with its hostility to war, could not support the Moscow trials, the Hitler-Stalin Pact, and Soviet militarism.20

In the end, the conception of change through the dynamic of politics proved incompatible with the avant garde vision of change accomplished through new ways of self-expression and perception. Artistic radicals wanted to look at the world directly, as Stuart Davis always argued, and respond in their art to what they saw without what turned out to be the limitations of political ideology. As poet Kenneth Rexroth wrote to Malcolm Cowley, "I don't believe ART should be solely or even principally concerned with the class struggle.... ART is mainly concerned with getting born, growing up, eating and drinking, fucking, getting an 'aim in life,' wishing you hadn't, dying...." Thus, by World War II, the cultural radicals of
the thirties came to reject the political radicalism of the Communist Party and returned to the historic vanguard theme of integrating art and life. In large part because of the experience of the 1930s avant garde, the next generation vanguard would be fiercely independent, anarchistic in politics, and focused on transforming the individual, not society directly.21

MODERNISM CANONIZED

In the late 1930s, the New York Intellectuals, disillusioned with the extant Marxist vanguard, reconstituted themselves in the cultural forefront by returning to the basic texts of the European and American modernist avant garde of the 1910s and 1920s. By aligning themselves with a "high culture" tradition that critics such as Dwight Macdonald and Clement Greenberg defined as distinct from both low "mass culture" and the somewhat more refined "middle-brow" culture, the New York group separated themselves from American society and culture even as they identified with America’s liberal political institutions as opposed to Soviet totalitarian politics.22

In this program, the New York intellectuals had allies in the so-called new critics. John Crowe Ransom, one of the founders of the new criticism, described the method as "more scientific, or precise and systematic" than the impressionistic, ethical, or historical approaches of traditional criticism. The new critics, represented by such journals as the Kenyon and Hudson Reviews, and with a very
different political and cultural pedigree from that of the New York intellectuals, shared an interest with the New York group in writers such as Henry James, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and most important for our purposes, avant gardists such as T. S. Eliot, Franz Kafka, and W. B. Yeats. The New York intellectuals and the new critics formed a cultural movement with a strong ideological "charter," to use historian Grant Webster's term, based on liberal, consensus politics and a "high" modernist aesthetic. This cultural charter received institutional support from periodicals such as the Partisan and the Kenyon and from the academic positions of many of the members.23

In the process of canonizing the historic avant garde, intellectuals transformed the vanguard from a movement for cultural renewal through the integration of art and life, into another style period in European literature called "modernism." This process was accomplished in several ways. First, intellectuals canonized modernism by a process of redefining the role of the avant garde in society. From the late 1930s through the forties, in the pages of the Partisan Review the meaning of the avant garde changed as writers focussed less on the themes of innovation and cultural renewal and more on the role of intellectuals to conserve the gains of a narrowly defined high culture. In a 1938 essay, Philip Rahv defined the role of the intellectual to be "the sphere of technical and spiritual culture" Rahv argued that intellectuals had the responsibility to cultivate cultural values, protecting the legacy from the past and seeing that culture continued to grow. The fruits of the past
provided the energy for future development, so intellectuals had a somewhat contradictory role: "They watch over the hidden manna even as they consume it." But the Partisan Review writers also described the avant garde as alienated from their society. Creative intellectuals could not count on having influence beyond a small coterie. The avant garde existed in a state of creative tension with society. Advanced artists formed a cosmopolitan community that served as guardians of human values, presenting a vision of the future to which people should aspire, and yet was incapable of actually leading humanity to that future. As William Phillips wrote, "Envisioning the most far reaching ideals, the artist is, nevertheless, isolated from those forces which can realize them."24

Intellectuals canonized modernism, second, by redefining avant-garde innovation in formalist rather than cultural terms. In 1948, for example, composer and critic Kurt List reviewed "The State of American Music" for the Partisan Review. List began his essay with a formalist account of musical aesthetics from Bach to the present, an account designed to show that Schoenberg's twelve tone polyphony presented the solution to the technical problems faced by twentieth century composers. "If music is to exist as an artistic expression of modern America," List concluded, "atonal polyphony is really the only valid guide." He mentioned Roger Sessions and Charles Ives as the best examples among American composers for what he had in mind. Of the emerging vanguard, he had little to say beyond dismissing the early work of John Cage as an "escapist...[and]
regressive... reversion to Oriental techniques." List explicitly defined the task of the composer as continuing the evolution of European music within the framework of "problems" that the work of the past had left for the next generation. He expressed no interest in innovations that looked to a completely different music. Here was a model "keeper of the cannon."25

The formalist interpretation of art was advocated by the painters and sculptors associated with American Abstract Artists (AAA). The AAA was founded in 1936 by a group of mostly geometric abstractionists who felt alienated from movements more prominent in the New York art world of the day, specifically surrealism, regionalism, and social protest art. The primary goal of the organization was to sponsor exhibits of member's work, but they also assigned themselves the mission of educating the public about American abstract art through catalog and magazine essays. Perhaps the AAA's most indefatigable polemicist was painter George L. K. Morris, a founding member of the AAA, and also a patron and contributor to the Partisan Review.26

The artists of the AAA defined themselves as avant garde, or as one catalog essayist explained, "in the forefront of aesthetic development," because their art returned painting and sculpture to their basic roots in color, form, and design. Morris explained this formalist view by arguing that Western artist's, especially since the Renaissance, had explored the basic aspects of painting within a realistic framework until the 19th century when the old formulas had
been used to the point of banality. At this point Cézanne, Seurat, and the Cubists rescued painting by turning artists back to the basics, clearing the path, as Morris expressed it, for abstract artists, "who have finally stripped painting down to its bones and thereby established foundations for a new beginning."

Abstractionists, Morris declared, took art into the future by "attack[ing] the established conceptions of art itself."27

Morris's stance was similar to another Partisan Review editor and contributor, Clement Greenberg. Greenberg, however, did not believe that geometric painting was avant garde. He championed the new vanguard painters, the abstract expressionists. Greenberg may thus appear to be an exception to the pattern of canonizing the work of the past. On closer inspection, however, Greenberg becomes the exception that proves the rule. In Greenberg's formalist aesthetics, the "modernization" process of art consisted of eliminating conventions from other mediums until the art, whether music, poetry, or painting, was pure. Applying this formula to painting, Greenberg wrote that the abstract expressionists were, in their paintings, "testing the limits of the inherited forms and genres, and of the medium itself, and it is what the Impressionists, the post-Impressionists, the Fauves, the Cubists, and Mondrian did in their time."

Greenberg could account for abstract expressionist painting in this formalist fashion because he consciously and consistently dismissed the intellectual concerns of the artists themselves. In so doing, he completely misinterpreted and
misrepresented what the artists themselves understood themselves to be doing. But, he was able to connect their work to the modernist canon.28

Canonical modernism resulted, in part, as a response by the canonizers to their activist pasts. Having believed in the promise of a new world offered by the Communist Party and then felt betrayed by the totalitarian reality of Stalinism, the intellectuals of the depression generation became suspicious of any program of cultural renewal. They interpreted the texts of the historic avant garde, with which they had come intellectually of age, as, in David Hollinger's phrase, "a set of suspicions" about human beings and human society rather than as a world view. Intellectuals used these suspicions to question the verities of liberal society—human goodness, progress, middle-class morality—without having to take a stand on the truth of these suspicions. At the same time, by attacking the totalitarian suppression of the avant garde, intellectuals could affirm the liberal state. As a result of this process, intellectuals transformed the avant garde from a movement closely related to the surrounding culture to a highbrow movement "suspended" above culture, "of the world," as Hollinger notes, "but not in it."29

Canonical modernism also resulted from the institutional goals of the new critics. The new critics defined their method as more intellectually rigorous and therefore most appropriate for the university setting. Ransom described the method as a complex one
intended to be practised by "learned persons," i.e., technically trained experts, not gentleman scholars; "its proper seat," Ransom declared, "is in the universities." The practitioners were especially adept at using the method on the complex texts written by the first generation avant garde. The new critics used the technical precision of their readings to justify bringing both the new literature and the new criticism into the university curriculum. In this way the historic avant garde became another academic specialization.30

The success of this modernist-liberal synthesis was such that in 1950, the editors of Time featured T. S. Eliot on the magazine's cover. The feeling of acceptance appeared to be mutual: Philip Rahv and William Phillips noted in their introduction to the famous Partisan Review symposium "Our Country, Our Culture," that American writers (with the exception of a few of those represented) no longer felt alienated from American society. The modernist avant garde had travelled a long way from its beginnings as a rebellion of alienated bohemians to stand at the center of contemporary culture. Literary historian James Breslin noted that "at mid-century, accepted, even celebrated by the Luce corporation, the modernist revolution might well seem to be finished."31

Indeed, throughout the immediate postwar years, many cultural commentators for journals such as the Partisan and Kenyon Reviews expressed disappointment that the avant garde had been tamed, become established, and they did so even as they continued to canonize the
works of the 1920s modernist vanguard. In 1946, for example, William Barrett, in a review of Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich's *The Little Magazine: A History and Bibliography*, published by Princeton University Press, noted that "the very existence of this book shows the avant-garde has become institutionalized to the extent that the little magazine is now accepted as a more or less permanent sideshow in our culture." In 1951, Paul Goodman wrote about the avant garde in the *Kenyon Review* as if cultural radicalism were largely a thing of the past. A few years later, Clement Greenberg seemed nostalgic for the rambunctious past of the avant garde, before their "acceptance by official and commercial culture." In 1958, F. W. Dubee, in a review of several recent poetry anthologies, lamented that none of the work was "conspicuously creative." Dubee characterized the writers as the "job-holding generation" and speculated that "the favorable—if that is the word for it—economic situation of recent years has affected the tone and substance of the poetry written by the young generation" whose subjects tended to be "home, wife, children, parents, pets, gardens," and such. Dubee missed the engagement with larger ideas, if not the experimentation, that had characterized the avant garde.32

The picture drawn by these critics of avant garde institutionalization and predictability bore little relation to the facts, of course, as would become very clear by the end of the 1950s. This attitude indicated preoccupation of the New York Intellectuals and New Critics with the aesthetics of early modernism rather than with innovative artists of their own day.
A NEW AMERICAN VANGUARD

In the mid-1940s through the early 1950s, a new American avant garde movement came together. For this new van, the Communist Party and Stalinist politics formed the context for their rebellion. Not all of these vanguardists had been Party members, but most were aware of the debates that had divided cultural radicals in the 1930s. The new advance guard differed from the previous generation in that the younger radicals refused to compromise the vision of a renewed culture. The new generation thus also defined itself as alienated from the canonizers of the avant garde.33

Some members of the new vanguard movement had been members of, or associated with, the Communist Party. Beat writer John Clellon Holmes, in the years immediately after World War II, identified briefly with communism. Holmes wrote that for him, and others of his generation, "our youth, our passion, our betrayed idealism: the sum total of lives without real hope was poured into this belief in a better life." For Holmes Marxism was inextricably linked to the Soviet Communist party. The 1948 coup in Czechoslovakia "severed" Holmes from the party, much as the show trials and Nazi-Soviet pact alienated the earlier generation. Now, Holmes saw Communism as pernicious, a kind of "intellectual disease." The "lucky ones" left "before they died spiritually." The flaw in communist morality, Holmes decided, not with a great deal of originality, was the idea that the end justified the means. He also saw this immoral principle
equally at work in the West in the anti-communist Cold War. As a result, Holmes lost all faith in politics:

I don’t believe that real justice can be legislated, that goodness and equity can be established merely by putting them on the statute books, and that human laws will always operate for the majority merely because you write them down.... Can we really live without hope based on reason? I only know that somehow we must.34

Critic Lawrence Barth agreed with Holmes, declaring that "Human society cannot much longer stand the ravages of politics." Marxist parties, he argued, were little more than cliques characterized by "trickery" and "hypocrisy" as they jockeyed for power amongst themselves. Barth compared radical parties to religious movements that oversimplified the world around them, becoming "non-realistic, anti-sexual, [and] anti-rational at [their] core." Critic James Courzen wrote that Marxist ideology, "in place of a needful righting of religious values," suppressed human personality, and put in its place a "deified State" that took on the "guise of a punitive rather than loving god [sic]." Members of the avant garde rejected Marxist materialism as an insufficient answer to the problems facing human beings. Cultural radicals believed that Marxism, much like American liberalism and conservatism, did not go far enough in articulating a new anthropology and a new spiritually by which individuals and culture could be redeemed.35

Avant gardists also dismissed the social realist art that went, as they saw it, with Marxism politics. In their view, the Marxist aesthetic was as spiritually bankrupt as the politics. To require of an artist political or social content was to block the creativity of
the spirit and thus the possibility for real social renewal. Such an aesthetic created one more conformity in age of conformism. Kenneth Rexroth dismissed proletarian literature as "the product of a sociology course and a subscription to a butcher-paper weekly." Poet Stuart Perkoff joined the Communist Party while in High School in the forties. He also wrote love poetry in the style of Kenneth Patchen. Party officials told Perkoff that his subject matter was too personal and he should stop writing such poetry. Perkoff quit the party. Painter Barnett Newman lumped social realist painting with American regionalist art and dismissed both as "commercial official art." Newman's friend, painter William Baziotes agreed, declaring that "When the demagogues of art call on you to make the social art—the intelligible art—the good art—spit down on them—and go back to your dreams—the world—and your mirror." Rather than Marxism, avant gardists believed in a cultural politics based on the integration of art and life, which will be discussed in chapter 4.36

While the the new American vanguard shared with the canonizers of modernism an antipathy to communism, the two groups had little else in common. To most vanguardists, the canonizers were the enemy to be defeated. Writer and little magazine editor Oscar Collier carefully noted to editor Judson C. Crews that Collier's journal was "certainly not a partisan review [sic]." Kenneth Rexroth dismissively referred to the "Ku Klux Klennyon" and "the Bronx edition of the PMIA, otherwise known as the Vaticide Review." Painter Clyfford Still instructed his exhibitor, Betty Parsons, to not show Still's work to
just anyone, explicitly stating that "men like [critic John T.] Soby, Greenberg, [Museum of Modern Art curator Alfred H.] Barr etc. are to be categorically rejected." Members of the avant garde repudiated any connection with the canonizers of modernism. ³⁷

What issues specifically alienated the postwar vanguard from the New York intellectual circle? Cultural radicals linked the latter to the academic culture of postwar America. Poet Stuart Perkoff described literature published in journals such as the Kenyon and Partisan Reviews as the "arch-rigid, over conscious, so carefully constructed verse of the English majors." Such writing was of the past, Perkoff wrote, it was not "living poetry" of the present or the future. Members of the avant garde recognized, without using these terms, that the project of the New York intellectual/new critical group was to canonize the modernism of the teens and twenties. George Leite, a pioneering editor of the San Francisco Renaissance, wrote in 1948 that "the Red Beast articles in Partisan are almost word for word like those that appeared in Hound and Horn during the period when Phillips and Rahv were whining at the door of the John Reed Club and barking at the intellectual reactionaries." Leite, like other vanguard editors, believed the decade of the 1940s was a "new world," and art had to develop in new directions. ³⁸

To call the modernist canonizers academic was, the for members of the new avant garde, another way of saying that the canonizers were an integral part of the techno-bureaucratic conformist culture that avant gardists opposed. The new vanguardists believed that modernist
intellectuals possessed a false value system. Editor and writer Leslie Woolf Hedley voiced these concerns in a review of a book by Russell Hope Robbins called *The T. S. Eliot Myth*. Hedley maintained that the volume deserved attention because Robbins exposed the dangerous, reactionary influence of Eliot and the "intellectual... clerico-fascism" he represented, especially on "our younger, conscripted generation." The popularity of Eliot, and the modernist canonizers who promoted him, signaled to Hedley "the breakdown of both moral and philosophical values among writers today." The outcome of this collapse of values was clearly stated by Robbins: "the suppression of all creative activities, ...and the abandonment of the mainstream tradition of culture and enlightenment." Here Hedley voiced almost all the themes that defined the alienation of American avant gardists in the years after World War II: the belief that the social and political system tended toward totalitarianism, that avant-garde innovation was becoming ossified in the academy, and that many, if not most, intellectuals acquiesced in this process. Declared the editor of *Neurotica*, "As we see it, the little literary magazine is dead. The 'little mags that died to make verse free' have been replaced by subsidized vehicles for clique poetry, critical back-scratching, and professional piddle."³⁹

The ideas about aesthetics and the relation between art and society that defined the avant-garde canonizers and the new vanguard were so different that the members of one movement could hardly communicate with the members of the other. Literary historian Grant
Webster used the concept of paradigms as formulated by historian of science Thomas Kuhn to explain the conflict between rival vanguards. A paradigm is a framework of values and interpretation. When paradigms come into conflict, one characteristic is the inability of adherents of one paradigm to communicate with adherents of another. The new vanguardists believed that their opponents did not understand what the innovators were doing. The academic "creeps," Allen Ginsberg wrote, "wouldn't know poetry if it came up and buggered them in broad daylight." The estrangement between the two groups is sharply demonstrated by Norman Podhoretz denunciation of the Beats as "Know-Nothing Bohemians," published in the Partisan Review in 1959. "The plain truth is," Podhoretz declared, "that the primitivism of the Beat Generation serves...as a cover for an anti-intellectualism so bitter that it makes the ordinary American’s hatred of eggheads seem positively benign." Furthermore, he continued, "This is the revolt of the spiritually underprivileged and the crippled of soul." After reading Podhoretz’s essay, Ginsberg wrote to his friend, Peter Orlovsky: "Saw Partisan review [sic] attack on us, goofed up, long as enemies bullshit like that we’re awright." Even when critics sympathized with new work, they did not seem to understand what the vanguard artists were doing. Poet Robert Duncan described a conversation with Clement Greenberg in which Greenberg was "enthusiastic" about a Duncan essay published in Dwight Macdonald’s Politics, but Duncan concluded that "what I actually wrote was nothing that he read." This inability to communicate may explain
why, as Rexroth observed, the New York intellectuals could talk about the end of the avant garde and then "visit...the Gotham Book Mart and pick up a copy of the Hudson or Kenyon Reviews and literally not see all about them the dozens of little magazines...full of free verse and anarchism, but so it was."  

CONCLUSION

The members of the avant garde desired to enliven the arts with a vital aesthetic and by so doing also enliven society. From the avant-garde perspective, the moral sense of the American people was dead and needed quickening to prevent a physical death in nuclear war. The differences between the older generation and the new vanguard are apparent in an exchange of letters between Dwight Macdonald and Allen Ginsberg in 1964. The context of these letters was a discussion of the merits of the avant-garde films of Jonas Mekas and Jack Smith, especially the latter’s Flaming Creatures, which was involved in an obscenity case. Ginsberg wrote to Macdonald that "there’s no political revolution possible in USA[.] There is possibility of an artistic revolution and consequent revolution of mental consciousness and bodily feelings[, and therefore,] political change." This remark prompted Macdonald to note a distinction between their two views:

you [Ginsberg and Mekas] are moralists, reformers, rather than artists. What you’re after is a better way of life, and so you accept a movie like [Flaming Creatures]...because it exemplifies your morality of free personal expression. But you can have f.p.e. without art.... Living free is one thing, creating a work of art is another.... Art has to be controlled, ordered, arranged in patterns, rhythms, all very artificial and unfree.
Ginsberg responded that "I have written some poetry of 'controlled [sic] arranged order' so unique it was unrecognizable for several years as poetry by the guardians of order of an ancien regime."

Reiterating the by now standard new avant garde critique of academic culture, Ginsberg described this "ancien regime" as "imitative of earlier poetry" and attached to methods of versification "already decayed when Ezra Pound went to London." Ginsberg reaffirmed his commitment to an aesthetic of spontaneity and individuality ("intuition and character") and concluded: "As for your idea of me as a moralist, ...it's charming, but don't get carried away. I just don't want to see the planet go up in a cloud of sexless hydrogen."41

Committed to the integration of art and life, avant gardists like Ginsberg sought a vital and expressive aesthetic and a new relation between art and society. These goals did not appear to the members of the new American vanguard to be the goals of the post-Marxist vanguard. This latter group appeared to be the aesthetic expression of the values of a society from which the new advance guard was highly alienated. Alienation was the negative ground from which the vanguard sprang, but these radical artists also developed a positive definition for themselves. These positive values they expressed in their ideology of innovation and their vision of the future.
Notes to Chapter II

1. See Donald Egbert, Social Radicalism and the Arts. Western Europe: A Cultural History From the French Revolution to 1968 (New York: Knopf, 1970), pp. 3-64, for a general overview of European radicalism in general (with some mention of the United States) and its relation to art, and the volume in general for specific discussion of radicalism and the arts in all the major European nations. Lenin's remark, from his 1902 essay, "What is to be Done?", is discussed on p. 123.


11. Stuart Davis, "Art and the Masses," *Art Digest*, 1 October 1939, p. 34. For Davis and Marxism see, Whiting, *Antifascism and American Art*, p. 70; Whiting discusses Davis and Jazz, ibid., p. 82-89; Davis quoted p. 89. See also Karen Wilkin, *Stuart Davis* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987), p. 32.


19. The cultural conflicts between Rahv and Phillips and the Communist Party are discussed in Cooney, Rise of the New York Intellectuals, pp. 67-94.

20. Egbert discusses the limitations of Marxist influence on American avant gardists in Socialism and American Art, pp. 727, 749-750.


War II" (doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1965), pp. 420-421.


37. Oscar Collier to Judson C. Crews, [c. 1946], Judson C. Crews Papers, University of California, Los Angeles, hereafter cited as Crews Papers. Kenneth Rexroth to Allen Ginsberg, 12 July 1952, Ginsberg Deposit Collection, Columbia University, hereafter cited as Ginsberg Deposit. Kenneth Rexroth, Bird in the Bush, p. 105. Clyfford Still to Betty Parsons, 20 March 1948, Betty Parsons Gallery Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, hereafter cited as Parsons Papers. The Partisan Review did publish a poem each by Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso in the late fifties. Furthermore, work by Kenneth Rexroth and William Carlos Williams had been published in the magazine from the late 1930s through the 1940s. Corso specifically requested that his publisher send a copy of Corso’s book Gasoline to Barbara Guest at the Partisan for review. No review of Gasoline appeared, but Corso’s next volume of poetry, The Happy Birthday of Death, was reviewed in the Partisan in 1960. By way of contrast it should also be noted that during the forties and fifties the Partisan Review also published two of T. S. Eliot’s Four Quartets and 25 poems by Robert Lowell, a good indication of where the literary sympathies of the editors lay. See Gregory Corso to Lawrence Ferlinghetti, [c. Winter 1958], City Lights Books Papers, University of California, Berkeley, hereafter cited as City Lights Books Papers.


CHAPTER III
THE AVANT GARDE AND SOCIETY:
ALIENATION, 1945-1960

INTRODUCTION

In 1956 in a poem entitled "The Suicide," Stuart Z. Perkoff noted that in the aftermath of such a tragedy, the question asked out loud was always "Why did he do it?" But Perkoff argued that the most important question remained unasked, festering inside and "rotting the soul." That question was: "How? Could I?" Suicide is one expression of an individual's alienation from self and from society. Perkoff suggested that everyone in contemporary society repressed a great deal of alienation from the modern world. Perkoff was not alone in this belief: other members of the postwar avant garde were deeply alienated from the society in which they lived.¹

Alienation, as noted above, is one of the defining characteristics of the avant garde. Poggioli described alienation as a "sociopsychological condition" related to the artists' economic and social status as well as the intellectuals' attitude to her or his culture. Members of the postwar American van were aware at the time of the fact of their alienation and of the historic meaning of their
condition. Poet and critic Kenneth Rexroth, for example, discussed the estrangement of the artist as a product of industrial capitalist society: "[From] Baudelaire, Blake, Holderlin, down to T. S. Eliot, Voznesensky, or Allen Ginsberg, every important poet since the rise of acquisitive, competitive modern society has been alienated to a greater or lesser degree." Alienation was not, however, Rexroth contended, the typical experience of American poets throughout most of the nineteenth century. Only when the nation was heavily industrialized, Rexroth said, could there emerge a strong community of alienated avant gardists.²

Indeed, in 1948, critic Clement Greenberg would go so far as to say that "the alienation of Bohemia was only an anticipation in nineteenth century Paris; it is in New York that it has been completely fulfilled. In 1959, painter Jack Tworkov, a member of the avant garde Eighth Street Club in Greenwich Village, wrote in It Is that Cézanne was "the very image" of contemporary artists. In particular, Tworkov wrote, the French painter was an "alienated intellectual" who was profoundly interested in the question of meaning and was uncomfortable in the presence of those who "got along" easily in life, and in particular of those people whose "religion" was to "get on in the world." In contrast to this worldly attitude, the alienated artist was one "who in his innermost center has a fierce pride and sure conviction about the values of the artist in the world."³
Members of the avant garde believed that this "worldly" attitude of which Tworkov wrote was an indication of how divorced from the real world were people in modern America. Cultural radicals believed that in contemporary American society people were separated from the worlds of nature, human community, and the spiritual self. Rexroth wrote that

as human beings grow more remote from one another, they become more like things than persons to each other. As this happens, the individual becomes remote from, loses, himself. First alienation from comradeship in the struggle with nature, then alienation from each other. Finally self alienation.

Vanguardists believed that values in Western culture had become so attenuated that societies faced "material and spiritual disintegration."4

American cultural innovators experienced this alienation in various ways. In this chapter the bomb will serve as a key theme around which avant gardists expressed their alienation. The bomb, a product, according to members of the advance guard, of bureaucratic technology in the service of a bankrupt political ideology, seemed to be the ultimate folly of rationalistic, industrialized capitalist society. The bomb threatened not only the cultural, aesthetic, and ethical ideas of the avant garde but the existence of humanity itself. In this chapter will also be discussed the vanguard critique of the United States as a conformist society. Cultural radicals described a "spirit of the age" that molded individuals to a materialist success ethic and a narrow Cold War political ideology. Such concerns reflected an historic avant-garde interest in
individualism. For these reasons, then, members of the new vanguard felt deeply alienated from American society. Postwar vanguardists also felt alienation from Victorianism and other cultural traditions, much as their predecessors from the 1910s and 1920s, as will be discussed below. But this estrangement produced for cultural radicals a constructive result. The state of alienation strengthened the resolve of avant gardists to create a new cultural landscape in which art and life would be integrated and from which no one would be estranged.5

THE AVANT GARDE AND THE BOMB

Writing in the middle 1950s, William Carlos Williams pondered the meaning of the atomic bomb. In his long love poem, "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower," he wrote, "I am reminded/ that the bomb/ also is a flower/ dedicated/ howbeit/ to our destruction." Williams noted the fascination, almost religious awe, that the exploding bomb had for people, and he transformed the bomb into a symbol for humanity's destructive acts from the Salem witchcraft trials, to book burnings, to environmental desecration. For Williams, the bomb brooded over the world, exercising a malignant influence in history. Williams presented a choice between the creative influence of love and the destructive influence of the bomb. "There is no power/" he wrote, "so great as love/ which is a sea,/ which is a garden." Unfortunately, he concluded, few people really believed this: "they believe rather,/ in the bomb/ and they shall die by the bomb."6
William Carlos Williams was, of course, one of the leading figures in the first generation American avant garde but he was also an important influence on many post-World War II vanguardists. The bomb, too, was a pervasive influence on these cultural radicals. Writer Douglas Woolf choose an apt title for his little magazine review of Donald Allen's 1960 anthology, The New American Poetry: "Radioactive Generation." In particular, the bomb heightened the sense of social alienation felt by members of the avant garde. In his participant observer history of twentieth-century American poetry, Kenneth Rexroth noted that the bomb had "permanently shattered the crust of custom" and "made all but the most insensitive alienated at least a little." Williams in his poem presented themes that weighed on the minds of most advance guard intellectuals in the years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Members of the avant garde came to doubt the idea of progress, especially technical and scientific progress, and they feared for the very future of humanity. Radical intellectuals also expressed a sense of powerlessness before the new technology and attendant bureaucracy.7

The atomic bomb heightened the opposition of avant gardists to American notions of technical progress. The members of the postwar van were not the first cultural radicals or intellectuals to question the idea of progress. As historian Spencer Weart noted, nuclear weapons did not create an entirely new, post-Hiroshima culture. Rather, people responded to the bomb within intellectual categories formed in the past. Thus, intellectuals responded to the bomb within
a framework of anxiety and despair that dated from the beginning of the century. These feelings resulted from many causes: the impersonal universe described by Newton, Darwin, Marx, and Freud; the collapse of religious belief in response to these thinkers; the failure of the values of humanism to prevent World War I. Auden had other reasons besides the bomb to call the years at mid-century the "Age of Anxiety." The bomb was, however, the perfect symbol for this anxiety and most discussion of the topic in the years after 1945 made some reference to the bomb, however brief or stereotypical.  

Kenneth Rexroth described his own increasing feeling of hopelessness from the 1920s forward. For Rexroth, the lights of progress and hope that had burned so brightly in the first quarter of the century began to dim with the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927. The Moscow Trials, the Spanish Civil War, the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the war and concentration camps: all these dimmed further the light of hope. "Now the darkness is absolute," he concluded. "In the blackness," Rexroth wrote, "well-fed, cultured, carefully shaven gentlemen sit before microphones at mahogany tables and push the planet inch by inch towards extinction." It was this link between an educated and cultivated elite and atomic annihilation that more than anything explains the depth alienation felt by post-war avant gardists from their society, whether from its institutions, such as the academy, or from its values and mores. To cultural radicals of the 1950s, a vanguardist underground was vitally necessary.
Some commentators tried to use the new physics to construct positive metaphors for innovative art, not unlike the promoters of the peaceful atom in the United States government and nuclear power industry. In 1951, for example, critic Peter Blanc, writing in the mainstream Magazine of Art, drew on ideas from modern physics to explain recent avant garde art. Blanc related the paintings of surrealists Gorky and Miro to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, and defended the work of abstract expressionists Jackson Pollock and Willem De Kooning by describing their paintings not as expressions of, as critics charged, "spiritual confusion" or "lack of humanity" but as pictures of movement that recognize that "energy and void" are the only reality. "It is the paradox of art today," Blanc concluded, that what is still known as realism is actually an escape from reality. 10

Most members of the avant garde were not disposed to such arguments. From the avant garde perspective, the influence of science and technology was as likely to be to destroy life and curtail individual freedom as it was to improve life and expand freedom. Soon after the first use of the bomb, critic Dwight Macdonald wrote in his journal Politics, "'The greatest achievement of organized science in history,' said President Truman after the Hiroshima catastrophe—which it probably was, and so much the worse for organized science." The result of technological progress was a weapon whose power threatened the very existence of civilization. "The bomb," Macdonald declared, "is the natural product of the kind
of society we have created." Macdonald argued that in a society that associated the good life with mass produced consumer goods and technological conveniences the citizenry willingly abrogated great power to the organizations that produced these goods without questioning the consequences for moral decision making in a democratic society.\textsuperscript{11}

Members of the avant garde rejected the notions of progress that they perceived to be prevalent in postwar society. In 1960, Beat poet A. Pankovits wrote in a poem called "Progress:" "I am not only going to stand in the way of progress./ I am going to stick out my foot as it runs past." Painter Morris Graves declared that his work was not for those who were comfortable in the new atomic world: "those who seeing and tasting the fruits and new buds of self-destructive progress [and] still calling it good, to them the ideas in the paintings are still preposterous, hence not worth consideration." The reality of the bomb meant that belief in technological progress was not just fatuous: such belief was positively dangerous.\textsuperscript{12}

Poets and critics Robert Bly and William Duffy argued that, in both the Soviet Union and the United States, the scientific outlook, "with its passion for experiment[,...its confusion on moral issues, [and indifference]...to human suffering" was becoming much too powerful. "Unless," they concluded, "these men are fought, in their inquisition millions will die." Painter Clyfford Still wrote that he did not want to express the spirit of his age in his paintings
because "our age—it is of science—mechanism—of power and death. I see no point in adding to its mammoth arrogance the compliment of homage." Novelist William S. Burroughs, who had been a student at the Los Alamos Ranch School a few years before the government acquired the institution and turned it into a bomb laboratory, felt a special connection with the bomb. He noted how the "idyllic Ranch School, an outpost of the pastoral dream" (and where Burroughs had been miserably unhappy) had been "commandeered by a government agency for a team of foreign-born scientists who gave away their secrets of mass destruction to the generals and politicians." Burroughs forthrightly declared himself "anti-scientist," maintaining that "if anybody ought to go to the extermination chambers...[it should be] scientists."13

The mushroom cloud also cast a great shadow over the future of humanity. Many avant-garde intellectuals, like others at the time, believed that nuclear war would be the likely end of Western culture. Journal titles from the forties and fifties such as *Death: A Literary Quarterly* and *Hearse* illustrate this fear. The editors made their concerns explicit. In 1948, a writer in *Neurotica* declared that "The new look is the anxious look." In 1950, Leslie Woolf Hedley, the editor of *Inferno*, also expected an apocalypse: "Unfortunately, we're all waiting for the explosion. If you find a tinge of that terror and death on these pages, it's a sign of the times." "Hearse is not a hobby nor an intellectual game," wrote the editor of the magazine, E. V. Griffith in 1954. "It is a serious attempt on the part of seriously-minded editors to get as much good
work into print as possible, as we await The Bomb." Poet Kenneth Patchen characterized himself as a poet "for a generation born in one war and doomed to die in another."14

Not just a general fear, at times members of the avant garde, like other Americans at the time, believed that war was imminent. In 1958 poet Allen Ginsberg wrote to his lover, Peter Orlovsky, "It looks like war, maybe in the next week or if not the next months. It may be atomic war so be wise to get out of large cities." In 1961 and 1962, San Francisco artist Bruce Connor left the United States because he feared the coming atomic war.15

Kenneth Rexroth argued in his history of modern American poetry that an "eschatological world-view" was typical for the first generation avant garde. Poets from Rimbaud to Eliot, Rexroth noted, believed in the imminent end of Western Civilization. But the end of civilization did not mean the end of the world, and, as Rexroth pointed out, such anxieties had a certain "neurotic character." They raised the question, was a decline really happening? The bomb, argued Rexroth, changed everything: "eschatology has ceased to be a world-view, it has become a simple fact with which every living person must reckon." In 1945 painter Barnett Newman wrote: "After more than two thousand years we have finally arrived at the tragic position of the Greeks...because we have at last ourselves invented a new sense of all-pervading Fate." Coming to terms with the bomb and the society that created this threat re-defined avant-garde alienation.16
Members of the avant garde have generally been deeply interested in questions of moral values. Typically, avant gardists rejected the prevailing moral standards, leading critics to accuse members of the avant garde of immorality. But far from being immoral, members of the vanguard strove to shape a life-affirming and life-sustaining morality to replace what they perceived to be a restrictive and stultifying system. The atomic bomb threw into sharp relief a number of important moral questions. The use of the bomb by the United States government caused many vanguard intellectuals to doubt the morality of the whole allied cause in the Second World War. Dwight Macdonald compared the use of the bomb on the Japanese to the Nazi death camps and concluded that neither side in the conflict could now claim moral superiority.\(^{17}\)

Members of the avant garde believed that individuals should have the power and freedom to make moral decisions. The development and use of the atomic bomb suggested to them that individuals played only a limited role in modern, bureaucratic, technological society. Macdonald, again, articulated this concern. He noted that the bomb was the product of group effort, that many involved were highly educated scientists, and that all were dedicated to the cause of defending democracy. But, Macdonald pointed out, most of them knew very little about the complete project or how their contribution would fit with the whole. Further, the American public, Macdonald argued, knew nothing of the new weapon that was developed and subsequently used in their name. Where then, Macdonald asked, did moral responsibility lie? He concluded:
The bomb becomes the most dramatic illustration to date of the fallacy of "The Responsibility of Peoples."... The social order is an impersonal mechanism, the war is an impersonal process, and they grind along automatically; if some of the human parts rebel at their function, they will be replaced by more amenable ones; and their rebellion will mean that they are simply thrust aside, without changing anything.

In a technological society, the individual seemed to be impotent before giant organizations with their own imperatives.18

The reality of the bomb, cultural radicals argued, changed the entire moral context of modern life. The basic dilemma, from the avant-garde perspective, was well expressed by the editors of Death in 1946: "It seems to be much easier today for man to decide how his is going to destroy himself than how he is going to live." Americans seemed, in the opinion of vanguardists, to have been "struck blind, deaf and dumb" by the bomb, and thus they turned to old answers to solve new problems, in particular military answers. As the Cold War developed, members of the avant garde believed that morality was becoming militarized. In 1958, Allen Ginsberg wrote in a poem fragment:

The army is trying to
Blast fire at god's face
How many cannons
are pointed up into
the sky at night.19

Advanced artists and intellectuals believed that they could help Americans plot a new moral course but they also believed that few people wanted to hear their voice: "America, you know, pathologically hates poets," wrote Leslie Woolf Hedley in Inferno in 1950. "America loves generals and whores like that." Kenneth
Rexroth, writing to his friend, Dwight Macdonald, a few months after the first atomic bombs were dropped, was discouraged:

Man's universe of pseudo-values is finally, literally, about to destroy him. Only those who rebuild from the personal, responsible core out, of materials that the bursting of all the atoms in the universe cannot destroy, will be, as the old word has it, saved. I think it highly unlikely that they will...have any influence on history.

Avant-garde writers and artists tried to respond creatively to the bomb but often could go no further than a superficial symbolism. Some cultural radicals tried to appropriated the bomb as a symbol for their social criticism. For example, in late 1947, Paul Goodman published in painter Robert Motherwell's and critic Harold Rosenberg's little magazine, Possibilities, a surrealist allegory called "The Emperor Of China" about the dehumanizing nature of modern society. One character was a "hellish wizard," a symbol for both social rules and also society, a wizard described as having "made his excrement into missiles" and as "destroying those who love him.... They are drowned in the searing piss, beaten by his penis, and jumped on up and down." Goodman grafted nuclear fears uneasily to a Dantesque vision.

Other artists tried to express their moral outrage at the bomb. In 1946 a show at the Museum of Modern Art of "14 Americans" featured a painting by Boris Deutsch, "What Atomic War Will Do To You."

Parker Tyler, reviewing the show in View, noted that the painting had won a competition sponsored by a cola manufacturer and commented sardonically that "evidently, not only Pepsi-Cola 'hits the spot.'"
Tyler went on to describe the stylistic similarities between Deutsch and Picasso and to ask, "is it not the sibylline implication of the painting that the horrid violence of the atom bomb may succeed in converting us all, quite literally, into 'Picassos' and such?" As these examples suggest, the immediate artistic responses of avant gardists to the bomb were forced and superficial. The bomb was a difficult symbol both because it was beyond the realm of artists's direct experience and because the destructive power of the bomb seemed to point only to the end.

Some writers tried to put the new weapon in some perspective by contrasting the innocence of children with the destructive power of the bomb. Little magazine editor Judson Crews's 1955 story "Atomic Bomb Cathedral" presents a dreamlike description of the narrator entering a deserted city. Deep inside the crypt of an abandoned cathedral he found a playground full of maimed children going about their games in rags. Realizing he could do nothing for them, and sensing that the place would soon blow up, he fled as the city disappeared in "dull gray mushroom smoke" and the sky filled with radioactive embers. The story concluded:

The Atom bomb cathedral.
A. B. C.
I am conscious as I awake that these are the initials of my infant daughter screaming terror in the night."

James Boyer May's 1950 poem "Return to Pelagianism" referred to the destructive power of the bomb and science and technology in general. But May concluded with some hope, referring to a child "smug" in bed, "prepared to counter nuclear physics." He presents the possibility
at least that the next generation may be able to envision, and perhaps create, a new world.24

Beat poet Gregory Corso was one of the early experimenters in the satirical approach to nuclear fear in his 1958 poem, "Bomb." In his poem, printed in the shape of a mushroom cloud, Corso described the bomb as the "Budger of history Brake of time You bomb/ Toy of universe." "O Bomb I love you," Corso declared, and continued, "I sing thee Bomb Death's extravagance Death's jubilee." Such lines as "BOOM ye skies and BOOM ye suns/...ye days ye BOOM/ BOOM BOOM," and his final vision of the "magisterial bombs wrapped in ermine.../fierce with moustaches of gold" proved too much for some audiences. After reading the poem at New College, Oxford, Corso was pelted by shoes from the feet of members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, who also called Corso a fascist. Though Corso regarded the poem as his best to date and "timely," the Oxford experience caused him to doubt the wisdom of his humorous approach.25

The profound anxiety about the future felt by members of the avant garde in response to the bomb increased their alienation from post-war American society. But this sense of anxiety and alienation also resulted in innovative work that would proclaim the hope of cultural radicals in the possibility of the future.
CONFORMIST OR INDIVIDUALIST?

To characterize the 1950s as a time of conformity is a stereotype dating from the decade itself. In 1954 critic Irving Howe declared the post-war years an "Age of Conformity," while as early as 1950 sociologist David Riesman described the loss of individualism before institutional pressures in his influential book, *The Lonely Crowd*. Historians have since noted that, while conformity may be a part of the culture of the fifties, this quality is far from the only characteristic, as the existence of the avant garde of the present study should attest. Indeed, this avant garde was one source for the conformist stereotype.26

Members of the cultural vanguard experienced the years immediately following World War II as stifling to the individualist spirit. This theme was explored humorously in an essay by S. E. Laurila on men's clothing of the fifties. Writing in the little magazine *Miscellaneous Man* in 1956, Laurila described "the average man [as] dark brown and gray...; without adventure; lifeless", indeed downright "dull." Laurila went into great detail describing and ridiculing men's clothing styles, especially in comparison with the freer and more colorful clothing worn by women. The dreary clothes that men believed they had to wear restricted, according to Laurila, both movement and spirit. He concluded by looking to a future when people could "breathe freely in the knowledge that men really are men without the necessity of proving it, and concentrate on making our whole lives a work of art in other ways too, besides clothing."
Laurilla thus linked anxieties about gender and status to a group behavior (fashion) that the writer viewed as inimical to individual expression and freedom. The concluding call to integrate art and life is, of course, as an noted above, an historic theme of the avant garde.27

Other members of the vanguard expressed their alienation from American culture in terms of conformity. In 1954, James Boyer May, editor, and champion of little magazines, declared that the littles represented "life-versus-death" and "creative individualism versus patterned group dogmas." In 1953, editor E. E. Walters said that the purpose of his magazine, Embryo, was "to serve as a medium of conveyance for the expression of those few who refuse to be thwarted by demands for complacence and conformity." In 1961, writer David Meltzer contended that people feared "self-freedom" and thus could "only move as directed by paranoid monkeyhouse kings." From fear came conformity and a citizenry destined to be "food in power's pigpen." In the opinion of these and other members of the avant garde, the people around them conformed their behavior to a set of prescribed norms. These standards included consensus politics, militarism, traditional bourgeois sexual ideas, and economic materialism. From the vanguard perspective, this conformity stifled the spirit of individuality that was the source of creativity and originality. The very spirit, indeed, of life.28

In order for a society to be conformist, there must be something to which people conform. "To what does one conform?" Howe asked in his essay, and he answered: institutions, the needs of daily
survival, and, especially, "the Zeitgeist, that vast insidious sum of pressures and fashions." Norman O. Brown declared that "the Western consciousness has always asked for freedom: the human mind was born...to be free, but everywhere it is in chains.... It will take a miracle to free the human mind: because the chains are magical in the first place." The conflict between the independent individual and the conformist pressures of society was the starting point for the critiques members of the avant garde offered of American society, whether the problems of materialism, technocracy, Cold War politics, or academic culture.29

Members of the avant garde criticized what they regarded as their conformist society, in part, as a response to nuclear weapons. The moral outrage and downright fear that the bomb inspired in radical intellectuals was in sharp contrast to the general agreement among Americans that the use of the bomb was justified and to the acceptance by Americans of the arms race as the postwar years went on. In the face of what many radical critics believed to be the moral challenge of the century, most Americans appeared content to accept things as they were. Such complacency was repugnant to members of the avant garde. Rather than thinking, Americans appeared to be conforming to whatever opinions those in authority presented them.30

Other developments in postwar American culture gave support to the vanguardist description of a conformist society. The stifling of political dissent as a result of the second Red Scare was a concrete example, to cultural radicals, of the practice of politics when
citizens behaved as pliant conformists. Avant gardists also argued that the economic expansion of the post-war years (not unrelated to the Cold War militarization of American society) encouraged conformity. As far as these critics could see, the only ambitions shared by Americans in the 1940s and 1950s were to find a good job in some corporate bureaucracy and buy a house in a ticky-tacky suburb. Such goals, of undeniable importance and moral value to many Americans, were unworthy of human ambition, in the opinion of the radical vanguard.

Furthermore, these cultural critics saw conformity in the technical bureaucracies of big science and the growing universities. As scientists organized to build more bombs, university humanists institutionalized modernism in a new scholasticism. According to cultural radicals, then, once the initial anxieties that attended the launching of the Cold War had passed, the American public allowed themselves to be soothed by President Eisenhower and members of the Atomic Energy Commission, and they turned to the pursuit of private agendas of career and suburban home ownership. The avant garde attacks, therefore, on materialism, technology and bureaucracy, the politics of the Cold War, and the previous avant garde, were, among other things, specific aspects of the more general attack on conformity. As poet Amiri Baraka remembered, the post-war avant garde "came out of the whole dead Eisenhower period, the whole period of the McCarthy Era, the Eisenhower blandness, the whole reactionary period of the fifties."
For members of the avant garde, the conflict between the individual and the demands of society for conformity was of vital importance. Only through creative non-conformity could one discover one's true self, cultural radicals argued. Thus, for example, the interest by the beat writers in the various undergrounds of jazz, madness, and homosexuality. That Allen Ginsberg's poem Howl, which dealt with these subjects, should be declared obscene by authorities in San Francisco in 1957, only served to demonstrate Ginsberg's point that American society was repressed and tyrannical. The judge's ruling that the book was not obscene was a victory for Ginsberg and his publisher, Lawrence Ferlinghetti (who was actually on trial), which might indicate that American society was less oppressive than vanguardists thought. And yet the acquittal was not entirely a surprise to avant gardists. Beat poet Gregory Corso, for one, had great confidence that the future was theirs, and he wrote to encourage Ferlinghetti, saying, "What you are going through is marvelous, young, true, great—the philistines can't win out—you will win.... Thus, fight on! go forward, for forward is the Light!"32

ALIENATION FROM TRADITION

The same desire to escape the limitations imposed by the past that moved the first avant gardists motivated members of the postwar van to innovation. The past most had in mind was the Victorian world. For example, in 1947, painter Jean Franklin wrote that the Victorians tried to protect themselves from the "unhappy realities of
the Industrial Revolution by establishing an ideal of behavior completely unrelated to life," and created in the process a "foolish muddle" values and ideas that impeded, among other things, "the growth of a new and vigorous artistic expression." Franklin thanked the intellectuals of the interwar years for their "iconoclastic attitude toward the existing social structure" as a result of which, Franklin said, "the damp Victorian fog has lifted." In 1946, poet Oscar Collier described the nineteenth-century German avant-garde philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, as a model for cultural radicals because, "socially conscious, he had the good sense to examine, and when he found stupidity, to destroy. Is that a terrible thing to do? I think it is good to be terrible then, and long may terrorism live." 33

The iconoclasm of avant gardists extended to any tradition that they believed defined limits on their creativity. Thus, many radical painters rebelled against the Renaissance heritage. Mark Rothko spoke of "breathing and stretching one's arms again" after he "escaped" the "oppressions of the Renaissance heritage." Choreographer Merce Cunningham linked the linear staging of classical ballet to Renaissance perspective and celebrated the origins of modern American dance in German expressionism and the personal experience of American vanguard dancers in the first half of the twentieth century. The cultural radical, however, defined "tradition" for his or herself. For each case there was a past to reject and each intended their innovations to knock down that past, sweep the rubble away, and begin a new building process. Sculptor
David Smith spoke for most avant gardists of the postwar generation, and indeed of all avant-garde generations, when he declared, "This is the greatest time to make art. I enjoy watching the world crumble and the old values go down. Why shouldn't I enjoy it? This is my time!" In individual self-realization through creativity the members of the avant garde saw the future of humanity. This hope was the positive impulse behind their critiques of postwar American society.34

ALIENATION AS A POSITIVE FORCE

Alienation describes the relationship between the avant-garde intellectual and his or her society. Alienation was more than a negative or destructive attitude towards the artist's times, however. As Poggioli notes, the characterization of the avant garde as a "culture of negation" is accurate in the general sense that that members of the vanguard are estranged from the values and traditions of bourgeois culture. The advance guard must not, however, Poggioli argues, be interpreted as being opposed to culture in general. Rather, he wrote, two, "parallel cultures" are in conflict, and "as a minority culture, the avant-garde cannot get by without combating and denying the majority culture it opposes." The goal of the vanguard is a new culture, "hence, [the avant gardist's] dreams of reaction and revolution, his retrospective and prophetic utopias, his equally impossible desire to inaugurate new orders or to restore ancient ones." Observers from among the avant garde agreed. Alienation was, painter William Baziotes declared in 1957, "a positive force" in
avant-garde creativity. In 1958, James Boyer May contended that "true poets" need "opposition/s," arguing that "the creative 'motor' of every psyche is powered by resistances, the charged statements which carry the current endlessly negating conformist death." Also in 1958, Philip Whalen made the point in verse:

I can't live in this world
And I refuse to kill myself
Or let you kill me

*  *  *

I shall be myself—
Free, a genius, an embarrassment
Like the Indian, the buffalo
Like Yellowstone National Park.35

Alienation freed cultural radicals from conformity to critical expectations and the weight of art and literary history. They were, as Poggioli said, "cursed in [their] alienation" but also "blessed in [their] liberty." Clyfford Still wrote: "Whatever is for me valuable in the work is no part of the classical continuity of taste and form demanded for effective incorporation in the civic heritage." Members of the advance guard did not desire to be a part of a tradition or to produce conventionally uplifting work. Free from the past (as expressed in present expectations), members of the avant garde were, in critic Harold Rosenberg's phrase, "aesthetic Legionnaires." He characterized painters such as Robert Motherwell, William Baziotes, and Adolph Gottlieb as coming "from the four corners of this vast land" to "plunge themselves into the anonymity of New York" and carry on their own "private revolt against the materialist tradition that... surround[ed] them." Alienation separated the cultural vanguard from their community and from the values and traditions that defined that community. In this way, members of the avant garde created something new.36
The result of the extreme isolation and loneliness (the "curse" of alienation) that Rosenberg described was not negative, however, but rather, "a kind of optimism, an impulse to believe in their ability to dissociate some personal essence of their experience and rescue it as the beginning of a new world." Avant gardists turned inward and transformed their private struggles into public expressions of universal experience and truth. In 1947, abstract expressionist Mark Rothko wrote that "the unfriendliness of society to his [the painter’s] activity is difficult for the artist to accept. Yet this very hostility can act as a lever for true liberation. Freed from a false sense of security...transcendental experiences become possible." In 1958, painter John Ferren recalled the freedom felt as a result of their isolation by many of the innovative painters who were members of The Club. "Well, we don’t sell anyway," they said, "so why not?" Ferren explained:

In short, by accepting our isolation we acquired its rewards. We were alone with ourselves; we painted by ourselves, and in some degree we became better acquainted with ourselves. Our complete divorce from the official art world, from magazines and the museums—in a word, our hopelessness—gave us the possibility of unknown gestures. The "crazy," the "gone," had no terror for us. We were in limbo. It was in this situation that Pollock kicked over his first can of paint...picked it up...saw the drip, and saw that it had an expressive power he could use.37

Ferren’s 8th Street colleague, William Baziotes, described public acceptance as a cause for despair. The "miracle" of being "loved by a whole country, or embraced by his enemies," probably indicated, Baziotes said, that an artist had lost passion or become complacent. Estrangement, Baziotes argued, made the artist "more aware of himself and the world. It is as natural and necessary for his advancement as
the use of his eye and brain." For members of the avant garde, the state of alienation did not make for an easy life but artists channeled this negative energy to creative purposes. Vanguardists believed that creative self-expression was essential to authentic human existence.38

CONCLUSION

For a previous generation of American avant gardists, to be new meant to reject America for Europe. In accordance with a long tradition of expatriation, cultural radicals like Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein linked their rebellion with the European avant garde. The expatriate model appealed to subsequent generations of American rebels. In 1944, Robert Motherwell advised just such a course to his friend William Baziotes: "The future in America is hopeless," Motherwell wrote. "For you and for me there are only two possible courses, to go to France forever (which is what I am going to do) or remain and here and be psycho-analyzed." Significantly for the history of the American avant garde, Motherwell and other cultural radicals did not expatriate themselves. Instead, they remained in the country of their birth and, building on the innovations of European colleagues, created an authentically American vanguard culture.39
Notes to Chapter III


CHAPTER IV
THE AVANT GARDE AND CREATIVITY:
INNOVATION, 1945-1960

INTRODUCTION: INNOVATION AND CULTURAL REGENERATION

Cultural radicals are defined by more than their state of alienation from their culture. Creative innovation is as important a characteristic as alienation. Poet and editor Cid Corman noted in 1952 that "the subject and object of all avant-garde action...is the creative." By "creative," Corman and other members of the vanguard meant much more than technical innovations in their artistic medium or change for mere shock value. As Corman continued: "avant-garde doesn't reach definition in the word 'eccentricity.'" Composer John Cage declared in 1956 that "I have never gratuitously done anything for shock" and noted that "my work is almost characterized by being insufficiently exciting."1

American cultural radicals in the postwar years, as their predecessors in Europe and America, believed in the regenerative power of creativity. They chose the creative path of radical innovation over more conventional directions because they wanted to express their own independent spirit, to enlarge the creative freedom
of artists so that others could express themselves fully, and, most important, to transform their world through the integration of art and life. Poet John Clellon Holmes brought these themes together in a journal entry in August of 1948: "The knell is sounding of the old way and now we must do things, not only because they can help, because something will come out of them, but because it is necessary for us to do them to exist."\(^2\)

Interpretations such as that of Clement Greenberg—who described vanguard painting as a process of purifying painting of influences external to the genre by focusing on two-dimensionality—are narrow and do not adequately explain the goals and ideas of members of the avant garde. More recent scholars have taken cultural radicals more seriously as intellectuals with ideas they wished to communicate to others through their work and, in many cases, their lives. The meaning of avant-garde innovation emerges best from exploring the passionate concern of avant gardists for the relationships between art, ideas, and society.\(^3\)

In this chapter, then, the first section will address the politics of cultural regeneration that was the primary motivation for avant garde innovation. No avant garde movement is as divorced from the past as most members like to believe; a discussion of the continuities between the innovations of the postwar vanguard and their predecessors will make this clear. The means avant gardists believed would achieve cultural renewal was the integration of art and life. This concept will be defined and related to the primary
aesthetic innovation of the postwar avant garde, the definition of art as process. This notion produced an aesthetic based on using materials from everyday life. In the rest of the chapter, the themes of cultural renewal and the integration of art and life will be examined as related to four central interests of the postwar van: jazz, sex, drugs, and the spiritual quest. All of these themes were interrelated in the thought of most cultural radicals. To separate them in this manner is somewhat artificial, though necessary to understand avant-garde thought. The result is, however, some overlap in subject matter from section to section. This should serve as a reminder that art and life formed an integrated whole in the thought of members of the avant garde.

CULTURAL POLITICS

Members of the advance guard strove to do more than innovate artistic practice. Avant-garde innovation had a social and political content, as well as an aesthetic one. Indeed, these aspects were hard to separate in the work of most cultural radicals. While most avant gardists could be classified as some kind of anarchists, they did not have a coherent political program or uniform philosophy. Rather, they integrated politics and creativity into a cultural politics based on the idea that the liberation of individual creativity would lead to social and cultural renewal.
From the fifties to the present, the prevailing account of the politics of the postwar vanguard has been that the members of the van were apolitical. Leftist critics in the late fifties castigated the literary vanguard for lacking a coherent (Marxist) critique of American society. Irving Howe, for example, writing in the Partisan Review, argued that the apolitical protest of the Beat writers made them functionally the same as the middle-class suburbanites the cultural radicals criticized. The politics of the abstract expressionists is a case in point. Some recent scholars have described the abstract expressionists as not just apolitical, but as naively allowing themselves to be co-opted by the elites prosecuting the Cold War or as willing agents in the cultural Cold War (the distinction is not always clear). The mistake made by critics is to assume that because the members of the avant garde rejected established categories of political thought and action, and especially Marxist ones, they therefore abrogated social and political responsibility. In fact, vanguardists looked for the path to the future in very different places from those that political activists inhabited. As we shall see, the orientation of members of the abstract expressionist and other postwar vanguard movements was not political, but historical and cultural.\footnote{4}

If the concerns of avant gardists did not quite fit the boundaries defined by Marxist political analysis, these concerns can be broadly placed in the tradition of pacifist anarchism. Anarchists tend to be anti-programmatic and dismissive of standard political
processes and procedures. Renato Poggioli described anarchism as "the least political or the most anti-political of all...political ideolog[ies]." This fact explains, in part, the appeal of these ideas for avant gardists. The lack of program may also explain why Marxist and other critics have had trouble recognizing the new generation as having a political ideology. Historian Donald Egbert argued that anarchism attracted cultural radicals in Europe and America from the late nineteenth century forward because the philosophy is anti-statist and instead emphasizes the role of the individual. Furthermore, Egbert noted that anarchist ideology emphasized irrational and subjective forces, a contrast with the Enlightenment tradition of rationality and natural law to which Marxism and liberalism were heirs. The anarchist focused on the free individual creatively making his or her own life and allowing others to do the same.5

Alienated as members of the new American vanguard were from what they perceived to be the bureaucratic centralization and conformism of postwar America, a return to anarchist ideas was a logical move. Many American vanguardists, moreover, learned from and appealed to an American tradition of anarchism in the thought of Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman. Evidence of the change in political thought appeared in the poems and essays published in the little magazines that emerged from the mid-1940s forward. Writers denounced private property, war, and censorship and advocated a decentralized society with greater freedom for the individual, usually discussed in terms of the right
Members of the new American vanguard looked to more than just changes in economic and power relations to bring about the end of alienation in American culture. They believed that political solutions were no solutions. Renewal needed to come, advance garde innovators believed, from deeper and broader sources. The English critic Herbert Read, a thinker read by many abstract expressionists and other vanguardists, described the means to cultural reconstruction as the "politics of the unpolitical." Writing in 1943, Read tried to look to the future in the midst of ravages of war. Read could hope for the future because he believed in the moral sense of humanity. And because Read believed that the aesthetic sense was a guide to seeking and recognizing basic needs and values, he believed also that artists would play an important role in the renewal of postwar society.

Read's book represents an early formulation of the stance toward society that members of the new American vanguard would take—a stance I describe as a politics of cultural innovation. The word "culture" should be read not as "high culture," but in the broader anthropological sense, which is how most avant gardists, knowledgeable as they were of the works of Boas, Benedict, and Mead, used the word. Radical innovators believed that all aspects of society needed to be changed and renewed: from mores governing sexual and family relations to the organization of the political
economy. And, yes, also the standards defining what was and was not art. Ultimately, cultural radicals believed that creativity was central to a meaningful life. They based their cultural politics on the idea that the unleashing of creative forces would change the way individuals thought about themselves and their environment and thus produce a transformation in society. For avant gardists, the creative act was the means to a liberated future for humanity.8

To achieve the goal of cultural renewal, avant gardists called for the integration of art and life. Cultural radicals tried to change the relations between artists, their works, and their audiences. Rather than three separate categories, avant gardists proposed the integration of art, work, and audience. Art would no longer consist of distinct objects for aesthetic contemplation but be expressive of community values and therefore provide models for new relations between individuals and the world.

An early explication of this viewpoint comes from painter Robert Motherwell's and critic Harold Rosenberg's "occasional review," Possibilities, which they edited in the late forties. In a short statement of principles introducing the magazine, Motherwell and Rosenberg noted the pressure for action exerted by "the deadly political situation." Implicit was the tension of the developing Cold War, and the shadow of the bomb lay across the page. Recognizing this political reality, Rosenberg and Motherwell argued that art and political action were mutually exclusive. They stated flatly that "political commitment in our times means logically—no
art, no literature." Motherwell and Rosenberg argued that intellectuals faced a choice between "'more serious'...organized social thinking" and art: "whoever genuinely believes he knows how to save humanity from catastrophe has a job before him which is certainly not a part-time one." While sympathetic to the reasons one might choose this course of action, they saw it as a "political trap." The editors expressed skepticism about any program of activism because, like other members of the vanguard of the time, they doubted the relevance of any established modes of thought to the crisis of their times. They affirmed, rather, the possibility of renewal in creative activity somewhere "in the space between art and political action." Neither Motherwell nor Rosenberg offered a program or direction, just the faith that creative action would produce the necessary new insight to prevent catastrophe. They offered only "the extremist faith in sheer possibility." They made clear, however, that this was not an escape from politics or the world situation. Rather, they said, the political pressures of the times demanded such action.9

Throughout the forties and fifties, cultural radicals, therefore, affirmed their faith that the answer to the cultural and social crises was not political organizing but the re-organization of consciousness through the release of creativity. In the early 1940s, poet Charles Olson resigned from his government position and ended what many regarded as a promising career in politics to dedicate his life to art and education, because he believed that the solution to
social problems lay in cultural, not political, action. In the 1950s, Olson was for a few years the chancellor of avant-garde Black Mountain College in North Carolina and an important figure in avant-garde literary circles. "The prime purpose of my writing is liberation. (Self-liberation first & hopefully that of the reader)," poet Michael McClure wrote. William H. Ryan, editor of the little magazine, Contact, described his faith in art in an early issue of the periodical:

Through the means of Art, by which we mean the utterances of the creative imagination, we believe that Insight and Truth are attainable, and if Truth or a truth can be merely sighted, it lights the way toward the understanding of human needs which is the only kind of understanding that can deal with this Age of Adolescence.... The essence of Contact is, I hope, unpredictability and spontaneity in its search for truth.

Composer Morton Feldman, a friend of John Cage, remembered that when he started composing in the fifties, his purpose was to "free sounds." "I wanted," he said, "sounds to be a metaphor, that they could be as free as a human being might be free." Feldman believed that sound was "some kind of life force that to some degree REALLY CHANGES YOUR LIFE... if you're into it."10

In 1955, the editors of the little magazine, Miscellaneous Man, declared their purpose to be "seeking and testing creative approaches to the problems that face individual men and women, that limit their humanity and chain them in a cage of mere existence." To live merely, alienated from themselves, from others, from anything that gave human life a larger purpose, was not enough, vanguardists
maintained. In the postwar years, cultural radicals argued, technocratic bureaucracies had destroyed human beings as surely as the atomic bombs produced by those bureaucracies. Rejecting the rationalism they believed caused this situation, members of the avant garde argued that people must turn inward, to the subjective, spontaneous, creative forces within themselves to find liberation. In 1958 LeRoi Jones and Hettie Cohen, editors of Xugen, described their goal of cultural regeneration in the subtitle of their little magazine, "a new consciousness in arts and letters." Poet Kenneth Rexroth expressed his idea of cultural renewal in his tribute to jazz musician Charlie Parker and poet Dylan Thomas. These men were, he said, "heroes of the post-war generation" because "both of them did communicate one central theme: Against the ruin of the world, there is only one defense—the creative act."

Cultural radicals believed that old ways of thinking and acting, including politics, had created the crisis faced by Americans and all people in general. Vanguardists believed that people needed new ways of thinking and acting and that the aesthetic politics of creative innovation was the way to rebirth. As individuals liberated their minds and spirits, they would, so the advanced thinkers hoped, turn outward to their fellows and create a new society.

Many cultural radicals intended their work to model the future they hoped to create. For example, the individual was the starting point for much avant-garde social analysis. The editors of The Needle, for instance, declared in 1956 that "individual liberty is a
prerequisite for any rational system of relationships between men." Composer John Cage tried to fulfill such a commitment in his compositions. He argued against the use of conductors in the performance of music, saying that "from the point of view from which each thing and each being is seen as moving out from its own center, this situation of the sub-servience of several to the directives of one who is himself controlled, not by another but by the work of another, is intolerable." Instead, Cage wrote music that was indeterminate in both composition and performance. In this way, Cage's music modeled the ideal society of free individuals. The cultural politics advocated by the new American vanguard dissolved the boundaries between art and politics. This blurring of traditional categories is a defining characteristic of avant garde movements: the advance garde goal to integrate art and life.\textsuperscript{12}

CONTINUITIES

Although alienated from the "modernist canon" that critics developed in the 1940s, members of the avant garde did not separate themselves completely from the work of the past. Radical artists acknowledged continuities between their work and the work of earlier advance-guard artists. The poetry of French vanguardists Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Appollinaire served as an example for American avant garde painters such as Robert Motherwell and William Baziotes and writers such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac.
The more recent vanguardists who influenced the new generation tended to be artists without canonical status. Thus, advance guard poets looked to William Carlos Williams as an exemplar of poetic practice. Given that Williams's response to *The Waste Land* was that "it had set me back twenty years," Williams would seem a natural mentor. While the work of Eliot became the subject of essays in critical quarterlies and part of college curriculums, Williams worked in relative obscurity. But Williams's emphasis on speech rhythms and everyday American subject matter appealed to young vanguardists. Poet Joel Oppenheimer declared, "I see William Carlos Williams as my poetic grandfather" [sic]. The analogy is apt. Williams corresponded with Allen Ginsberg and wrote the introduction to Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems*. Ginsberg spoke of the older poet as being the link between the younger generation and the avant garde of the 1920s, and through that movement to Melville and Thoreau. Pound, too, especially his language-collage technique of verbal association in the *Cantos*, influenced many avant gardists. Ginsberg, for example, told Pound that the *Cantos* were "like stepping-stones" that made a "ground for me to...walk on...." The practical effect has been to clarify my perceptions."  

The standard description of abstract expressionist art as a synthesis of cubism and surrealism indicates continuities between the avant gardes. Painter Jackson Pollock admired Picasso and Miro. Pollock and the other artists associated with abstract expressionism shared an interest in surrealist notions about the subconscious. As
painter John Ferren said, "the idea of the subconscious, the techniques of chance, and a concern for the depths of the inner life: these took hold of us as a powerful influence."14

Cultural concerns linked the abstract expressionist vanguard with movements not usually thought of as avant garde. For example, the ideas of the regionalist painters of the thirties, especially Thomas Hart Benton, with whom Pollock studied, shaped avant garde understandings of the links between art and culture. Benton believed that "art is not only art but a regenerative force and because of that, permanently valuable to men." While abstract expressionists rejected the ruralism of Benton and others and the "utopia of material technology" that predominated in WPA murals inspired by the regional school, the members of the vanguard shared Benton's belief in cultural renewal through art.15

The aesthetic rebellion of avant-garde composers marked perhaps the most fundamental break with the past. In the postwar years, advanced composers defined themselves, according to Catherine M. Cameron, by their "disavow[al] of history and tradition" and their "complete...antipathy to the idea that there are any connections between past and present music." Thus, for example, Harry Partch advised students to question the corpus of knowledge, traditions, and usages that give us a piano, for example—the very fact of a piano; they must question the tones of its keys, question the music on its rack, and above all, they must question constantly and eternally, what might be called the philosophies behind the device, the philosophies that are really responsible for these things.
John Cage liked to quote painter Wilhelm De Kooning’s remark that "the past does not influence me; I influence it." Obviously, the claims to complete originality that pepper avant-garde rhetoric should be regarded with suspicion. The innovations of the new generation of composers, such as Partch, Cage, Morton Feldman, and Christian Wolff, did produce a body of work that most commentators agree is highly original, a quality illustrated by the need of these composers to develop their own systems of notation in order to write out their musical scores. The work of these younger musicians, therefore, marked a radical break with what had come before in Western European music, including the older vanguard of Schoenberg and Stravinsky.  

If the younger composers claimed any genealogy, they claimed the avant-garde figures of the past who were not securely a part of the modernist canon, such as Eric Satie, and especially the American composers Edgard Varèse and Henry Cowell. Cage commented that Cowell was not attached (as Varèse also was not attached) to what seemed to so many to be the important question: Whether to follow Schoenberg or Stravinsky. His early works for piano, ... by their tone clusters and use of the piano strings, pointed towards noise and a continuum of timbre. Other works of his are indeterminate in ways analogous to those currently [1959] in use by [Pierre] Boulez and [Karlheinz] Stockhausen.

The work of these American composers marked a break with the past of European music, but not with the past of music or aesthetics. Rather, these composers looked, in part, to other traditions. Thus, for example, Cage’s interest in Zen Buddhism, or Partch’s attempts to
revive traditions of music and theater derived from ancient Greece
and non-European cultures. This interest of postwar avant-garde
composers in non-Western sources of precedent linked them to other
radical innovators with similar interests in non-western
cultures.17

Perhaps the most important continuity, which links the musical
vanguard with movements in painting and literature, were the ideas of
Dada and Marcel Duchamp. Abstract expressionist Willem De Kooning
described Duchamp as a "one-man movement," and as "a truly modern
movement because it implies that each artist can do what he thinks he
ought to—a movement for each person and open for everybody." Cage
painter Robert Motherwell each contributed to putting the ideas of
Dada and Duchamp before the contemporary vanguard. Motherwell edited
anthology of Dada Painters and Poets, published in 1951, through
which a whole new generation of painters and poets learned about this
central avant garde movement. At the New School for Social Research
in New York and at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, Cage
taught a synthesis of Duchampian Dada and Zen Buddhism to a
generation of artists who came after the abstract expressionists.
Like Duchamp, Cage rejected the Surrealist idea of automatism,
according to which artists used chance operations to express their
subconscious. Cage used chance procedures to get away from
psychological meanings so that sounds and objects could be
appreciated for what they were. Cage combined Duchamp's use of
Readymades, everyday mass produced objects used by the artist without
change, with Zen ideas to produce an aesthetic that emphasized the integration of art and life. The breadth of Cage's influence is illustrated by the cooperation of Cage and artist Robert Rauschenberg with dancer Merce Cunningham. As Cage explained,

We are not, in these dances and music, saying something.... We are rather doing something.... I may add there are no stories and no psychological problems. There is simply an activity of movement, sound, and light.... The activity of movement, sound, and light, we believe, is expressive, but what it expresses is determined by each one of you.

By calling artists' attention to Dada and Duchamp, Motherwell and Cage did not just establish an important link between the earlier vanguard and avant-garde movements in America. The artists also added one more set of ideas into the eclectic mix from which American cultural radicals as diverse as Rauschenberg, Cunningham, Jasper Johns, and Allan Kaprow could draw to create a new, highly innovative art.18

THE ART OF THIS CENTURY

Though continuities existed between the avant-garde innovations of the past and the new work of the postwar avant garde, most cultural innovators emphasized the quality of newness. Many members of the postwar avant garde, like previous van movements, believed that the present was "their time" and that their art should relate to the new developments in science, technology, politics, and economics that cultural radicals believed defined their era. To "make it new" was only, in their eyes, to make an art that would speak to the world in which the artist found him or herself. In 1950, Jackson Pollock
declared in a statement that recalled the technological interests of the Italian Futurists of the turn of the century that "Modern art to me is nothing more than the expression of contemporary aims of the age we’re living in.... It seems to me that the modern painter cannot express this age, the airplane, the atom bomb, the radio[,] in the old forms of the Renaissance or any other past culture."

Composer Harry Partch argued that he did not have to justify his search for a new musical idiom. Rather, he maintained, the opponents of change needed to defend their choice of program; justification of the status quo, he wrote,

belongsTo to those who accept the forms of a past day without scrutinizing them in the light of new and ever-changing technological and sociological situations, in the light of the interests that stand to profit by the status quo, and in the light of their own individualities, this time and this place.19

The members of the new advance guard were determined that their art would be more than aesthetically pleasing objects sheltered in museums apart from the world. They wanted their creative works to speak to their time and contribute to social and cultural developments taking place. "We live in a period of transition," declared French Surrealist Joan Miro in the American little magazine, Possibilities, in 1947. "It is necessary to make a transition of everything that has been done."20
ART AND LIFE

Peter Bürger argues that the defining concept of the avant garde is the idea of integrated art and life. This concept has many meanings and ramifications. First was the notion that the act of creation was not restricted to special people called artists. Rather, creativity was available to all. Consider, for example, the following dialogue from John Cage’s 1955 essay, "Experimental Music: Doctrine":

QUESTION: But, seriously, if this is what music is, I could write it as well as you.
ANSWER: Have I said anything that would lead you to think I thought you were stupid?

As Cage also wrote, "It is better to make a piece of music than to perform one, better to perform one than to listen to one, better to listen to one than to misuse it as a means of distraction, entertainment, or acquisition of 'culture'."21

Cage also makes the second point: members of the advance guard rejected the notion that art consisted of objects to be collected in museums, concert halls, and libraries and consumed for cultural uplift or entertainment. They believed art was a vital part of life to be experienced directly. Sculptor and assemblage maker Claes Oldenberg declared:

I am for an art that is political-erotic-al-mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum..... I am for an art that imitates the human, that is comic, if necessary, or violent or whatever is necessary. I am for an art that takes its form from the lines of life itself, that twists and extends and accumulates and spills and drips and is heavy and coarse and blunt and sweet and stupid as life itself."22
The specific application of this idea to artistic practice would be the use of everyday materials in the making of paintings, music, or poetry. But the goal to integrate art and life extended to more than matters of artistic materials. The cultural politics of the advance guard called for all of life to be a creative self expression. Historian Harry Russell Huebel characterized this concern as a quest for "enlightenment." He noted that many vanguardists pursued this goal through liberated sex, bebop jazz, and illicit drugs. Critics at the time dismissed these actions as mere hedonism. While certainly cultural radicals enjoyed these activities, they did so in part because they placed sex, jazz, and drugs in a larger context of liberating the body and spirit and becoming more aware of the creative potential of everyday life. Ultimately, the quest for enlightenment was a spiritual one. Avant gardists studied myth, ritual and Eastern religion in order to shape a new system of values that could give richer meaning to life in modern America.23

ART AS PROCESS

The members of the avant garde rejected the definition of art as an artifact to be institutionalized in a museum or an academic mannerism. In order to safeguard art from such degradation and integrate art and life into a renewed culture, avant gardists defined art not in terms of the object, whether poem or assemblage, but as a process of creation. A work of art, according to cultural radicals, was not an object that fulfilled certain conditions that defined one
thing as art, another as not. In contrast to this ojectivized conception of art, avant gardists defined art as a process of imagination and struggle applied to ordinary objects, whether words, paint, or noise, that challenged the person confronted by the artist to feel, or see, or hear differently.

In 1950, for example, Robert Motherwell contrasted European with American painting: "young French painters...have a real 'finish' in that the picture is a real object, a beautifully made object. We are involved in 'process' and what is a 'finished' object is not so certain." Poet Robert Duncan related the creative process to the learning process: "Human learning is not a fulfillment but a process, not a development but an activity .... Every moment of life is an attempt to come to life. Poetry is a 'participation,' a oneness" with that process. Composer Earl Brown described his compositions for piano MM87 and MM135, which were inspired by Jackson Pollock's drip paintings, as "composed very rapidly and spontaneously and...in that sense performances rather than compositions." Jack Kerouac's "spontaneous prose" aesthetic was an attempt, similar to Brown's, to record the creative process directly on the page, without any subsequent revisions. In this way, the reader could have an almost direct experience of the creative process.

The emphasis placed by members of the literary avant garde on poetry readings also reflected this conception of art as process. The "poetics of performance," as literary historian Michael Davidson called it, conceived the poem as a living work of language. San Francisco poet and publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti described oral
poetry as a means of "getting the poet out of the inner aesthetic sanctum where he has too long been contemplating his complicated navel. It amounts to getting poetry back into the street where it once was, out of the classroom, out of the speech department, and—in fact—off the printed page." To remain on the page was to be objectified for academic study. To be poetry, the words had to live in the ears of hearers, and to penetrate their subconsciouses. Poetry so conceived was social poetry in the sense that the writer intended the work to, as Davidson says, "engage the reader in a more interactive role." Such an understanding of social poetry is very different, obviously, from the social realist aesthetic of the Depression era in which subject matter and adherence to working class tastes tended to define social art. Vanguardists defined the artist not as a teacher of sociological facts but as a teacher of religious truths and a performer of religious rituals. The poet was, as Gary Snyder declared, a kind of "shaman" who presented, as he read, "a kind of Communion" and "articulated the semi-known for the tribe." By defining art as a process and not a finished object, members of the avant garde hoped both to redefine the nature of poetry and to achieve their goal of integrated art and life.25

THE AESTHETICS OF THE EVERYDAY

Members of the postwar avant garde also expressed their goal to integrate art and life by using materials from daily experience in their work. Literary historians have characterized the aesthetic of the new American poets variously as a "poetics of presence," of
"immanence," and of "immediacy." The idea behind these interpretations is that the poetry of the new vanguard was, as James Breslin expressed it, grounded "in a sharply observed physical present, its dense materiality implicitly mocking the transcendent, totalizing imagination of symbolism as well as the more covertly transcendent imagination of the new criticism and the young formalists." These poets sought to communicate directly to their audience the emotions and experiences of everyday life by including ordinary experiences and emotions, producing, as one vanguardist said, a "collage of the real." This aesthetic concern with "immediacy," as Breslin calls it, characterized not just the avant garde writers of the period but all aspects of radical creativity.26

Radical artists expressed the immediacy of the everyday by making emotion a primary focus of their work. In 1948 Painter Barnett Newman described his goal as "reasserting man's natural desire for the exalted, for a concern with our relationship to the absolute emotions." After witnessing the dehumanizing experience of war and facing the fear of nuclear destruction, many cultural radicals expressed a need to feel and to express emotions. In 1946, poet Oscar Collier praised Judson Crews's poetry for "transcending the mass, of going beyond personal neurosis, of portraying your struggle in a way that has universal significance." For avant gardists, the work of art was not an object but, as Newman said, "These paintings are not abstractions..., they are specific embodiments of feeling." As painter James Ferren wrote in 1958, "there is no longer a belief
in an objective reality out there and a pure arrangement of lines and colors right here." In place of this false distinction between the painting and the observer, Ferren declared, "the avant-garde artist has substituted ‘immediacy.’ He permits no barrier between his inspiration and his execution, no intellectual editing, no cleaning up to conform to some preconceived idea." The immediacy of expression in the work of the abstract expressionists inspired other avant garde artists, including the poet Michael McClure and the composer Earle Brown. Both tried to capture the spontaneity and energy of these painters in their works. The paintings of Jackson Pollock, for example, moved Brown, who saw in them "life, energy, and immediacy." He decided that "these qualities should also be in my music."27

Avant gardists also used everyday materials in their works, whether mass produced objects, common speech, or the sounds of life, to expressed the immediacy of lived experience. Visual artists produced such works as Claes Oldenburg's Store (1961), which featured plaster replicas of common objects, or Robert Rauschenberg's combines made up of commonplace items the artist found at hand in his studio or in rubbish bins on walks through his neighborhood. For example, the combine Bed (1955) consisted of Rauschenberg's quilt and pillow splashed with paint. These works confronted viewers with the world of the quotidian, not an aesthetic realm where paintings were worlds unto themselves. As Rauschenberg commented, "A pair of socks is no less suitable to make a painting with than wood, nails, turpentine, oil and fabric." Poet and art critic Frank O'Hara, writing in the avant-garde magazine Kulchur, praised Oldenburg's Store because of
Oldenberg’s ability to transform "the very objects and symbols themselves, with the help of papier-mâché, cloth, wood, glue, paint, and whatever other mysterious materials are inside and on them, into art."28

The literary vanguard transformed the ordinary into art in prose and poetry. They "made it new" both in their focus on their emotions and the things around them and in their language. To express the immediate experience of life, these writers used the rhythms of American speech as the proper language for American poetry. In this practice they followed the ideas of William Carlos Williams and Charles Olson. Olson expanded upon Williams’s notions about American meter in the former’s influential essay "Projective Verse," originally published in 1950. Not only did Olson urge that the poem express both the poet’s "ear" for American language, but also the breath of the poet. Olson also argued that "one perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception." Poet Frank O’Hara was such a poet in whose work perceptions crowd in upon themselves. In 1960 he wrote about his technique in which the ordinary events and thoughts of lunch hour walks became the stuff of poetry: "I am mainly preoccupied with the world as I experience it.... It may be that poetry makes life’s nebulous events tangible to me and restores their detail; or conversely, that poetry brings forth the intangible quality of incidents which are all too concrete and circumstantial." Also in 1960, LeRoi Jones declared that "MY POETRY is whatever I think I am.... I make a poetry with what I feel is useful & can be saved out of all the garbage of our lives[.]."
wives, gardens, jobs, cement yards were cats pee, all my interminable artifacts... ALL are a poetry..." Jones went on to declare iambic metrics to be "dry as slivers of sand;" for Jones, the only way forward was the poetics of Williams and Olson.29

Avant-garde composers expressed the idea of immediacy by using the sounds of ordinary life as musical material and by using chance techniques in composition. The result was a radically different kind of music that John Cage would call "organization of sound," and composer Christian Wolff described as "sound come into its own."

Cage’s interest in the use of ordinary sounds, what most people would consider noise, dated to the 1930s. In 1937, Cage wrote:

Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating. The sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between the stations. Rain. We want to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as musical instruments.

In the early fifties, Cage discovered the possibilities of silence, as in his famous silent "composition," 4’ 33" (1952). What he discovered, of course, was that silence was not so quiet: the music was the ambient sounds of wind and rain, and, Cage observed, "the people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out."30

The use of chance techniques, which Cage also began using in the early fifties, both in composition and performance, also contributed to the process of "sound coming into its own." Chance techniques removed intentionality from the composition. The composer’s purpose, the feelings he or she was or was not expressing, all of these became irrelevant considerations. The only important fact was the sound of
the piece. As Christian Wolff wrote, "The 'music' is a resultant existing simply in the sounds we hear, given no impulse by expressions of self or personality. It is indifferent in motive, originating in no psychology nor in dramatic intentions.... But this does not make their work 'abstract,' for nothing, in the end, is denied." Cage advocated the use of chance procedures to prevent sounds from "being exploited to express sentiments or ideas of order." Cage desired that sounds be sounds and left it up to the audience to make of them what they would. These composers hoped that their auditors would begin to hear differently and discover music in the sounds of everyday life.31

JAZZ AND LIFE

Jazz music inspired the creativity of many members of the avant garde because they interpreted music and the community of jazz musicians as models of the culture vanguardists desired. Cultural radicals believed that jazz musicians integrated art and life. These themes are illustrated in the work of novelist Jack Kerouac. In a famous scene in Kerouac's On the Road, Dean Moriarty has the transcendent experience of "IT" while listening to a bop musician in San Francisco:

His tone was clear as a bell, high, pure, and blew straight in our faces from two feet away. Dean stood in front of him, oblivious to everything else in the world, with his head bowed, his hands striking in together, his whole body jumping on his heels and the sweat...pouring and splashing down his tormented collar to lie actually in a pool at his feet.
In the bop jazz created in the 1940s by Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Lester Young, and others, Kerouac heard emotional self-confessions. In the dedication of these musicians to their music, often at the expense of everything else in their lives, Kerouac saw an example of the artist giving all to creativity. In these ways, the beboppers represented for Kerouac and other cultural radicals rebellion from the perceived pressures of conformity and expressed individuality. Kerouac wrote that the jazz artists "kept talking about the same things I liked, long outlines of personal experience and vision, night-long confessions full of hope that had become illicit and repressed by war."32

That avant gardists should be interested in jazz was entirely appropriate because both emerged in opposition to Victorian culture. The proponents of the genteel tradition codified Culture as refined, traditional, harmonious, exclusive. For these Victorians, Culture was to be experienced in a passive, reverent manner. Jazz was the complete opposite: raucous, new, discordant, and accessible. Jazz was played for noisy, dancing, clapping, stomping audiences. Genteel Culture was "highbrow," while jazz was "lowlbrow." Jazz was also a black art form; Culture was white. Recognizing the counter-cultural aspects of jazz, most Americans throughout the first half of the twentieth century viewed jazz as morally suspect and denounced the music. Jazz did, however, find a growing white audience, especially among young people more interested in rhythm than Culture. The big swing bands presented a sanitized kind of jazz, however, and did not interest avant gardists.33
The themes of the jazz counterculture did interest avant-gardists, however, and a new jazz form that emerged in the 1940s did attract the attention of members of the avant garde. That music was bop. As the black music of jazz became popular with white audiences, especially in the form of swing, black musicians became acutely aware of the racial hypocrisy of their white contemporaries. While whites gave jazz music increasing attention, black musicians experienced discrimination in pay and accommodations, as well as other indignities. The bop rebellion allowed black musicians to take back their music, devising a new jazz form that did not have the suspect popularity of swing. As it turned out, however, the bop rebellion appealed to alienated white avant gardists also, and they contributed to acceptance of the new music into the jazz mainstream.  

Kerouac, and other avant gardists, identified with the alienation from mainstream society felt by these black musicians and interpreted the music as a creative force for cultural renewal. Beat writer John Clellon Holmes, for example, wrote that he and his friends felt "like blacks caught in a square world that wasn't enough for us."

The notion that black, urban culture provided a model for rebellion against contemporary white society and culture was the theme of one cultural observer, novelist Norman Mailer, in his 1957 essay, "The White Negro." For Mailer, jazz played a crucial role in this rebellion: "the Negro...in his music... gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variation of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream and despair of his
orgasm. For jazz is orgasm, it is the music of orgasm, good orgasm and bad, and so it spoke across a nation...." Kenneth Rexroth declared that "during the years of darkness," that is, the period of the Cold War and the dominance of academic poetry, the artists who spoke for the young were jazz musicians Charlie Parker, Lester Young, Thelonius Monk, and others. Moreover, he argued that "modern jazz is not just music—it is also a social system, a way of life." Like Mailer, Rexroth linked jazz to sexual liberation. But Rexroth also spoke of the regenerative force of artistic creation: "Against the ruin of the world, there is only one defense—the creative act."

Jack Kerouac developed this theme in novels such as Doctor Sax and Visions of Cody, in which he presented jazz as a procreative force in both a physical and spiritual sense.³⁵

The music and culture of bebop jazz was more than rebellion, however. It served members of the advance guard as a model for a society that integrated art and life. Peter Willmott declared in a 1947 essay in Jazz Forum that "the most important artistic medium is life itself,...[and] the aim of each of us should be to achieve in our living grace, harmony and integration with all other life." Willmott argued that "wholly improvised hot music" presented a perfect balance between the freedom of improvisation and responsibility to the group. The jazz combo was thus an example for society:

In social terms these conditions seem to me to constitute the basis of a coherent social philosophy, a philosophy which holds that only through freedom and responsibility can men play a living and creative part in society, and that only through a devolution of power can men act responsibly in small social units.³⁶
For many avant gardists, the vitality they heard in jazz represented the powerful creative energy inside people the release of which could, cultural innovators believed, transform society. An editorialist wrote in Climax that jazz "affirmed the ideal of creative vitality." Jazz represented, Eithne Wilkins wrote in Jazz Forum, "the form that art must take if it is to work out the nightmare and what lies behind, [and] so gradually liberate the patient, who is both the person-in-society and society itself." This understanding of innovative jazz as a revolutionary force for social change inspired Ginsberg to rhapsodize:

Holy the groaning saxophone! Holy the bop apocalypse! Holy the jazzbands marijuana hipsters peace & junk & drums!37

Bebop also served as a model for the technical innovations of many avant gardists. The musical line of bop jazz fit in with the interest of avant garde writers in common American speech. Allen Ginsberg believed that the United States vanguard differed from the British angry young men, a movement to which the Beats were often compared, because of the the American "tradition of speech and prosody experiment & new jazz." While Kerouac's ideas of "Spontaneous Prose" reflected European influences (especially surrealism and James Joyce), the language Kerouac used to describe his aesthetic clearly derived from listening to musicians like Parker, Young, and Gillespie. The writer should, Kerouac said, "tap from yourself the song of yourself—blow!" Poets such as Ginsberg and Kenneth Patchen explored the use of jazz rhythms and imagery in much of their writing.38
Patchen and Rexroth regularly combined poetry readings with jazz music (indeed, Rexroth had participated in such performances as early as the 1920s). These musical readings fulfilled the avant-gardist goal to integrate art and life by combining the oral experience of poetry with a popular musical form. As Rexroth argued, "it returns poetry to music and to public entertainment as it was in the days of Homer or the troubadours." Poetry jazz recalled for members of the avant garde an earlier (idealized) time when artists were an integral part of the community. Jazz inspired technical and performance innovations that radical artists hoped would create such a community anew.39

SEX AND THE REGENERATION OF ART AND LIFE

Sexual liberation was an important concern of members of the first generation avant garde, and the theme continued to be important for the postwar vanguard. Sex meant many things for cultural radicals in the 1940s and 1950s. As it did for the first American vanguard, uninhibited sexual relations served social, psychological, and spiritual purposes for the new American vanguard. Sex served a social function as a rebellion against middle-class morality. Psychologically, avant gardists viewed sexual expression as important to emotional health, reflecting a vulgarized version of Freud or the radical Freudian, Wilhelm Reich. More generally, sexuality represented for members of the vanguard a creative force for spiritual and broadly cultural regeneration, a conception that reflected the influence also of the thought of Carl Jung.40
For many avant gardists sexual liberation became the rebellion. In 1961, poet Tuli Kupferberg wrote that "the prototype of The Underground is the sexual underground." Novelist Ronald Sukenick argued that Reichian psychology appealed to him and others in the 1950s because Reich's ideas provided an alternative radical value system to Marxist politics. "For me, and I think for many others," Sukenick wrote, "sex [became] a weapon and dissipation a form of dissent, instead of merely a way of having fun in defiance of the work ethic."^1

Other avant gardists followed the tradition of their predecessors and argued that individual and social health depended on free sexual expression. In a 1956 article in Miscellaneous Man, Lawrence Barth rejected Freud's contention that civilization mandated the sublimation of erotic instincts. Barth argued that "the natural functioning of human bodies is culture...[, and] true culture is possible only through allowing the basic natural functions of the body to operate as they must." Far from creating civilized culture, Barth argued, sublimation created "destructive impulses, dirty-mindedness, rape and other criminality." Declaring sexual drives to be "moral, natural," Barth maintained that "the negation of the body's genital and other instincts is the thing which is immoral." Finally, Barth answered the charge of anti-intellectualism by declaring that "nothing more surely conserves intellect than eliminating preventable neurosis." Critic Paul Goodman linked the Cold War, the arms race, and the burning of Wilhelm Reich's books by
the Food and Drug Administration to sexual repression, lamenting that "it is into this insane asylum that I have to bring up my children."
The themes discussed by cultural radicals paralleled that of contemporary post-Marxist Freudians such as Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown.42

While most of the avant gardist writing on sex and society in the postwar years was little different from similar arguments made in the teens and twenties by cultural radicals such as Emma Goldmann and Floyd Dell, a significant difference was that the later avant gardists replaced Freud as their authority in these matters with Wilhelm Reich and Carl Jung. Reich gave avant gardists a sexual critique of postwar society. A one time student of Freud, Reich went even further than Freud in emphasizing the importance of sex to human psychology and society. Reich argued that sexual expression was vital to human health, both mental and physical. On this premise he created an argument against oppressive and repressive social and economic structures that appealed to cultural radicals. Reich also claimed to have discovered a sexual energy that permeated the universe, which he called orgone energy. This energy, Reich believed, could be tapped by sitting in telephone-booth-sized boxes called orgone energy accumulators. Paul Goodman was one of many avant gardists enthusiastic about Reich. In 1945 Goodman wrote, "It is just because Reich wants to set free the forces native to each individual, which, in adults at least, are beyond the influence of advertising slogans and political propaganda, that his thought has such enormous libertarian dynamism."43
In the 1950s, many intellectuals discussed Reich's ideas and some acted on them by seeking Reichian therapy or sitting in orgone boxes. Sukenick remembered that during the decade "practically every hip apartment or loft you walked into had...an orgone box."

Intellectuals as diverse as little magazine editor Jay Landesman and writers Saul Bellow, Isaac Rosenfeld, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg used orgone boxes with some regularity. A Reichian psychologist at the avant-garde Black Mountain College introduced students there to orgone energy. William Carlos Williams and Kenneth Burke discussed Reich in correspondence in the 1940s. William Burroughs introduced the Beat writers to Reich, Burroughs being especially influenced by Reich's social criticism.

Reich's ideas did not impress all Americans, and in particular, in the mid 1950s, officials at the Food and Drug Administration accused Reich of deceiving the public with fraudulent health claims. When Reich ignored an injunction to desist from selling his accumulators and literature, he found himself sentenced to prison for contempt and his books and machines destroyed. Reich's subsequent death in federal penitentiary only served to confirm for many members of the avant garde that the sexual repression in American society produced an oppressive state.

Many cultural radicals described sexuality as a force for spiritual and cultural regeneration, reflecting the influence of psychologist Carl Jung. To make their point, members of the avant garde tried to recontextualize sex in terms other than Victorian and
producer culture values. Poet Manfred Wise, for example, examined a rather obvious source, the Song of Songs. Wise commented that "few people realize the confirmation of body-love found in ancient scripts." He went on to declare that "no one can fully entertain the God-concept who has not had God personalized in the Body-and-Life of some beautiful human." Composer Harry Partch explained what he considered to be the stagnation of musical innovation in the mid-twentieth century by going back to D. H. Lawrence's notions of mind-body separation. Quoting Lawrence, Partch wrote, "We are afraid of the 'procreative body' and its 'warm flow of intuitional awareness,' and fear it is 'poison to the human psyche.'" Only by acknowledging and drawing on our own energy of physical generation could creative advance continue, Partch argued.46

For members of the abstract expressionist vanguard, sexual imagery was an especially potent symbol for the regeneration of society and values. In abstract paintings of the 1930s, Clyfford Still used phallic images (precursors of the flame imagery of his postwar work), while in paintings of the 1940s Barnett Newman used biomorphic images resembling egg and sperm. This imagery reflected Carl Jung's symbolic interpretations of the phallus as "universal creative power" and the egg as the "cosmic egg" from which all things grew. Sexual liberation, for members of the avant garde, represented not only a rebellion against Victorianism but an affirmation of their hope for cultural renewal.47
DRUGS AND THE LIBERATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Just as the practice of free love was a way for cultural radicals to demonstrate their estrangement from bourgeois society, so the use of illicit drugs, especially marijuana, served as an expression of rebellion. But avant garde artists also had more positive goals. Many of them believed that drugs could be used as tools to expand one’s consciousness and deepen the user’s creative insights. Not all members of the vanguard advocated drug use, but those who did believed that mind-altering substances could help their cause to integrate art and life.

In this way, the use of illicit drugs, especially marijuana, became part of the stereotype of the "beatnik" in the late fifties. For example, Paul O’Neil, writing in Life in 1959, described Allen Ginsberg: "Like most Beats he is a marijuana smoker." More bohemians used (and were often addicted to) alcohol, a legal drug, than ever became deeply involved with illicit drugs, but for those vanguardists who used illicit substances, marijuana was the drug of choice, a substance well known in the jazz community, from where cultural radicals picked up cannabis. Some cultural radicals tried peyote and heroin, and, in the 1960s, some experimented with LSD, most notably Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg always claimed a serious purpose behind his use of drugs: marijuana was for "study purposes," not "party purposes," he insisted. Poet Stuart Perkoff concurred, noting in his journal in 1956 that he and others in the Venice, California, bohemian community used drugs because "we are impatient
for that opening of mind (& soul) that follows on the loosening of the fingers of tension."^{48}

Ginsberg and other vanguardists used drugs to heighten their aesthetic awareness. They would use a drug and then go to a museum to look at paintings or read poetry, hoping thereby to gain increased understanding of the works observed and to stimulate their own creativity. Vanguardists would often write or paint while "high."

In 1964 Ginsberg explained to Marcel Duchamp that the purpose of LSD induced creativity was to "express myself on the spot when the moment comes that life brings me to a state of maximum feeling-awareness-consciousness, i.e., epiphanous moments, mystical coherences, whatever label is useful." The story of how Jack Kerouac wrote On the Road in three weeks sustained mostly by Benzedrine and coffee is perhaps the most famous example of how members of the new vanguard used drugs to encourage creativity.^{49}

Drug use also served as a way for cultural radicals to express their rebellion against American society and government. In 1961, writer Paul Bowles wrote that the "grown-ups" in "alcoholic countries" like the United States opposed the use of marijuana because "the user of cannabis is all too likely to see the truth where it is and to fail to see it where it is not. Obviously few things are potentially more dangerous to those interested in prolonging the status quo of organized society." Noting the "huge sadistic police bureaucracy" in each state that "persecute the illuminati" (i.e., marijuana users), Allen Ginsberg declared in 1959
that "to be a junky in America is like having been a Jew in Nazi Germany." Using drugs and protesting against the illegality of drugs became, especially in the 1960s, another way that avant gardists could rail against the conformism and oppression that they saw in postwar America. Drug states, cultural radicals maintained, enabled people to transcend rationality and unleash creative forces in the subconscious that could be harnessed to integrate art and life. To oppose drugs was to oppose the liberation of human creativity and the innovations that could result.\textsuperscript{50}

Not all vanguardists believed drugs were useful. John Cage, for example, opposed drug use on the same grounds that he opposed "Art": "both promise transcendence from mundane life." Cage argued instead that one should look and listen carefully to one's own experience and find beauty there. Gary Snyder argued that drugs, while often "eye-openers," were not suited for deep "vision and illumination-seeking." The constant use of drugs "leads nowhere," he wrote, because it lacks intellect, will and compassion; and a personal drug kick is of no use to anyone else in the world." Snyder's words seem to be confirmed in Stuart Perkoff's plaintive thought that he and his friends would not need to use drugs "if we were to achieve the state of initiate," but, unfortunately, he continued, "we are not initiates, any of us."\textsuperscript{51}

Although members of the advance guard believed that the use of drugs could inspire creative insight and contribute to the integration of art and life, the results of their program were
ambiguous at best. On the one hand, Allen Ginsberg throughout the 1960s would use drugs to inspire his poetry—for example, his 1967 poem, "Wales Visitation." On the other hand, Stuart Perkoff and Peter Orlovsky are just two more well-known cultural radicals who would become addicted to drugs by the 1960s. In part following the example of their avant-garde predecessors, members of the sixties counterculture would used marijuana and other drugs. Again, the results were not always benign, though Gary Snyder, despite his cautions about drug use, concluded that "the H.A. [Haight-Ashbury] scene, and LSD are all to the good—a revolutionary tool, step forward—to bring people...around to formal discipline where needed." Novelist Ronald Sukenick saw a self-destructive component in the drug use of Greenwich Villagers of the late fifties and early sixties. Rather than searching for enlightenment and liberation, Sukenick argued that many seemed to seek self-immolation because it was preceded by "incandescence." Sukenick recalled one of Bill Manville’s "Saloon Society" columns in the Village Voice in which a bohemian commented on a recent casualty from a drug overdose: "Imagine, Bill, how strong that junk must have been. Imagine, not only to die—but to turn BLUE and to die!" Jack Kerouac, of course, did not need illicit or exotic drugs to destroy himself. He chose the traditional drug of the working and bourgeois classes and drank himself to death in 1969.52
THE SPIRITUAL QUEST

Members of the avant garde felt alienated from rational, technical, bureaucratic modernity in large part because, like generations of their predecessors, they believed that the value systems of contemporary society denied deeper spiritual realities. For many avant gardists, the problems of the modern world stemmed from just this alienation of human beings from their spiritual roots. Avant gardists generally did not find spiritual nourishment in the American mainstream religious traditions of Christianity and Judaism. Members of the cultural van instead followed several, often interrelated, paths to find a spiritual integration of art and life. For most, aesthetic creation was a participation in the creative, spiritual process of life. Some looked to mythology from Western and aboriginal, including native American, sources to find universal spiritual meanings. Others turned to Eastern religious traditions, especially various forms of Buddhism. None of these approaches was exclusive; many cultural radicals created some sort of combination of a number of them.53

Many avant gardists felt something missing from their lives. The options that cultural radicals believed society offered them, scientific rationalism or middle-class materialism, did not provide them with a satisfactory sense of purpose or meaning. Little magazine editor John Fles, writing in Kulchur, in 1960, expressed the restlessness in modernity experienced by many avant gardists:

The obvious question: Is the secular life enough, are we missing anything, anything renewing, vital? I don’t know.... I don’t think [Charles] Olson’s ‘Human Universe’ is enough, at least for
me, though it may be what is, the facts. I know I want something else, that, even, I have experienced something else: there are some things unaccounted for.

Writing about the "Modern Painter's World" in 1944, painter Robert Motherwell also addressed the spiritual crisis of modernity. Motherwell observed that the twentieth century had been shaped by the "spiritual breakdown which followed the collapse of religion." Into this vacuum of meaning, Motherwell argued, no "synthesized view of reality" as universally compelling as religion had emerged. Motherwell listed some contenders, however, as he dismissed science as "a method" not "a view" and rejected the "property-loving ...values of the bourgeois world." Motherwell held up artists as a "spiritual underground" whose purpose was to "guard the spiritual in the modern world."54

For most members of the cultural vanguard, innovation created a culture counter to the social and aesthetic norms of postwar America. Through the process of innovative creativity they both expressed their dissatisfaction with what was and exposed the process of their search. Both cases also served as invitations to others to join with them. Thus, the spiritual quest was another way of describing avant-garde cultural politics.

Many cultural radicals experienced the process of creation as spiritual and a manifestation of the spiritual life force that animated all things. Choreographer and dancer Martha Graham instructed her dancers to think of themselves as vehicles for "a vitality, a life-force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action." Poets such as Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg,
and Philip Whalen expressed in their work the idea that God was present in the world both in creative visions and in the more ordinary experiences of work and sex. Composer John Cage explained his understanding of the connection between the spiritual life and art with this story about Sri Ramakrishna:

[Ramakrishna’s] living and talking had impressed a musician who began to think that he should give up music and become a disciple of Ramakrishna. But when he proposed this, Ramakrishna said, by no means. Remain a musician: music is a means of rapid transportation. Rapid transportation, that is to say life "everlasting," that is to say, life, period.

Painter Clyfford Still described the experience of regeneration that the creative process made possible for him:

I seem to achieve...ecstasy in bringing forth the flaming life through these large responsive areas of canvass. And as the blues or reds or blacks...rise in austere thrusts to carry their power infinitely beyond the bounds of their limiting field, I move with them and find resurrection from the moribund oppression that held me only hours ago.

Painter Richard Pousette-Dart declared that "My definition of religion amounts to art and my definition of art amounts to religion." Describing the purpose of his art, Pousette-Dart wrote: "I strive to express the spiritual nature of the universe. Painting is for me a dynamic balance and wholeness of life; it is mysterious and transcending, yet solid and real."

The interest of cultural radicals in mythology and the primitive was not original; they reflected sources as diverse as the English romanticism of Wordsworth; the American romantic transcendentalism of Thoreau and Emerson; and the depth psychology of Jung. But these ideas were in sharp contrast to the more rational approaches of regionalist and realist art of the New Criticism, and of the Partisan
Review. While artists and critics in the previous movements and traditions sought to impose order on the chaos of history, the new artists looked to that chaos as a source of creative sight and spiritual growth. The avant gardist belief in vitalism both justified innovation and defined innovation as regenerative. What was important for artists in the van was to express their own spiritual struggles in the process of creating their work. In doing this, they believed they were expressing the struggles of their generation, even if their contemporaries in flannel suits did not recognize their own angst. As Jack Kerouac asked in 1960, "When the hell will people realize that all living beings[,] whether humans or animals, whether earthly or from other planets, are representatives of God?"57

THE MYTHICAL JOURNEY

Painter Mark Rothko, in writing that "without monsters and gods, art cannot enact our drama," effectively summed up the interest by many postwar avant gardists in primitive art, mythology, and spirituality. Most cultural radicals were well read in the literature of cultural anthropology and the interpretation of myth. For example, the painter Jackson Pollock’s library included Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, Ruth Benedict’s *Patterns of Culture*, and Joseph Campbell’s Jungian interpretation of myth, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Lawrence Lipton noted that the libraries of the vanguardists he studied in California contained works by Freud, Jung, Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, Susan K. Langer, and Ernest Casirer. The reading of
American cultural radicals of this generation also reflected their strong interest in Native American culture. Pollock owned a collection of books on Native Americans published by the American Bureau of Ethnology, and he, like other avant gardists, studied Native American artifacts at New York's Museum of Natural History.58

Innovative artists believed that scientific rationalism and industrial modernity had created knowledge and material goods, respectively, but had not produced a symbolic language rich enough to explain the depth of human experience. The cultural radicals of the forties were not the first to make this argument, of course. Romantics always had done so.59

By the twentieth century, anthropological interpretations defined "myth," usually also with reference to ritual, as a method of social organization, judging it neither as primitive, nor (in its own terms) irrational in comparison with modern western ideas. Psychological interpretations, especially those of Carl Jung, described myths as symbolic expressions of psychological struggles, often specific to the life experience of individuals but also expressive of conflicts basic to all persons, and thus myths and rituals shaped a collective unconscious of symbols common to all.

The counter-definition of myths as irrational expressions of "unreality" persisted, of course, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This fact contributed to the alienation of members of the avant garde from their culture and to their interest in "primitive" mythology as an answer to the modern world view. T.
S. Eliot's use of mythological material in *The Wasteland* is an obvious example. By studying these mythologies, Eliot and other members of the avant garde (including many abstract expressionist painters who were influenced by Eliot's ideas on this point) believed they could construct a new mythology that would be a force for regeneration for modern humanity. Members of the avant garde argued that the economic crisis of the depression, the horror of World War II, and the terror of the bomb had, in a sense, returned human beings to a primitive state of uncertainty and powerlessness before unknown forces, of crisis, and of tragedy. Vanguardists turned to the modern science of anthropology to learn about the primitive past and applied the insights gained to their creative work so as to return mystery and wonder to contemporary, rational society.60

Alienated from their society, the members of the vanguard believed that rationalism and materialism had produced social evils, evils culminating in the atomic bomb. "How live, accepting death?" asked poet and essayist James Boyer May in the *Grundtvig Review* in 1952, "How create, anticipating extinction?" In the atomic age, May argued, human beings needed to develop new myths that would provide people with a sense of meaning and purpose for their existence that scientific rationalism could not: "Atomic fission can render human beings neither nobler nor meaner," he asserted. Marjorie Farber, writing in the San Francisco little magazine, *City Lights*, in 1955 echoed May's remarks, arguing that what was useful for physical science was dangerous for human beings. "For twentieth century man who has the insights of modern depth psychology," Edward F. Edinger
declared in *The Realist* in 1958, "the rationalistic negation of myth must be seen as an opposite extreme alienating man from his origins both in the individual and the historic sense." Western civilization, these cultural radicals argued, had reached an impasse. The only way forward, they argued, was, in a sense, backward. By looking at so-called primitive peoples, avant gardists maintained, Americans could find the roots of their present crisis and discover resources to help them find their way out of the crisis of modernity to a livable future.61

One way members of the avant garde proposed to bring about this changed consciousness was to revive older ideas about the power of word and image. Barnett Newman, for example, writing in 1947 about the art of the natives of America's Northwest coast, noted that for the native artist, "a shape was a living thing, a vehicle for an abstract thought-complex, a carrier of the awesome feelings he felt before the terror of the unknowable." To the Native American artist, the abstract shape was "real," neither a formalist construction nor a "purist illusion." The artist, his society, and the artifact were integrated by a complex of meanings. There was no alienation. Poet Stuart Perkoff applied this same idea to words. In the Autumn of 1956, Perkoff wrote in his journal, "In the days when man believed that the word itself brought and made things happen, was the actual cause of the god's existence, [they] had such words, such poems, to make corn grow, & rain fall, & protect [them].... In our time, man doesn't believe this, & there is no community."62
The mission of the avant garde artist, therefore, was to end alienation by, as Mark Rothko wrote about the work of Clyfford Still, "creating new counterparts to replace the old mythological hybrids who have lost their pertinence in the intervening centuries." Newman described the goal of cultural radicals as the creation of an "idea-complex that makes contact with mystery—of life, of men, of nature, of the hard, black chaos that is death, or the grayer, softer chaos that is tragedy." By returning to their origins and their psychological roots, members of the avant garde argued, modern people could come in contact with their true selves, selves from which industrial consumer capitalism separated them. The result of this reintegration of the self would be the regeneration of society.63

THE SPIRIT OF THE ORIENT

The spiritual quest of American avant gardists at mid-century took many of them to the East. Alienated as many members of the avant garde were from American and Western values, the turn to the orient seemed logical to them. Still, literary historian Carl Jackson is correct to point out that, given America’s history as a cultural outpost of European tradition, a tradition to which American intellectuals have long looked for inspiration, the shift marked a significant cultural change. The turn to the East was not original with the postwar vanguard, however. While Henry James’s expatriation to England may have been prototypical, Lafcadio Hearn’s expatriation to Japan modeled a different approach. At the turn of the century, the American orientalist Ernest Fenollosa looked to a future fusion
between Eastern and Western cultures, much as would painter Mark Tobey and poet Gary Snyder in the last half of the twentieth century. Japanese haiku interested poet Ezra Pound, who learned much about the arts of the Orient from Fenollosa himself. Asians themselves were perhaps less interested in spreading their culture to the West in general and the United States in particular, but there were notable exceptions. In 1893, Zen Buddhist master Soyen Shaku, for example, disregarded the advice of fellow priests and took Zen to the "land of the white barbarians" at the World Congress of Religions at the Chicago World’s Fair. Shaku would reputedly be the first Zen priest to visit the United States. He would not be the last. Through the writings of D. T. Suzuki and the Englishman Alan Watts, Zen Buddhism became well known as the Eastern spiritual tradition of choice among the new American avant gardists, especially those associated with the Beat movement.64

For cultural radicals such as writers as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder, and composer John Cage, Eastern thought provided an answer to the alienation they felt from modern American culture. From the materialism, rationalism, conformity, and fear they felt in Cold War America, these vanguardists turned to the East to find a new paradigm for society. For Kerouac, for example, the appeal of Buddhism lay in the first of the Four Noble Truths: "All life is suffering." This insight resonated with Kerouac’s alienation from society and himself, and for a few years, he tried to follow the spiritual discipline that Buddhist teaching presented as the answer to that suffering. Kerouac popularized Zen ideas in books such as
Pharma Bums, and Desolation Angels, predicting a back-to-nature "rucksack revolution" as millions of "Dharma bums" rejected the values of industrial society. Kerouac's enthusiasm for Buddhism waned by the late fifties, however, and he returned to more traditional sources to relieve his angst: Roman Catholicism and alcohol.65

While Kerouac was the chief publicist for Zen, poets Gary Snyder, and Allen Ginsberg were examples of a deeper commitment and understanding of Eastern thought on the part of postwar avant gardists. Kerouac presented Snyder as the chief Dharma Bum in the person of Japhy Ryder. This was in recognition of the help Snyder gave to Kerouac as the latter began his studies. Snyder's interest in Eastern thought dated from his youth and after many years of study in the United States, Snyder spent several years in a Japanese Zen monastery for further training. Snyder's interest in Eastern spirituality grew from his alienation from Christianity and from the environmental destruction brought about by industrialism. Snyder interpreted Christian doctrines about human domination over nature as part of the environmental problem, and he turned East, at least in part, to explore "the possibilities of a civilized society operating in harmony with nature." Ginsberg became interested in the Orient after he stumbled on a book of Chinese prints in the New York Public Library. His spiritual journey took him from Zen to Hinduism to Tibetan Buddhism, where he found a spiritual home.66
These various religious perspectives shaped not only the world views held by postwar vanguardists, but also their aesthetics. Davidson argued that the Beat Buddhists could be divided into two groups based on different tenets of Buddhist practice to which these writers adhered. Davidson maintained that writers Ginsberg, Kerouac, and McClure followed the way of Buddhist compassion (karuna). In their poetry, this compassion is embodied in a receptive" stance to the world and experience. These poets attempted to be completely open to the spiritual reality present in everyday life and to present in their poetry spiritual insights just as they came to them. Thus Ginsberg’s use of mantric forms in his poetry and his attempts to deal poetically with his spiritual experiences by rejecting the use of the poetic persona and directly transcribing the spiritual voice.

Poets such as Snyder and Philip Whalen, Davidson contended, followed the path of Buddhist wisdom (prajna). The poetry written from this perspective tended to be based on the discriminating use of detail derived from close observation of the physical world and everyday experience. While these aesthetics reflected different approaches to Buddhist enlightenment both of these approaches can be placed in a larger context of American poetry. The aesthetics of the first group showed, once again, continuity with Emerson and Whitman, the long line, improvisation, and jazz, as well as the Indian Vedic tradition that influenced nineteenth century American Romantics. The aesthetics of the second group related them to Thoreau, to the shorter line of imagism as used by Pound and the early Williams, as well as the Chinese lyric tradition of poetry that influenced early modernist lyricism.67
The ideas of Zen also influenced the aesthetics of composer John Cage. Margaret Leng Tan pointed out that two Zen ideas in particular were important to Cage's development: the concepts of unimpededness and of interpenetration. Unimpededness was the idea that each person is the center of the universe and is, as D. T. Suzuki said, "the most honored of all." Interpenetration expressed the idea that each person should be able to learn from and connect with others and, indeed, with all around them. As discussed above, Cage developed a new aesthetic from a fusion of these two related ideas with Dada concepts. Cage concluded, first, that all sounds were equally valid, that there was "no need to cautiously proceed in dualistic terms of success and failure or the beautiful and the ugly or good and evil but rather simply to walk on." Second, he concluded that he should not try to force his own ideas and feelings on others with his music. By turning to chance operations he could remove his ego from the composition process and free the sounds to be sounds open to appreciation by individual listeners on their own terms. This left the listeners, other "centers of the universe" in Zen thought, "free to be the centers." Cage's students adapted many of their teacher's insights to their work even if they did not practice Buddhist meditation, as Cage did.68

CONCLUSION

In his denunciation of the new vanguard, "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," Norman Podhoretz contrasted the primitive, irrational incoherence he saw in the contemporary rebellion with the avant garde
of the twenties. "The Bohemianism of the 1920s," Podhoretz wrote, "...was a movement created in the name of civilization: its ideals were intelligence, cultivation, spiritual refinement." Regardless of whether Ernest Hemingway or Ezra Pound would have recognized this description, members of the new van did not read the past in Podhoretz's terms. Writer John Clellon Holmes described the twenties rebellion as a "hollow" (though "magnificent") "debauch." The new movement of which Holmes was a part differed because, he wrote, "Our search is, I firmly believe, a spiritual one." William Carlos Williams wrote that "The Beat Generation is basically a religious movement, essentially a moral movement." The commitment of many members of the avant garde to often rigorous spiritual discipline and the desire of others to rediscover the mystical power of word and image all testify to the aptness of these assessments. Besides Eastern meditation, vanguard writers were interested in other spiritualities, such as animism (Michael McClure), theosophy (Robert Duncan), and cabalism (David Meltzer and Diane DiPrima). Podhoretz was correct in describing avant gardists as primitive and irrational. Whether this constituted a negative or a positive description was, clearly, a matter of point of view. For members of the avant garde, alienated from the contemporary American world view, concepts of primitive mythology and Eastern spirituality seemed more "rational" and less "primitive" than the atomic bombs and Cold War ideology that Podhoretz and American society seemed to offer. Gary Snyder argued that if a person followed the paths of contemplation, morality, and wisdom, she or he would probably "get pretty far out,"
and that, he concluded, was "better than moping around classrooms or writing books on Buddhism and Happiness for the masses, as the squares (who will shortly have succeeded in putting us all down) do." 69

The ultimate goal of the spiritual quest, as of all avant-garde innovation, was to integrate art and life. Cultural radicals felt alienated from postwar America. They made their feelings very clear, often in graphic terms. But members of the avant garde believed that alienation was a "fallen" state. The true destiny of humanity, they believed, was to be fully connected with one's emotions, sexuality, creativity. Postwar avant gardists rejected the political solutions proffered by the previous vanguard. But by building on the ideas of the first generation of radical innovators, members of the new American advance guard made the case in their life and in their art for a cultural politics of renewal and regeneration.
Notes to Chapter IV


17. Cage, Silence, pp. 63, 71, 84. The interest of other avant gardists in Zen Buddhism and non-Western culture in general is discussed in Davidson, San Francisco Renaissance, pp. 95-100; and Polcari, Abstract Expressionism, pp. 35-50.


22. Cage, Silence, p. 64, see also p. 44. Claes Oldenberg quoted in Sidra Stich, Made in the USA: An Americanization in Modern Art, the '50s and '60s (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 208.


53. In Linick's 1965 survey of more than 60 members of the literary avant-garde, asking, among other things, about their religious background and practice, more than three quarters of them responded that they were reared either Christian or Jewish, but most described themselves as lapsed. Only 14% of the respondents attended religious services. See "American Literary Avant-Garde," p. 373.


67. Davidson, San Francisco Renaissance, pp. 97-98.


INTRODUCTION

Members of the new American vanguard, like previous advance guard movements, understood themselves to be explorers on the frontiers of the future. As was pointed out in Chapter Three, cultural radicals, alienated from American society, attempted to expose the dehumanizing artificiality of the social world by acts of cultural negation. Responding positively to their alienation, members of the innovative van articulated an aesthetic of process by which they modelled their advance guard goal of integrated art and life.

Avant gardists did not believe that their work represented the future plopped down into the present, but they did believe that what they did constituted the vital transition from now to the future. Cultural radicals maintained that the creative intellectual was the person in society who could most clearly envision the broad contours of what the future could be. For example, in 1956, the editors of the Los Angeles-based little magazine Coastline declared their purpose: "We keep our eyes open to the coastlines of the future, the
unexplored continent of time which man is able to sense only in the
instinct of profound creation." Members of the advance guard
believed in the power of creativity to regenerate human culture so as
to create a new future. The key to cultural renewal, they believed,
was the ability of people to perceive their world and experiences in
new ways.¹

As believers in a better tomorrow, avant gardists shared the
belief in progress typical of Western intellectuals since the 18th
century. For informed Americans, that belief was shaken by the
Depression and World War II. But the return to prosperity and peace
in the 1950s restored faith in progress and the future among many
media commentators at least until the seventies. Intellectuals,
however, felt more deeply the challenges to the idea of progress and
the future that occurred in the twentieth century. Writing in the
Nation in 1955, Roderick Seidenberg noted that from the interwar
years forward, utopian fiction became increasingly "more grim, more
subtly brutal, more fateful and pessimistic." Cultural radicals also
felt increased pessimism about the future. While most continued, in
the postwar years, to articulate a hope in the future, their
attitudes revealed a steady change in avant-garde ideas about that
future.²

The new avant-garde perceptions of the future would contribute to
the domestication and end of the movement by the 1960s. In
particular, during the 1950s and 1960s many avant gardists began to
emphasize individual, psychological renewal over cultural renewal.
Further, most radical innovators at mid-century placed less hope than their predecessors in technology as a positive contributor to the future, again choosing instead to emphasize individual psychological factors. Likewise, American vanguardists became more skeptical of the idea of inevitable progress. Instead, they talked about cycles of progress, or they disparaged the whole idea of the future and argued that transformation would come in the present, if at all. By the 1960s most intellectual innovators did not believe that one could meaningfully talk about culture or the future. They focused on their own creative and personal development without expectation that the future would be much different, and certainly not better, than the present.

ART AND THE REGENERATION OF THE SELF

Members of the postwar American advance guard believed, as did most of their earlier vanguard counterparts, that radically innovative intellectuals shaped the future by communicating to others the need to integrate art and life. The ways in which the idea of integrating art and life shaped the innovations of avant garde artists was discussed above. In this chapter we will explore how this idea changed the way cultural radicals understood the future.

Members of the new avant garde believed that if they taught individuals how to look at the world around them in new ways then those people would begin to challenge the values of their culture. Furthermore, avant garde artists argued that enlightened individuals would
begin to practice their new values in the way they lived and in this manner redeem culture. The future described by cultural radicals was one in which human beings were no longer alienated, from themselves, from their community, from the world. Thus, for members of the postwar van, the theme of new vision replaced the social and political interests that concerned their Depression era predecessors and have typically been a part of vanguard movements in general. The full impact of this change in view will be seen in the next chapter, which explores how these ideas would make possible the integration of the avant garde with the consumer culture, a consequence that the members of the radical van did not intend.

The future advocated by members of the avant garde would come, they believed, through the liberation of human creativity. The artist, cultural radicals believed, provided the model for this liberation. Painter Mark Rothko insisted in 1943 that, "The world is what the artist makes it." The creative innovations of the artist, radical innovators argued, would be the basis for renewal in society. Writer Wendell B. Anderson quoted poet Louis Dudeck to explain this point: "The way to freedom in the future will lie through art and poetry. Only imagination, discovery of man's self and his relation to the world and to other men, can save him from complete enslavement to the state, to machinery, the base dehumanized life which is spreading around us." If others followed the example of the radical artist, painter Michel Seuphor declared in 1957, "everyone [could] cause a new spring to gush out, the flavor of which
is not like any other." In these terms did members of the advance guard described social renewal through the process of individual discovery.3

The centrality of the individual for avant gardists in the postwar years does not mean that community was no longer important for radical innovators. For most the cosmopolitan ideal still had meaning. In 1950, Harry Holtzman and Martin James announced in the opening manifesto of their little magazine Trans/Formation that "The measure of man—what distinguishes man as man—emerges in his ability to communicate, co-operate, construct..... [Today] we are in a position to overcome cultural isolationism which would pit peoples and specialities against one another." Vanguardists also tried to achieve the cosmopolitan community in their own social relations. The New York based abstract expressionists formed a recognizable community organized formally in the Eighth Street Club and informally at the Cedar Street Tavern around the corner. Likewise, in the case of the Beat poets, personal and aesthetic concerns linked the artists. Advance guard intellectuals received a great deal of encouragement from their relations with their fellows.4

The cosmopolitan ideal began to be transformed in the postwar years, however. Increasingly vanguardists valued the beloved community because of the support provided by the community to individuals to be individuals. Thus, cultural radicals in the postwar years based their belief in the future on the regeneration of individuals as individuals, not as members of a new community.
NEW ART, NEW VISION, NEW BEING

How did avant gardists believe individual renewal would take place? They believed that the new music, literature, painting, and sculpture required people to see and hear differently. The result, cultural radicals argued, would be a new understanding of creative possibilities, a liberation of individual creativity, an expanded awareness of the purpose of life, and the development of new ways of living. For example, in 1957, composer John Cage wrote, "New music: new listening. Not an attempt to understand something that is being said, for, if something were being said the sounds would be given the shapes of words. Just an attention to the activity of sounds." Poet Anne Waldman described the function of the poet as "the first person to begin the shaping and visioning of the new forms and the new consciousness when no one else has begun to sense it.... Pound once said, ‘Artists are the antennae of the race.’ Whether or not we have an audience, this strong visioning and shaping of a master poem informs the conscience of generations to come." In 1951, writer Jacqueline Johnson, wife of painter Gordon Onslow-Ford, described the work of her husband and other avant-garde artists as the "transformation of reality by a transformation of our own awareness."

Cultural radicals communicated the idea of a transformed vision and new world to younger artists. Painter Elmer Bischkoff, for example, remembered the atmosphere at the California School of Fine
Arts in the late forties. Douglas McAgy, the director of the school, championed the abstract expressionists and hired painters Clyfford Still and Mark Rothko to teach at the school. Bishkoff recalled that though no one talked about the "service" art might perform for people, the students tended to believe that "their work might play a role in the forming of a better world—that it might assist toward deeper understanding between people.... That gestures in paint on canvass or gestures in welded metal and wood...and stone could become...liberating to all who had eyes."6

Cultural radicals believed that if they presented their works to as many people as possible, especially the younger generation, they would redeem the future. Allen Ginsberg wrote to his friend Peter Orlovsky, "Bill [Burroughs] thinks new American generation will be hip & will slowly change things—laws & attitudes, he has hope there—for some redemption of America, finding its soul." Ginsberg was perhaps not as confident as Burroughs, noting the "competition and deception" he saw in modern America, but believed redemption possible if everyone "lov[ed] all life.... More & more I see it [love] isn't just between us, it's a feeling that can be extended to everything."7

An historical pattern emerges from this evidence. Historians have noted a rhythm in American intellectual and cultural history in the twentieth century as thinkers moved back and forth between focusing on self and focusing on society. In the twenties, cultural radicals emphasized the intellectual's individual quest for the true
self. In the thirties and forties the social responsibilities of the intellectual took precedence. In the late forties and the fifties, individual self-expression once more became important for intellectuals. In the 1960s the responsibilities of the self to society would energize intellectuals once again. Such a reading of the postwar period is superficial, however. The evidence presented here suggests that the new avant garde conceived of the self as arbiter of social values. They defined the good society as that in which all individuals experienced emotional fulfillment. This attitude underlay the avant-garde protest of the fifties and the Movement in the 1960s. The hippies represented a "mainstreaming" of avant garde attitudes, and this "quest for the ideal self," as Peter Clecak called it, would continue to be a major theme in American society through the seventies and into the eighties. The new vanguard contributed to American culture an ideology that could undergird both social protest and individualism by subsuming society and culture under the quest for self-expression.8

TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE

After 1945, and in tandem with the increased focus on the self, many American vanguardists changed their understanding of the relationship between technology and the future. The members of the historic avant garde generally believed that technological and scientific creativity contributed to human liberation in much the same way that "artistic" creativity did. Technological optimism was
especially typical of American cultural radicals. Many American and European avant gardists used technological motifs in their works; the machine imagery of American precisionists Charles Demuth and Charles Sheeler are obvious examples. The Hungarian vanguardist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, onetime member of the Bauhaus faculty who immigrated to the United States to escape Nazi oppression, epitomized the attitudes of many first and second generation radical innovators toward technology: "The reality of our century is technology: the invention, construction, and maintenance of machines. To be a user of machines is to be of the spirit of this century. It has replaced the transcendental spiritualism of past eras." The optimism felt by early vanguardists about the possibilities of technology in life and art was part of the standard account made in the postwar years about cultural radicalism. For example, in a 1954 issue of the Partisan Review, critic Clement Greenberg described the turn-of-the-century avant garde as "the first to accept the modern, industrializing world with any enthusiasm. Even poets—thus Apollinaire—saw, at least for a moment, aesthetic possibilities in a streamlined future, a vaulting modernity; and a mood of secular optimism replaced the secular pessimism of the Symbolist generation."9

Many members of the new American van would not respond so favorably to technology, however. As noted in Chapter 3, the bomb produced almost universally negative reactions from cultural radicals. Many innovators in the fifties and sixties would remain alienated from technology, science, and the rationalist mode of
thought associated with both. As critic Meyer Shapiro noted in 1957, recent events had rendered "the values of technology less interesting and even distasteful" to contemporary intellectuals because, from their point of view, technical rationalism denied the expressive power of the self. Some cultural radicals, however, continued to affirm that art, science, and technology could together contribute to a positive future. For these intellectuals, the problem facing society was less the excessive reliance on scientific rationalism as a lack of balance between the subjectivity of art and the objectivity of technology and science.¹⁰

ART AGAINST TECHNOLOGY

Many members of the new American vanguard were sceptical of their predecessor’s faith in the technological future. The former believed not only that technology, such as the bomb, threatened the future, but also that technology came with a world view that valued machine values of rationality and efficiency above the creative human values that members of the advance guard prised. American vanguardists viewed their society as, in the words of one critic, a "sick or dying culture, strangling from over-civilization, over-mechanization and de-humanization, world wars, mass butchery, killing and degradation." Cultural radicals rejected a technocratic value system that described human beings as "assemblages of...biological, sociological, and other functions," and seemed to reduce human life to "a number in the coroner's table." This technocratic world was an
avant gardist's nightmare. Indeed, poet Gary Snyder described a
dream of "a new industrial dark-ages: filthy narrow streets and
dirty buildings...—unwashed illiterate brutal cops—...tin cans and
garbage and drooping electric wires everywhere."11

While some saw a post-war world of social and economic advance,
others saw a world of social and aesthetic squalor. Painter Mark
Tobey observed that contemporary builders replaced structures
embodies "human dimensions" with "uniform boxlike buildings which
seem poor orphans of the once promising Bauhaus tradition," buildings
that, "never appear to have been touched by human hands." For Tobey,
these buildings were a visible sign of an encroaching "impersonalism"
that he believed to be "a child of our overindustrialism and our
belief in the material man." Editor James Boyer May echoed Tobey's
concerns, declaring that intellectuals had "oversold material
'progress.'" He argued that the technological and scientific models
that supported "Progress" had impeded aesthetic development:

Emphasis on scientific method, from a notion that knowledge may
be enlarged only through processes modelled on laboratory
experimentations, has raised havoc with contemporary writing.
The fanatical imagists have ignored that empirical devices apply
only to materially and temporally limited research, and that
over-concentration on them blocks speculative imagination. (In
truth, in sciences themselves, the greatest advances have
followed quite "unscientific" and essentially poetic theories.)

In a similar vein, psychiatrist James Russell Grant wrote in *Trace* in
1957 that "it is the poet who gives words their meaning,
and...extends the realm of consciousness." The scientist, however,
"narrows" the "realm of consciousness," Grant contended. Writer
Frederick Kiesler declared in a catalog for a show of the surrealist
painter Hans Richter at Peggy Guggenheim gallery Art of This Century, "The vision of art precedes that of science." For many members of the advance guard, the creative imagination was the surest guide to the future.12

According to cultural radicals, much technology alienated people from their creative selves. Writer Robert Anton Wilson, for example, condemned television in a 1960 essay in the Realist. Calling television a "One-Eyed Monster," Wilson declared that "we have lost contact with our own bodies, with the biological core-energies of life with their million year hungers, and are masturbating in front of TV sets instead of jazzing time to make it pregnant with a more aware future." Much as T. J. Jackson Lears has argued that members of the late nineteenth century bourgeoisie felt "weightless" as the processes of urbanization and technological development seemed to separate them from fundamental experience, so Wilson and other twentieth century avant gardists believed their society left them alienated from the basics of living. Radio, television, and other media increased the variety of possible ersatz experiences in the postwar years, but real, quality experience remained elusive for most people, according to cultural radicals. They did not believe that technology was the answer; a fuller life with a deeper sense of meaning had to be searched for in other places, vanguardists declared.13
The interest of radical intellectuals in myth and so-called "primitive" cultures (see previous chapter) is another expression of the desire of avant gardists to find a model for the future other than the scientific, rationalist, technologically progressive Euro-American example. Pointing to the example of the Native Americans, painter Barnett Newman observed in 1946 that "the many primitive art traditions stand apart as authentic aesthetic accomplishments that flourished without benefit of European history." Composer Partch was fully aware that the instruments he invented on which to play his music—various stringed instruments, modified reed organs, and numerous percussion instruments—were an "anomaly" for the mid-twentieth century, "primitive means to an expanding musical idea—and this in an age of universal admiration for mechanical miracles and universal acceptance of scientific authority." For writer Jack Kerouac, the values and way of life of the poor peasants of the earth, the fellaheen as he called them, after Spengler's Decline of the West, defined the only world that would last. On the road in northern Mexico, Sal Paradise, Kerouac's narrative voice, observed that the fellaheen had come down from the back mountains and higher places to hold forth their hands for something they thought civilization could offer, and they never dreamed the sadness and the poor broken delusion of it. They didn't know that a bomb had come that could crack all our bridges and roads and reduce them to jumbles, and we would be as poor as they someday, and stretching out our hands in the same, same way.
Avant gardists, therefore, urged Americans to look to cultures other than the European heritage as well as to look deep within themselves.  

ART AND TECHNOLOGY

A second group of vanguardists continued to argue that both modern science and innovative art could contribute to a liberated human future. For example, painter Wolfgang Paalen wrote in 1945 that "art and science are indispensable complements;...only their cooperation will be able to create a new ethics." Composer Edgard Varèse, a member of the first generation vanguard, served as a link between the generations. Before the technology of tape recorders and synthesizers had been invented, Varèse championed the development of such new musical technologies. In the years after World War II, he made use of emerging possibilities in electronic sound in compositions such as Déserts (1949-1954) and Poème électronique (1957-1958). Writing in the abstract expressionist-associated little magazine, Possibilities, in 1947, Varèse declared that while human understanding of space, time, and matter "is no longer what it was for us in the past," the arts have not yet completely expressed these changes. "Music," he maintained, "...should be the first to reflect this revolution, as it could be the art to benefit the most." In lectures and essays in the 1950s, Varèse described electronics as "our new liberating medium," and he declared that the technology "has freed music from the tempered system, which has prevented music from
keeping pace with the other arts and with science." Varèse expressed special pleasure that "composers and physicists are at last working together and music is again linked with science as it was in the Middle Ages." The result, he believed, would be continued advances in music-making technology.15

Composer John Cage, too, believed that technological development would contribute to the liberated future about which avant gardists dreamed. Cage's thought reflected the influence of media theorist Marshall McLuhan and technological utopian R. Buckminster Fuller. Cage argued, following Fuller, that by the end of the twentieth century, technology would enable all basic human material needs to be met. Furthermore, Cage contended, following McLuhan, individual attempts to "make life endurable" by transforming one's consciousness, such as Zen meditation or artistic creativity, now took place on a corporate level because modern communications technology created an "exteriorized" nervous system that linked human minds and emotions. The intelligent application of new technology, Cage maintained, could transform the collective human consciousness. And indeed, he said, the process was happening "inevitably" as technology created a new "global mind." Because of technology, therefore, Cage declared that "we can become people devoted to life rather than to competitiveness and the killing of one another." The technological evolution of human society enabled people to concentrate on integrating art and life, according to Cage.16
Cultural radicals expressed their technological optimism by incorporating technology into their work. In 1952, for example, Cage produced one of the earliest compositions for tape. In the mid-sixties, Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, several members of the Judson Dance Theater, and other artists, collaborated with engineers from Bell Telephone Laboratories to produce 9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering (1966), a project defined by the goal, "technology for art’s sake." Rauschenberg also communicated the positive possibilities of technology in his works. In pieces such as Barge (1962-1963), Rauschenberg presented silkscreen images of technologies used for communication, transportation, and space exploration. In this work, the artist depicted technology as an agent that brought people together and widened human knowledge and experience. Rauschenberg also included images of military vehicles to suggest the negative possibilities of technology, but the overall impression was a guarded optimism. Composer Harry Partch, despite the fact that the musical instruments that he invented to play his music were not electronic, called for the development of new technology. He urged record companies and musical instrument manufacturers to follow the lead of chemical and electronic companies and establish research and development departments so that "music as an art might become imbued with the spirit of curiosity and investigation which characterizes our sciences." But Partch also argued that "forward looking composers" should be a part of these developments. Otherwise the new electronic music would be just a technologically sophisticated
version of the music of his day and "so much musical flim flam in a vacuum, so far as real values are concerned." Thus, many cultural radicals continued to believe that technology could further human creativity.  

THE NEW FUTURE: CONTINGENT, NOT PROGRESSIVE

While members of the avant garde continued to look to the future in the postwar years, their conception of the future changed in the 1940s and 1950s. The confident faith of thirties vanguardists in progress as a process of regular development did not survive the vicissitudes of Communist Party politics or the brutality of World War II. The new generation of cultural radicals defined the future in evolutionary and cyclical terms. They believed life was a constant struggle and each triumph over adversity a temporary victory that could be overturned in the next conflict. Barnet Newman's 1945 painting The Slaying of Hosieries illustrated this pattern of thought. Osiris, of course, was the mythical Egyptian King who was murdered, cut into pieces, and scattered across the country. His wife, Isis, pulled his pieces together and resurrected him. The story of Hosieries thus symbolized the cycles of death and rebirth seen in the seasons and the circle of generations. Radical innovators like Newman looked to these mythological models to formulate their conceptions of human history and hope for the future.
In 1953, painter Jack Tworkov discussed the contingent quality of human experience in an essay in the avant-garde art journal *It Is.* Tworkov argued that "there is no foreseeable future. Man acts on his environment but his deeds do not necessarily accomplish his heart's desire." Tworkov used the example of the Russian Revolution to illustrate his thought. No Marxist in 1917, he said, could have foreseen the reality of Stalinism, nor accepted totalitarianism as the fulfillment of her revolutionary dreams. But Tworkov also turned to the example of the Pilgrims in America. Tworkov argued that modern America was not what the Pilgrims had in mind, but for all its faults, Tworkov preferred that world to the one the Pilgrims would have desired. According to avant gardists like Tworkov, the future was a gamble. One could never be sure how things would turn out. But if the evolution of human culture was not always to the good, this evolution was not destined to be always to the bad. Tworkov believed in the possibility of human action to accomplish the "heart's desire," and especially the action of the avant garde: "Destiny's tools are the avant-garde. A man cannot make his life, but whatever he makes, that's his life. And since we never make and cannot make the same things, everything keeps on changing."¹⁹

In a similar manner, writer and little magazine editor Barding Dahl, in 1956, declared his satisfaction that "the great damage wrought by the concept of endless progress towards perfection is on the mend." Dahl maintained that people were learning from psychology to "adjust" to the present situation and the possibilities inherent
in that situation. As a result, he concluded, "we will again have
great enterprises of the hand and mind which will be untroubled by
the knowledge that the failure of the enterprise may or may not set
back the charter date of utopia. Playing the game is what counts."
Avant gardists did not know for sure what the future would be, but
they knew it would be different because the rising and falling of
human evolution was inevitable. And human action, they believed, was
part of that future.\textsuperscript{20}

In the person of the hero, members of the advance guard connected
their interest in myths and rituals of the past with their interest
in the future and the self. Vanguardists drew their ideas about the
hero from books such as Nietzsche's \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}; Joseph
Campbell's \textit{The Hero with a Thousand Faces}, and from their studies in
anthropology and ethnography, including Native American traditions.
For cultural innovators, the hero represented the power of human
action to shape human destiny, or at least to argue with the forces
that moved through history. Whether they described the poet as a
"shaman" or the painter as an "image-maker," members of the vanguard
communicated their self-understanding to be creators of new patterns
of thought that could restore meaning to life and thus create a
purposeful and livable future. In 1949, painter Adolph Gottlieb
declared the "times are out of joint" as "our aspirations have been
reduced to a desperate attempt to escape from evil." Choreographer
Martha Graham wrote that people sought "some pattern in which they
can engage their destinies." She concluded that the artist should be
an "angel" leading human beings to new destinies: "Not angel in the strict Christian sense of the word, but angel in the new sense created by the contemporary artist—a sense which is transforming the outdated hero of physical action into the new hero of spiritual action." Again, the future would not be created by reordering the political and economic realms but by individuals transforming the spiritual or psychological realm. New "seeing" could, though not necessarily immutably, produce a new culture.21

THE ART OF NOW

While some cultural radicals redefined the future in terms of ancient myths and the cycles of nature, other members of the innovative van abandoned the future and focused on the present as the only reality. Existentialist philosophy was one source of this view. John Cage was another, more important progenitor of this view. Adherents tended to be slightly younger vanguardists, those born in the 1920s and later, who came of age intellectually after the war. Too young to have been directly influenced by the historical determinism of Depression era Marxism, they were aware of the disillusionment felt by older innovators whose hope was betrayed by the Stalinists. But while the members of this older group continued to define themselves in relation to some future, however indefinite, the younger vanguardists rejected historic vanguard ideas about the future.
In the 1940s and 1950s, many American intellectuals expressed interest in Existentialism. The central idea of existentialist thinkers like Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus that there were no absolutes, only individual self creation, appealed to American intellectuals jaded by totalitarianism and the social themes of the past decades and searching for a new world view. Many cultural radicals in the decade after World War II were aware of the new philosophy. Painter Willem de Kooning remembered that "existentialism...was in the air, and we felt it without knowing too much about it." Mark Rothko incorporated some existentialist ideas in his writings. But the key tenets of existentialism were counter to central vanguard ideas. In particular, existentialism emphasized the individual and his or her own self-definition. Existentialist thought denied the themes of culture and community so important to the historic vanguard.22

Critic Harold Rosenberg, in his description of abstract expressionism as "action painting," presented an existentialist interpretation of the movement. Rosenberg did not present an accurate depiction of the ideals of the abstract expressionist vanguard. But his interpretation of the artist expressing his or her quest for individual identity influenced a younger generation of artists who did not have the same cultural and intellectual concerns as the older vanguardists. The writings of Henry Miller, banned in the United States at this time but available in editions smuggled from abroad and in the lore of underground communities, exerted a
similar influence. Miller, like the existentialists, was not
interested in culture. He demonstrated in his work no desire to
belong to a community or participate in cultural renewal. He merely
depicted his experiences, affirming through the creative act only
that he existed. Influenced by these ideas, a younger generation of
avant gardists redefined innovation as the creative expression of
their search for themselves. They claimed no responsibility for the
future of the culture.23

The turn from culture and the future to the art of now by avant
gardists was influenced by composer and writer John Cage even more
than by existentialism. Cage combined Zen ideas, as popularized by
Alan Watts and others, with historic vanguard notions about the
integration of art and life to develop his aesthetic of the present.
Zen masters taught that both the future and the past were illusions;
these times existed only in one's imagination. In truth, they
taught, the only time that really existed was the present. Alan
Watts summarized this line of thought by saying, "Zen is a liberation
from time." Zen thinkers also rejected Western ideas of cause and
effect. As John Cage explained, "what is meant is that there are an
incalculable infinity of causes and effects, that in fact each and
every thing in all of time and space is related to each and every
other thing in all of time and space." Since everything in the
universe was related, no single line of cause and effect could be
singled out. This idea meant that whatever one did reflected the
influence of the past and shaped the future even as one could not
hope to untangle the precise relationships. Cultural radicals who adhered to this point of view could thus consistently profess some responsibility for the future and advocate a radical presentism at the same time. Thus, Cage defined contemporary music not as the "music of the future" but as the "music present with us: this moment, now." 24

Combining the Zen notion that one's attention should be on the present moment with the vanguard goal to integrate art and life, cultural radicals redefined their relationship to their art, their society, and their future in three different ways. Most importantly, they argued that the creative process and the work, or more often, the experience that resulted, were self-contained and needed no outside reference or goal to be complete. Second, these radical innovators emphasized even more emphatically than other avant gardists the priority of the moment of epiphany over an abstract future. Third, present-focused vanguardists tended to create for a small community of the enlightened who could understand their works that were often strikingly innovative technically even in comparison with other radical innovators.

Avant gardists who created for the present believed that art did not require any extraneous references or larger purposes. Avant gardists of this perspective rejected the mythological concerns of the abstract expressionist painters, for example. In 1958, painter and "Happening" creator Allan Kaprow remarked on the influence of Jackson Pollock on Kaprow and subsequent artists. Kaprow wrote that
Pollock's "concern with the unconscious, with primitive myth and ceremony, with the crisis of self-realization, in short, with the romantic urgency of creativity, are surely not factors in today's art." Nor did this new group of avant gardists look to the work as the future of a new society. Painter Robert Rauschenberg recalled that as a young painter in the middle 1950s trying to make his way in the wake of the abstract expressionists "the kind of talk you heard then [mid-fifties] in the art world was so hard to take. It was all about suffering and self-expression and the State of Things. I just wasn’t interested in that, and I certainly didn’t have any interest in trying to improve the world through painting." Cage maintained that art should be a simple "affirmation of life." Art should not, he wrote, "attempt to bring order out of chaos nor...suggest improvements in creation, but simply...wake us up to the very life we’re living, which is so excellent once one gets one’s mind and one’s desires out of the way and lets it act of its own accord."

Composer La Monte Young described his pieces as "theatrical,...inclusive, and intentionally purposeless."25

Looking not to the future, these avant gardists asked their readers or viewers to be participants and to learn how to pay attention to their own senses and to their observations of the world around them. These cultural radicals emphasized the possibilities for epiphany in the creative act and the present moment. In 1958, composer Christian Wolff described his music as follows:

It goes in no particular direction. There is no necessary concern with time as a measure of distance from a point in the past to a point in the future, with linear continuity alone. It
is not a matter of getting anywhere, of making progress, or of having come from anywhere in particular. There is neither nostalgia nor anticipation.

Poet Stuart Perkoff proclaimed his belief in the creative process and his commitment to a life for art on the night he spent on the beach at Venice, California, and wrote poems he dedicated to the muse of poetry and promptly burned in a driftwood fire. The idea of integrating art and life became less a definition of what human life should be and increasingly only a moment of epiphany. A larger audience learned of these ideas from Jack Kerouac, whose peripatetic characters in *On the Road* found liberation and meaning in special moments, whether on lengthy, usually spur-of-the-moment, auto trips; in long, intimate conversation; or in the ecstatic climaxes of jazz music.  

The aesthetic of the present also heightened both the sense of alienation and community among cultural radicals. For many avant gardists the art of now gave them an ideology counter to the future-oriented careerism of postwar America. For example, the members of the Venice, California, vanguard community dedicated their lives to art. They created for their own community and worked at odd jobs only long enough to earn the minimum needed to support themselves. For the most part they did not seek notoriety beyond their community. They understood the life of voluntary poverty and artistic obscurity they pursued as a way to rebel against the bourgeois ambition and careerism that their parents (and society) had tried to instill in them. The Venice bohemians appeared to have been
aware of the irony that the members of the Venice vanguard pursued their anti-materialist dream in a place (Southern California) that to most Americans represented the ideal of material abundance and the cutting edge of the future.27

The model of artist as shaman was especially appropriate. The shaman worked his magic for a community. His work was not preserved as a collector’s commodity or a museum exhibit. Thus, Cage suggested painters and poets turn from permanent pigments and bindings and look to performance models of dance, music, or Indian sand painting, activities that could not be historicized as part of the evolution of an art form. Cage’s own work tended toward pieces that encouraged sensory awareness or meditation, rather than aesthetic pleasures. Work that is, more in the tradition of ritual and spirituality. The shaman served as the model individual. All of these artists believed that anyone could assume the role of shaman by liberating the creative energy within him or herself. They called on individuals to integrate art and life now and be exemplars for others. They did not look to a future utopia.28

All three of the themes of self-contained work, present epiphany over the future, and performance for a coterie, are illustrated by the new avant-garde art forms that emerged in the late fifties: the environments and Happenings developed by artists John Cage, Allan Kaprow, James Dine, Claes Oldenberg, Robert Whitman, and others. Environments were ordinary spaces (usually in a gallery) transformed by the artifice of the artist into a new surrounding that engulfed
the viewer in the art. Happenings combined environments with "movement and activity" (as Kaprow put it) of a quasi-theatrical nature. In both art forms, the experience of participation was more important than the objects assembled. As temporary installations that existed in improvisatory performance, there was nothing to go into a museum along with other objects for contemplation.29

The happening was developed independently by both John Cage and Allan Kaprow. The first happening is generally considered to be an event staged by Cage and others at Black Mountain College in 1952. In a college dining room in which were displayed paintings by Robert Rauschenberg and Franz Kline, Cage stood reading on one ladder, poet Charles Olson read another text from another ladder, Rauschenberg played scratched phonograph records, David Tudor played the piano and the radio, while Merce Cunningham danced among them all.30

According to Kaprow, the idea for environments and happenings derived from his experience of viewing a 1950 show of paintings by Jackson Pollock. Kaprow recalled how the paintings covered all the windowless walls of the Betty Parson's Gallery, creating "an overwhelming environment,...drenching and assaulting the visitor in waves of attacking and retreating pulsations." Thus, for Kaprow at least, Pollock was less successful in communicating psychological and mythical themes of the heroic quest and the struggle to create meaning and more successful at creating a completely self-referential environment. Indeed, Kaprow described Happenings by saying, "They appear to go nowhere and do not make any particular literary point."
A couple of examples of happenings illustrate Kaprow's point. George Brecht designed a happening called "Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)" (dedicated to John Cage) that involved any number of motor vehicles arranged in a field in which performers would, at sundown, follow instructions to honk the horn, turn on the lights, or operate special equipment on their vehicle such as sirens or ladders. La Monte Young's "Composition 1960 # 3" required the performer to ask everyone present to do whatever he or she wished for the period of the composition. In all these works, the present moment of participation/performance was what mattered. That moment might transform one's way of perceiving, but the artist did not provide a larger frame of reference in which to place that transformation, nor a very clear goal for the transformation.31

To Kaprow, the transitory improvisations that were Happenings created the ultimate defense against historicism. Kaprow noted that "nearly every artist, working in any medium from words to paint, who has made his mark as an innovator, as a radical in the best sense of that word, has, once he had been recognized and paid handsomely, capitulated to the interests of good taste, or has been wounded by them." But Happenings preserved the artist from the pitfalls of success. The events could not be reproduced, and the materials used to create the environment were "perishable" items such as "newspapers, junk, rags, old wooden crates knocked together, cardboard cartons..., food, borrowed machines, etc." Happenings could not "be sold and taken home; they can only be supported."
Thus, Kaprow concluded, the artist "embodies the myth of Non-Success, and "remains isolated and proud."32

CONCLUSION

In the postwar years, therefore, members of the avant-garde became split over their views of the future. The division was based on a turn from society to psychology. Having rejected the Marxist social critique, cultural radicals turned to emotional and spiritual interpretations of the human predicament. The concern for society felt by many avant-gardists became obscured by their focus on individual subjective states. Thus, while one segment of the new American vanguard tried to describe a redeemed future in terms of myth, another focused on the here-and-now appreciation of the sublime moment. The two stances toward the future often produced only subtle differences in emphasis, typically a heightened awareness of historic avant-garde themes about the integration of art and life. But subtle or not, the change would have a profound effect on the relations between cultural radicals and their society.

By the late 1960s, probably a majority of innovative intellectuals believed that the present was more important than the future. Painter Frank Stella declared that "My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen there is there. It really is an object.... All I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all I ever get out of them, is the fact that you can see the whole idea without any confusion.... What you see is what you see." The title
of one of writer Marvin Cohen's short pieces expressed the doubt of many intellectuals from the 1960s forward that questions about the future, culture, and meaning are even possible: "What Is the Real, Really? What Does It Mean? Or Do We Only Think It? Is There a Real? But What Is 'Is'? And What Does It Mean?" In 1963 pop artist Robert Indiana expressed his belief that art could do little to transform the world:

"Pop does tend to convey the artist's superb intuition that modern man, with his loss of identity, submersion in mass culture, beset by mass destruction, is man's greatest problem, and that Art, Pop or otherwise, hardly provides the solution--some optimistic, glowing harmonious, humanitarian, plastically perfect Lost Chord of Life."33

Not only did innovative intellectuals abandon the historic avant-garde concern for the future of culture, they also rejected the goal of integrated art and life. In 1963 painter Jim Dine declared that he did not believe in the concept. Dine's use of common objects in his work did not mean, he said, that he was making a statement about art and life. "There's art and there's life," Dine maintained, "I think life comes to art but if the object is used, then people say the object is used to bridge that gap [between art and life]—it's crazy. The object is used to make art, just like paint is used to make art."34

By the 1960s, members of what had been the avant garde were repudiating much of the historic avant garde ideology. This change in thought helped to make possible the disappearance of the avant garde through integration into capitalist consumer culture.
Notes to Chapter V


Frederick Kiesler, Hans Richter (New York: Art of This Century, 1946), n. p., Guggenheim Papers.


34. Jim Dine, quoted in ibid., p. 63.
CHAPTER VI
THE END OF THE AVANT GARDE:
THE COLD WAR, CULTURAL RADICALISM, AND
THE DEFENSE OF CAPITALISM, 1950–1965

INTRODUCTION

The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union contributed to the integration of the avant garde into mainstream American culture. From the beginning, political leaders defined the struggle between these two great powers as a war between cultures. The conflict between the "American way of life" and Soviet society was clearly seen in the so-called "kitchen debate" between Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. In the kitchen of a model house at the 1959 United States National Exhibition in Moscow, the two leaders debated the merits of washing machines versus tanks. Of course in the United States, companies like Westinghouse produced both consumer goods and military hardware and the Presidents of Procter and Gamble and General Motors both served as secretaries of war during the Cold War. In the United States, the consumer culture and the militarized society were always closely linked.¹
Cultural Cold Warriors appropriated the avant garde as a weapon in the war of ideas between the United States and the Soviet Union. To these Cold Warriors, avantgarde innovations demonstrated the freedom and superiority of Western democratic culture. As other Americans began to interpret the vanguard in this way also, the movement became domesticated as a demonstration of how basically good American society was. This outcome was ironic, because the politics of the Cold War alienated members of the avant garde. The cultural vanguard, as will be discussed in this chapter, interpreted the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union as both a threat to vanguard values and a betrayal of American ideals. But avant gardists also contributed to their integration because their self-understanding paralleled many of the cultural themes advocated by Cold Warriors.

THE AVANT GARDE AND THE POLITICS OF THE COLD WAR

To radical critics, the Cold War meant militarism and an attack on dissent. Little magazine editor Horace Schwartz described the political situation as a "nightmare" as Americans engaged in an irresponsible "orgiastic carnival of denying reality and embracing falsehood." If Thomas Jefferson were alive, Schwartz continued, he would "cut his throat for shame." To writer Leslie Woolf Hedley "the air [was] charged with the stiff and sterile military mindlessness." From the perspective of the cultural vanguard the political and social consequences of the Cold War were just one more example of a
conformist society that lived a lie at the expense of authentic human existence. These radical critics, therefore, repudiated both Senator McCarthy, and his allies, and the liberal architects of the Cold War. Vanguardists believed that they saw an American fascism evolving. They also rejected the Marxist solution that had energized cultural radicals in the 1930s. The new avant garde returned to earlier vanguard themes, advocating a kind of aesthetic anarchism as the solution to American, and indeed world, problems.²

In the opinion of radical intellectuals, the conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States was not about ideology but power, and specifically political and economic power. Militarism and materialism, they argued, were part of the same formula to divert people's attention from what they really needed and from what was really going on. Poet Gary Snyder believed he described both East and West when he said, "The national politics of the modern world exist by nothing but deliberately fostered craving and fear—the roots...of human suffering." Bull Lee, a character in Jack Kerouac's On the Road, patterned after Kerouac's friend author William Burroughs, commented that "They can make clothes that last forever. They prefer making cheap goods so's everybody'll have to go on working and punching timeclocks and organizing themselves in sullen unions and floundering around while the big grab goes on in Washington and Moscow."³
In the 1950s, cultural vanguardists feared that in the fight against communism, the United States would become totalitarian. Critic Lawrence Barth, writing in Trace, pointed to a rash of book censorship in the early fifties and commented, "Just like that do we go down the road of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany." While he acknowledged that the United States had a long way yet to go on the "sliding scale of repression," Barth stated confidently that "America is rapidly becoming fascist." He compared the United States with the Soviet Union and saw ominous similarities:

Today the Soviet government's snooping, denouncing and jailing, its horrible automaton-manufacturing school system and vast emphasis on militarism and building weapons are in essence matched by the psychotic building of murder machinery here, by our congressional thought-control committees, our intense atmosphere of prying and name-wrecking. People in omnibuses and parks no longer speak aloud about anything that could be construed as "controversial," in what our ancestors once proudly called "the land of the free."

The editors of Inferno expressed similar fears in advertisements for their little magazine: "Inferno publishes the works of the last free poets of the American dark age." William Burroughs used black humor to address these anxieties about the future of freedom in his novel, Naked Lunch, a work described by avant garde poet John Clellon Holmes as a retelling of Orwell's 1984 by W. C. Fields. Gary Snyder suggested sarcastically that Allen Ginsberg conclude his poem "America" with a question:

America, what are you going to do to me for writing about you like this?
are you going to snoop after me and let the air out of my tires[?]
The next year, Ginsberg's book, *Howl and Other Poems*, which included "America," would be censored as obscene. Members of the avant garde experienced American society in the post-war years as stiflingly conformist. The international tensions of the Cold War served only to heighten the concerns of avant gardists for individual expression and freedom of thought.\(^4\)

Most members of the avant garde were so alienated by what they considered to be the extremes of the Cold War and the conformity present in the the society around them that they rejected the mainstream political options before them. The members of the avant garde also generally rejected the radical alternative chosen by their predecessors: Marxism. Poet Oscar Collier, in a letter to writer and editor Judson C. Crews, expressed the opinion of many avant gardists: "I am not in sympathy, but am actively against any contemporary political movements. I am especially against Communism, Marxism, and scientific socialist movements of any kind." Some kind of anarchism was the political and social view adhered to by most members of the cultural vanguard.\(^5\)

As we have seen, members of the vanguard felt deeply alienated from the "Eisenhower blandness." But the political alienation of cultural radicals went deeper than a rejection of the Republican Party. The liberalism of the decade seemed to most avant gardists to be at best a tepid solution to the serious problems in American society. Critic Lawrence Barth wrote in *Miscellaneous Man* that "generalized liberal exhortation solves very little so long as the
human animal remains sexually sick at his core, irresponsible, inert." Barth argued that the political process was not the path to a more authentic existence. Barth believed, rather, that people needed to look at human beings at a more basic, biological state. By replacing culturally defined needs and roles with needs that reflected human biology, especially needs for sexual expression, human beings could begin to shape a culture suited for human development. At its worst, liberalism was part of the very problem. William Burroughs advocated a radical libertarianism. From Burroughs's perspective, liberalism was oppressive. As Burroughs wrote to Kerouac:

You notice that any oppressive, meddling piece of legislation (anti-gun, anti-sex...) is always loudly supported by the "Liberal" press? The word Liberal has come to stand for the most damnable tyranny, a sniveling, mealy mouthed tyranny of bureaucrats, social workers, psychiatrists and union officials. The world of 1984 is not 30 years away.

Kerouac presented these ideas in his novel, *On the Road*, both through the Burroughs-inspired character, Bull Lee, and through the free wheeling approach to law and social expectations of his characters in general. To Sal Paradise, Dean Moriarty, and other characters in the novel, as to Kerouac himself, liberalism was just another side of the Eisenhower conformity, or, as Kerouac's younger readers, the cultural radicals of another decade, would learn to say, liberalism was part of the problem, not part of the solution.6
THE COLD WAR AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION

Many Americans in the postwar years believed that the avant garde was un-American and, thus, hardly a useful tool in the fight against Communism. Michigan Congressman George A. Dondero, for example, believed that the Russian Communist party invented the avant garde to help them overthrow the Czar. He also believed that in the 1950s the leaders of the Soviet Union used cultural radicalism to undermine the West. During the 1950s, such attacks moved former MOMA director Alfred H. Barr to defend vanguard painting and sculpture and critic Gilbert Highet to defend innovative literature against charges of being Communist-inspired.7

The United States government, through a variety of agencies, supported cultural activities intended to demonstrate the freedom of Western countries in general and American society in particular. Thus in the 1950s and 1960s the C.I.A. funded the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the publication of Horizon to highlight the best in Western thought and culture, including many first and second generation vanguardists. During the 1960s, the Voice of America broadcast jazz to foster good feelings about America abroad. From the late forties to the mid-fifties, the State Department and the United States Information Agency (USIA) sponsored several international exhibitions of American painting that featured a range of styles, including representatives of the various vanguard movements from the teens to the 1950s.8
In 1956 the government discontinued international exhibitions of post-1917 American painting. The suspension resulted from protests raised in Dallas, Texas about Communist-inspired art. In Dallas at that time, a coalition of anti-Communist and academic art organizations alleged that Communist artists painted several works in a USIA-sponsored exhibition called "Sport in Art." (The exhibit was shown in Dallas as part of a national tour before going to the Summer Olympics in Australia.) After the United States government discontinued sponsorship of exhibitions of contemporary work, curators at the Museum of Modern Art decided to take the government's place in such sponsorship.9

Cultural Cold Warriors integrated the avant garde into mainstream society by linking lifestyle choices and personal freedom. Critic and social commentator Joseph Wood Krutch explicitly linked lifestyle, consumption, and freedom in an essay published in House Beautiful in 1951. Krutch characterized the Cold War as a contest between organic and mechanistic world views. Totalitarians, said Krutch, described people as machines—manipulable and devoid of feeling. Those who believed in freedom, however, looked for their models in the natural world where, Krutch maintained, "every individual leads its own individual, unique, and rebellious life." This war of ideas was fought militarily and politically. But, Krutch contended, there were some "simple, direct" actions by which people could choose up sides and contribute to the struggle "against the forces which are conspiring to rob us of our humanity." Krutch argued that the choices in taste and fashion were weapons in the
war: "The houses we live in, the very decoration of our walls, proclaim where our own sympathies lie and subtly influence our own convictions." In the choice of fabrics for clothing and upholstery, in landscaping, in house design, in the choice of objects on the mantelpiece, Krutch declared, people could express their individuality and freedom. He denounced the dictates of official fashion for "subtly, if not consciously, attempting to deny that we are organisms rather machines" and advocated the use of natural materials and a return to the humanistic and naturalistic heritage of the renaissance. While Krutch was implicitly anti-avant garde in his tastes, his description of the individual owes less to the world of nature than to Romantic notions from which avant gardism developed. Avant-garde art would come to be promoted by Cold Warriors precisely because they saw in the work the expression of the "unique and rebellious life" that distinguished the "free world" from the Communist world.10

Advocates of cultural diplomacy argued that the arts, especially innovative arts, could enhance the American, and Western, cause in the Cold War by, first, demonstrating both the freedom of the West to Communists behind the Iron Curtain and around the world, and, second, by demonstrating the maturity of American culture to suspicious Western European allies. Columbia University philosopher Irwin Edwards, in a speech to art educators in 1951 declared that "the greatest triumphs of freedom, those of the spirit, which occur in art, are victories of disciplined knowledge, hallelujahs of ordered spontaneity." Rene d'Harnoncourt of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA)
celebrated the intellectual forces of the 18th and 19th centuries that had "freed [human beings] from the restrictions of dogma," and resulted in, among other things, modern art. "The totalitarian state negates the very achievements that have made modern civilization possible," d'Harnoncourt declared. Totalitarianism was not the direction for human social evolution, he said. Rather, human beings needed, he concluded,

an order which reconciles the freedom of the individual with the welfare of society and replaces yesterday's image of one unified civilization... [with] a pattern in which many elements...join to form a new entity.... I believe a good name for such a society is democracy, and I also believe that modern art in its infinite variety and ceaseless exploration is its foremost symbol.

Art critic Aline B. Iouchheim argued that "one of the ways in which we might gradually turn reluctant and uneasy military allies into friends would be to earn their respect for our contemporary culture." To do so, she maintained, required Americans to no longer be "antagonistic" to "our own most advanced, imaginative and best achievements in modern art and modern architecture." 11

Under the leadership of MOMA Board of Trustees President Nelson Rockefeller, the international exhibitions organized by the MOMA especially highlighted the work of the abstract expressionists. These painters became weapons in the Cold War of ideas. Their themes of alienation and cultural renewal were de-emphasized by MOMA curators who presented the works as representative of the freedom of the non-Communist world. The Cultural Cold War carried on by the MOMA was an unofficial continuation of previous government programs. The key figures at the Museum of Modern Art learned cultural diplomacy at the Department of State. Rockefeller's interest in
cultural diplomacy dated from his service in the State Department in
the 1940s. One of his duties in the government had been to organize
cultural programs, including several international exhibitions
sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art. At the State Department,
Rockefeller met two men who would also play key roles in the
development of cultural programs at the museum. One was
d’Harnoncourt, who came to the MOMA in 1944 to organize foreign
activities and became director of the Museum in 1949. The other was
Porter A. McCray, who directed international programing at the museum
in the 1950s.12

The cultural cold warriors at the Museum of Modern Art did not
interpret the unconventional values of the avant garde as dangerous
to the conventions of the American social and political system.
Thus, they could safely send them abroad as examples of the
sophistication of American high culture. Among the shows organized
by the MOMA in their cultural Cold War were "Modern Art in the US"
(1956), which featured a dozen abstract expressionists, and "The New
American Painting"(1958), devoted exclusively to abstract
expressionism. The curators at the MOMA presented these American
avant gardists as examples of the freedom of expression and dissent
allowed in America, as Alfred H. Barr made clear in his catalog
introduction for the exhibit, "New American Painting":

They defiantly reject the conventional values of the society
which surrounds them, but they are not political engages even
though their paintings have been praised and condemned as
symbolic demonstrations of freedom in a world in which freedom
connotes a political attitude.13
Given that members of the new American vanguard felt alienated from the technocratic consumer culture and the politics of the Cold War, these artists were not the best champions of the American cause. Two factors enabled the abstract expressionists to be so used, however. One factor was that the critics who mediated the abstract expressionist vanguard to the curators at the MOMA misrepresented the artists' ideas through selective interpretations. Critic Harold Rosenberg presented an existentialist interpretation of "action painting" that emphasized the idea of creative freedom and obscured the cultural, historical, psychological, and spiritual themes of the artists. Critic Clement Greenberg presented a formalist interpretation of abstract expressionism that emphasized the place of the painters in art history and the recentering of the international art world from Paris to New York and highlighted surface innovations only, ignoring the cultural politics of the avant garde.¹⁴

The members of the avant garde themselves contributed, secondly, to their own appropriation. Many vanguardists spoke of creative freedom in ways similar to those of the cultural Cold Warriors. Radical innovators recognized the benefits of a free society without intending to be used as propaganda in a war of words and images. Their experience of being politically exploited in the thirties caused them to reject overtly political uses for art and culture. In 1948 Leslie Fiedler declared that "the absolute claim to freedom in the creative act, in going on writing as we understand it, challenges many political systems and is challenged by them, most spectacularly
these days by the Soviet communist world-view.... This is our sufficient task as writers." A little magazine editor justified artistic innovation in Trace in 1953 by saying, "If art in all of its forms is to remain free...it must be left to change and show all possible facets. We have seen what can happen when conformity is exacted in Communist Russia, and what then happens to the artist. Totalitarianism in art is quite as objectionable as political totalitarianism." Cultural radicals emphasized the need to oppose restrictions on artistic freedom wherever they found them. They were willing to criticize both the Soviet Union and the United States. Their intent was never to hold up the "American way of life" as idyllic.15

CONCLUSION

All of the individuals discussed above believed that culture was at the heart of the divisions of the postwar world. Joseph Wood Krutch, Nelson Rockefeller, and Leslie Fiedler all believed that beneath and beyond the political and economic divisions between the Soviet Union and the United States lay basic questions about how the individual and society relate, about freedom and creativity, about what being human meant. But while Krutch, Rockefeller, and others like them believed that these questions had been largely answered by the extant social arrangements of postwar American society, avant gardists like Fielder felt differently. Radical innovators believed that while American culture may have raised many of the right questions, they were far from being satisfactorily answered.
Alienated from the culture of the cold war, the avant gardist's cultural politics intersected at key points with the ideals of cold war liberals. This connection was especially true for the idea of creative freedom. The intersection allowed representatives of culturally powerful institutions to appropriate the avant garde for purposes other than those intended by cultural radicals. The result was to integrate the avant garde as one of many style options in free, pluralistic American society.
Notes to Chapter VI


Not all members of the avant garde were so critical of liberalism or the Democratic party. Elaine de Kooning related in a letter to painter William T. Brown that members of the abstract expressionist 8th Street Club were active in the Adlai Stevenson campaign in 1952: "We are all excited about Stevenson," she wrote. "Bill's [painter William de Kooning] wearing a pin. Tom's [critic Thomas Hess] writing pamphlets. My lawyer...is writing speeches for the campaign and wants me to do likewise[,] which I probably will[,] or something similar[,] and the club is taking up a collection for this most wonderful and unlikeliest of politicians[,] and for the first time in American history I am going to exercise my vote." Elaine de Kooning to William T. Brown, [1952], William T. Brown Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, hereafter cited as Brown Papers.


13. Cockcroft, ibid.; Alfred H. Barr, quoted p. 41. The Ford
Foundation also participated in the cultural cold war of the 1950s
and 1960s by funding a journal of international modernism edited by
James Laughlin of New Directions Press, art exhibitions, and the
Congress for Cultural Freedom. See Kathleen McCarthy, "From Cold War
to Cultural Development: The International Cultural Activities of

14. James D. Herbert, "The Political Origins of Abstract-
Clement Greenberg, "Introduction," Ten Years (New York: Betty
Parsons Gallery, [1955]), n. p., Betty Parsons Gallery Papers,
Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Ironically,
reactionary critics like Dondero seem to have understood more fully,
if not very clearly, the fundamental challenge posed by cultural
radicals to American culture; see Mathews, "Art and Politics in Cold
War America," pp. 782-784.

15. See also Walter Gropius, "The Necessity of the Artist in a
These concerns pre-date the Cold War, of course; see Robert
Motherwell "The Modern Painter's World," originally published in Dyn
in 1944 and reprinted in Barbara Rose, ed., Readings in American
Art: 1900-1975 (New York: Praeger, 1975), p. 105; and Samuel M.
Kootz, New Frontiers in American Painting (New York: Architectural
CHAPTER VII
THE END OF THE AVANT GARDE:
INTEGRATION INTO THE INSTITUTIONS OF CULTURE, 1955-1965

INTRODUCTION

The avant garde came to an end in the middle decades of the twentieth century not just because the movement became integrated into the cold war. The movement also gained a place in cultural institutions to which members of the van had historically been alienated. The curators of museums and operators of galleries placed the avant garde in a progressive interpretation of art history. By thus historicizing the movement, the art world gave the avant garde a pedigree, as it were, and legitimated innovative art for wealthy collectors and institutions. The avant garde also became integrated into educational institutions. As a result of these transformations, the status of radical innovators changed from alienated outsiders to cultural insiders, a position inconsistent with historic advance-garde self-understanding.¹
THE ALIENATION OF THE AVANT GARDE FROM INSTITUTIONS OF CULTURE

Members of the avant garde felt alienated from the cultural institutions of a society that, from their point of view, did not value intellectual and aesthetic innovation. Vanguardists used words such as "provincial," "conservative," and "academic" to describe postwar American culture. These commentators expressed standard avant-garde critiques of the salons, academies, and journals of the genteel tradition, all of which for generations promoted an established aesthetic and resisted change. The Salon des indépendants, the Armory Show: these and other acts of resistance to the institutions of culture carried out by advanced artists are part of the "mythology" of the avant garde. In the first decades of the twentieth century the word "provincial" resonated for American avant gardists as an expression of the American artist's frustration at his or her geographical removal from the centers of European resistance to genteel culture. American advocates of the genteel tradition formed a "conservative" opposition to vanguard innovation. In the years after the Second World War, the emphasis shifted. The "academy" took on more importance as American universities became increasingly central to the intellectual, artistic, and economic life of the nation as well as intellectuals.2

Many advanced artists and writers expressed their discontent with postwar American culture. Kenneth Rexroth believed that culture in the United States had become pedestrian and provincial. He argued
that American poets had "abandoned the international idiom of twentieth century verse." In America, he contended, the Revolution of the Word had been lost as artists either "sold out" or sank into obscurity. "Why," he asked, "did American poetry, a part of world literature in 1920, become a pale provincial imitation of British verse in 1957? We are back two generations behind Australia."

Gallery owner Samuel M. Kootz also condemned the provincial nationalism that he thought characterized the criticism written about his client artists. In defense of abstract expressionist painter William Baziotes, for example, Kootz attacked critics who believed "that nationalism is more comfortable than internationalism, and that 'subject matter' is more important than plastic values." He accused the critics of having "made no attempt to understand [Baziotes's works]." Why did this situation obtain? Because, Kootz declared, "the artist heralds his own time while the critic remains in the status quo."3

Avant-garde composer Harry Partch believed that the conservative musical culture in America reflected a pervasive "sciolist and academic Europeanisme" that discouraged innovation. Partch rejected a musical system based, as he argued, on the "inherited forms and instruments of Europe's eighteenth century." A "healthy culture" encouraged diverse musical theories, Partch believed. Unfortunately, in the mid-twentieth century, he wrote,

anyone who even toys with the idea of going beyond...[the] legacies [of the past] for materials and insight is generally considered foolhardy if not actually a publicity-seeking mountebank. The door to further musical investigation and insight has been slammed shut by the inelastic and doctrinaire quality of our one system and its esthetic forms.
Cultural radicals believed that the constricting conformism and narrow nationalism that for them characterized postwar American society also pervaded the arts. Valuing individuality and creative freedom as they did, members of the avant garde necessarily felt alienated from the mainstream cultural life of their society.\(^4\)

**THE INTEGRATION OF THE AVANT GARDE INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES**

It was ironic, then, that the avant garde became integrated into the mainstream of American culture during the postwar decades. It was especially ironic that museums and galleries became the means of integrating avant garde painting and sculpture into American cultural institutions in the years after World War II. The social integration of the avant garde occurred in the context of an "art boom" fueled by the postwar prosperity. As prices for old masters, impressionists, and early modernist works rose rapidly, less wealthy collectors, including both individuals and institutions, turned to the work of contemporary artists. Because of their low prices, these new artists also appealed to middle-class Americans who wanted to collect original art on a low budget. Because contemporary avant garde work was so new and lacked the history of interpretation and sales that defined the old master market, collectors looked to a small number of museums, galleries, and critics for guidance about which artists were worth purchasing. The art boom, therefore, greatly increased the power of cultural gatekeepers.\(^5\)
The Museum of Modern Art was the most important avant-garde gatekeeper from the 1930s to the 1960s. The museum staff, especially director Alfred H. Barr, had been so successful in defining a style they called "modernism" that the museum began to be priced out of the market for the work of established artists such as Picasso and Matisse. The painters of the new American vanguard presented a way out of this difficulty. 6

In the 1930s, many American artists criticized the MOMA for not exhibiting enough American artists. Barr answered these charges by saying that contemporary American art was not as interesting or innovative as European. The situation changed in the postwar years. In the early fifties, Barr, and other curators, hailed abstract expressionism as the new vanguard art. The 1952 MOMA show "Fifteen Americans" featured works by Pollock, Rothko, and Still, and the museum began to purchase paintings by these artists. By admitting these American innovators into the stream of artistic development defined by historic avant gardists such as Picasso, Braque, Duchamp, Matisse, and Miro, the MOMA defined a place in art history for the American vanguard. For example, Barr described Kandinsky as "the first abstract expressionist." An exhibition checklist from 1969 put the matter more explicitly:

Since 1945 America has been the scene of a succession of artists of world importance and prominence. The role of rescuing American art from its heretofore provincial situation and placing it at the center of the modern tradition fell to the generation of artists shown in this exhibition.
Barr, and other curators at the Museum of Modern Art, contributed fundamentally to the conception of "modernism" as a style period. Collectors looked to the museum for guidance, both formal and informal, about what works to purchase. By legitimating abstract expressionism as part of the evolution of Western art, the museum created a demand for contemporary American art.7

Galleries also functioned to historicize the American avant garde and thus integrate the movement into American society. Samuel Kootz, for example, opened his gallery in 1945, following a successful career in advertising. Kootz financed shows by contemporary Americans such as Motherwell and Baziotes by selling works by established painters, chiefly Picasso. Kootz legitimated his vanguard artists for collectors by choosing his artists carefully and presenting them as the heirs of the historic avant garde.8

Critics, and in particular Clement Greenberg, also integrated the American vanguard into art history. In his influential criticism published in the Partisan Review and the Nation in the forties and fifties, Greenberg formulated a formalist, Hegelian understanding of art history based on the evolution of art to increasingly purer form. After Jackson Pollock's death, Greenberg, an early champion of Pollock, promoted two Washington, D. C., artists, Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis, as Pollock's successors. Greenberg organized exhibitions of Louis's and Noland's work and wrote critical articles about them. As a result, their work began to sell to museums and private collectors for increasing prices. The 1964 exhibit
"Post-Painterly Abstraction" that Greenberg organized for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art defined a whole period of art and advanced the careers of Noland, Louis, and artists such as Ellsworth Kelley and Helen Frankenthaler.9

As a result of the increased demand for contemporary innovative work, the institutional and economic situation for artists changed. At the most basic level, prices went up. In 1950, Jackson Pollock sold paintings for about $1200. In 1955, a year before his death, he could sell works for $3,000. Ten years later, the artist's paintings sold for $35,000 and the prices continued to rise. By comparison, Jasper Johns, an artist from the generation after Pollock, sold pieces from his first show in 1958 for $1200. In 1963, Johns sold works for $15,000 and by the end of the decade for amounts twice that figure. Similar examples could be adduced for the work of other avant gardists. Successful innovators no longer needed to be economically alienated from their society.10

The rising prices of avant-garde art in the 1950s transformed the institutional setting in which members of the vanguard worked. In New York City in the 1940s fewer than twenty galleries showed avant garde art, mostly European and mostly as one of many styles. Fewer than half a dozen galleries exhibited American vanguard work. By the 1970s almost three hundred New York galleries promoted contemporary innovative art. And promote they did. In the pluralistic art world of the late 1960s and following, gallery operators found that "discovering" a new movement was the best way to distinguish their
gallery from the competition. "Dealer generated" movements proliferated, further contributing to the commercialization, lack of direction, and domestication of the avant garde. These changes appalled many vanguardists. Painter Robert Motherwell recalled how in the late fifties he became "increasingly annoyed at how art [was] becoming more and more like the couturier business. I mean instant fashion, instant exploitation, instant everything." When Peggy Guggenheim, who had run an important surrealist gallery New York City in the mid-forties, returned to the city in 1958 after a dozen years in Europe she was dismayed to find that "the entire art market had become an enormous business venture. Only a few persons really care for paintings. The rest buy them from snobbishness or to avoid taxation."11

By the 1960s, the avant garde was "in," whatever the feelings of alienation individual members may have experienced. The career of collector Robert Scull illustrated the new situation. A cab driver from the lower east side of Manhattan in the 1940s, by the end of the fifties, Scull owned a fleet of cabs and was a millionaire. Having educated himself about the avant garde through evenings spent at the Museum of Modern Art, he began collecting post-abstract expressionist vanguard art. Critics credited him with being one of the collectors who made pop art into a movement. After purchasing Jasper Johns's ale cans sculpture, Painted Bronze, Scull began receiving invitations to society parties. A long time member of the MOMA, Scull and his wife discovered that they could not break into the inner circle,
dominated as it was by old money and less receptive to self-made men like Scull. He transferred his allegiance to the more "egalitarian" Whitney Museum of American Art. What was an avant gardist to do in such a situation, asked Frank O'Hara, a vanguard poet and a MOMA curator, in 1961. "Youth wants to burn the museums. We are in them—now what? Better destroy the odors of the zoo." If one could no longer épater les bourgeois, O'Hara saw only one option: "Embrace the Bourgeoisie.... How [else] are we going to fill the large empty canvass at the end of the large empty loft? You do have a loft, don't you man?"  

THE INTEGRATION OF THE AVANT GARDE INTO THE UNIVERSITIES

In the introduction to his *Genesis of a Music*, composer Harry Partch complained that "the door to further musical investigation and insight has been slammed shut by the inelastic and doctrinaire quality of our one system and its esthetic forms." Many people considered the composer who attempted fundamental innovation to be "a publicity-seeking mountebank," Partch declared. And yet, other parts of the book demonstrated that what Partch wrote was not entirely true. Partch's innovation received sponsorship and encouragement from some very important cultural institutions: American universities. Partch completed the book while a research fellow at the University of Wisconsin, and the work was subsequently published by the university press. (In later years Partch also received research appointments from the Universities of Illinois and
California.) Otto Luening, director of the Columbia-Princeton Center for Electronic Music, wrote the foreword to the book, and Partch acknowledged the "moral backing" he had received "from seats of some authority in our musical educational institutions" in the persons of such composers and educators as Howard Hanson of the Eastman School of Music, Quincy Porter of Yale University, Gunnar Johansen, artist in residence at the University of Wisconsin, and Douglas Moore of Barnard College, Columbia University. Thus, despite his rhetoric, Partch's cause was not completely hopeless. His message had at least been acknowledged by some of the most important institutions and individuals of his day.13

Partch's experience would prove typical of the relations between American colleges and universities and the avant garde in the postwar years. Institutions of higher education would play a key part in the integration of vanguard ideas and ideals into American culture.

"ACADEMIC" CULTURE

In the postwar years, the term that members of the avant garde increasingly used to describe American culture was "academic." The use of this term was not just the repetition of an avant-garde shibboleth, nor was it meant only as a metaphor for "conservative, provincial culture," though the term could sometimes mean any of these. Rather, the use of the term reflected the real importance of the university in American intellectual life in the middle of the twentieth century.
In the late nineteenth century, education reformers created the modern American university to validate the new bourgeois professions, particularly engineering and management. The curriculum changed from a traditional liberal arts one to emphasize science and scientific modes of thought. During the twentieth century the American university emerged as one of the central institutions in intellectual life. Statistics tell part of the story: from 1900 to 1940, the number of college professors in the United States increased eleven times. By 1950 this number would almost double again. By the middle of the twentieth century, colleges and universities were becoming the most significant employers of intellectuals. The independent "man of letters," who had been the mainstay of American intellectual life since colonial times, was becoming obsolete. Many critics feared that intellectuals would lose their capacity for independent critical comment on society once they became ensconced in academia. Irving Howe described the graduate school as an agent of conformity that "grinds and batters personality into a mold of cautious routine." Writing in 1948, critic R. P. Blackmur was resigned: "The writers will be in the universities. The economic, political, and cultural drifts of our society are towards the institutionalization of all the professions."14

Cultural radicals shared these concerns but they denounced the universities in much stronger terms than any other critics. From the perspective of members of the avant garde, the academy represented all that was bad in postwar American society: conformity, false
values, and technocratic bureaucracy. Through the process of tenure, the rules for publication in academic journals, and the means of advancement in scholarly associations, critics maintained, the institution transformed generalist intellectuals into pedantic specialists. Instead of talking to their society about the great issues before them, intellectuals talked to other scholars in a language understood by only a few. Critic Michael Fraenkel wrote in *Death* that "the modern suicide hasn’t the guts to shoot himself, so he kills himself inside and carries on otherwise...[finding solutions writing] criticism, instead of poems." Poet Robert Creeley remembered that in the late 1940s "the colleges and universities were dominant in their insistence upon an idea of form extrinsic to the given instance.... [It] was this assumption of a mold, of a means that could be gained beyond the literal fact of the writing here and now that had authority."¹⁵

In 1956 writer Leslie Woolf Hedley composed a satiric academic job interview in which the candidate described his publications and in so doing lampooned the modernist canon and the journals in which most of the canonizers published:

I wrote a review praising the poetry of T. S. Eliot for *Sewanee Review*, a review praising the *Sewanee Review* for *Kenyon Review*, a review praising the very sound Americanism of Ezra Pound for *Hudson Review*, a review against independent poetry for *Poetry Chicago*, a review praising the poets of New York for the *New Yorker*...[, and] I wrote an article stating that Wystan Auden, T. S. Eliot, Stephen Spender, John Crow Ransom and Allen Tate aren’t published often enough.
Other writers also attacked the cultural conservatism and anti-avant
gardism that they saw emanating from the academy. The editors of
Yugen presented a fictitious award to academic poet W. D. Snodgrass
for "outstanding achievement in nineteenth-century English verse,"
and Robert Bly conferred "The Order of the Blue Toad" on historian
Jacques Barzun "for his middle-class hatred of art and poetry
disguised as a defence of intellect."\textsuperscript{16}

Vanguardists also charged that universities standardized
creativity. Academia brought the bureaucratic specialization of
industrial society into the creative realm with results that most
cultural radicals considered deleterious not only to intellectual
life but to life in general. Avant gardists believed that the
academy was no place for a genuinely creative artist of any kind.
Lawrence Ferlinghetti attended a reading at the Poetry Center at San
Francisco State University in 1956 and concluded that "writing
workshops, if attended assiduously, can only lead to the death of the
poet." Novelist Jack Kerouac dismissed colleges, in his 1958 novel
Dharma Bums, as "grooming schools for the middle class non-identity
which usually finds its perfect expression...in rows of well-to-do
houses with lawns and television sets...with everybody looking at the
same thing and thinking the same thing at the same time." Kenneth
Rexroth minced no words and condemned colleges and universities as
"fog factories:"

Behind their screen the universities fulfill their social
purposes. They turn out bureaucrats, perpetuate the juridical
lie, embroider the costumes of the delusion of participation, and
of late, in departments never penetrated by the humanities staff,
turn out atom, hydrogen, and cobalt bombers—genocidists is the
word.
The academy, from the avant-garde perspective, directed human creativity away from innovative and transformative goals to conventional, constrained, and destructive ones.17

THE AVANT GARDE IN THE ACADEMY

Members of the avant garde would be integrated into the academy almost in spite of themselves. The initial steps in this process would come from the educational institutions. In the 1950s and sixties, many educators believed that colleges had carried scientific rationalism too far and that to compensate, communities of higher education needed an infusion of humanistic values. Harold Taylor, President of Sarah Lawrence College, argued in 1966 in a symposium on "The University as Cultural Leader," published in Arts in Society, that the artist "should be given a major place in the college and university," and, indeed, "should have been there all along." One way colleges and universities demonstrated their renewed commitment to the arts was in the construction of multi-million dollar arts centers, including performance spaces, galleries, classrooms, and studios. For example, in the mid-1960s, a $3.3 million performing arts center was built at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and a $1.4 million center was built at the University of Illinois. By opening up universities to the humanities and the arts, administrators created opportunities for avant gardists that had not existed before.18
The Music School of the University of Illinois was a typical example of the new university arts programs. The school began to expand in the late forties, along with the rest of the university. Academic arts did not mean exclusively avant gardism, and the University of Illinois was no exception. Music history and musicology were early strengths of the department. But ambitious younger faculty and music students discovered that avant garde music, because it was new to the university, was an area where they could distinguish themselves. By the early 1960s, the Music School at Illinois gained national prominence as a center for the composition and performance of new music, especially electronic and computer music. John Cage was composer in residence at the school from 1967 to 1969, during which time he produced his multimedia happening HPSCD.19

The University of Illinois School of Music is just one example of how cultural radicalism became integrated into colleges and universities. Colleges also began to exhibit avant-garde art in their galleries. In 1948 the University of Illinois began a biennial exhibition of "Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture" that evolved into just one part of a general festival of contemporary art. Jackson Pollock exhibited several times at Bennington College between 1952 and 1958. In 1965, the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania sponsored an exhibition of Andy Warhol. During these same years, vanguard artists exhibited at the University of Minnesota; Smith College; Pennsylvania State
Colleges also began hiring innovative artists, both on a temporary basis in composer, writer, and artist in residency programs and as permanent members of burgeoning academic faculties.\textsuperscript{20}

Presented with these opportunities, many avant gardists began to reconsider their opposition to the academy and begin to see the university as a positive environment. They did so for a variety of reasons, including the money and the community. In 1960 novelist and University of Washington English instructor Robert O. Bowen wrote in the little magazine \textit{Inland} that

\begin{quote}
the university is the only place the literary artist belongs today. Aside from his salary and the bookish company, he belongs because no other recognized place exists for a learned man in America.... There are no low-rent Left Banks today; there are no cafes where old masters hand down the lore to the beginner.
\end{quote}

Universities also gave some structure to the intellectual life of a far-flung continent. Richard Kostelanetz described the "network of universities" as the "closest semblance of an 'intellectual center' America has." Furthermore, colleges and universities provided, as was discussed above, support for innovative art. Kenneth Rexroth, for example, despite his fulminations against the "fog factories," admitted that the San Francisco Poetry Center at San Francisco State College did a great deal in the 1950s and 1960s to promote innovative poetry through sponsored readings of new poems and through classes and workshops on avant-garde poetics.\textsuperscript{21}
Some cultural innovators argued that the university method of
technical specialization provided a better model for artistic
exploration than the avant garde model of *épater les bourgeois*. Composer Milton Babbitt was one such radical innovator. Babbitt worked in serial and electronic forms, taught at Princeton, and co-directed the Columbia-Princeton Center for Electronic Music. In his 1958 essay, "Who Cares if You Listen," published in *High Fidelity*, Babbitt argued that experimental contemporary music was a music "for, of, and by specialists." He compared the tremendous changes that had taken place in music since the early twentieth century to the nineteenth and twentieth century "revolutions" in mathematics and physics. Babbitt further noted that neither of these disciplines was particularly intelligible to laypeople, yet nobody denounced this condition as elitist or bad for the culture. Why not, Babbitt asked, carry the analogy further and treat experimental music as a specialized, technical activity?

And so, I dare to suggest that the composer would do himself and his music an immediate...service by total, resolute, and voluntary withdrawal from this public world to one of private performance and electronic media, with its very real possibility of complete elimination of the public and social aspects of musical composition. By so doing...the composer would be free to pursue a private life of professional achievement, as opposed to a public life of unprofessional compromise and exhibitionism.

Babbitt did not care if there was a public for new music, and neither did Richard Maxfield, who wrote in 1963,

Rather than popularizing such concerts,
warn the audience away.
Then only those who are receptive to the extraordinary will come.
And the atmosphere will be alert and open.22
The increasingly theoretical orientation of innovative art in the postwar years also made teaching more "respectable" to cultural innovators. Oliver Andrews, a sculptor and long-time member of the art faculty at the University of California, Los Angeles, acknowledged that when he began teaching in the mid-1950s teaching was "suspect" in the eyes of some artists because they believed art was about "doing" rather than "talking." With the innovations associated with conceptual art in the 1960s, however, knowledge became increasingly important for artists. The "intellectual content in art today," Andrews said, made teaching "respectable" for innovative artists. In the 1960s, art began to follow the course of music in the development of complex theory. The same occurred in literature as well, as avant garde novelists such as Thomas Pynchon, John Barthes, and William H. Gass wrote highly reflexive novels about the making of novels. As all the arts became increasingly based in philosophy, the university became the logical place for innovative activity.23

From the 1950s to the 1970s, the universities employed increasing numbers of avant gardists. In the 1920s, college teachers constituted 9% of the contributors to American little magazines. In the 1950s the figure for avant gardists at universities appeared to be about the same. Thus, four out of 44 contributors to Allen's New American Poets had held full or part-time academic employment, including Charles Olson who had been rector of the innovative Black Mountain College for several years. But when Allen reissued his
anthology twenty-years latter as *The Postmoderns*, the status of the contributors had changed. More than half of the writers, including Allen Ginsberg, John Ashberry, Robert Creeley, and William Everson, held posts as university faculty. By the 1960s, more than 40% of the contributors to little magazines would hold academic positions, and by the 1970s the number would rise to 60% and more. Clearly not all innovative artists found their way to universities, but academia had become significant as never before for the course of American avant-gardism.24

Many cultural innovators did not think twice about becoming college teachers. Oliver Andrews, is an example. Andrews graduated with a Bachelor's degree from Stanford University in 1948. He spent a year in Europe and then worked as a draftsman in Santa Barbara. Andrews decided, however, that he wanted to make his living as an artist, and he developed a strategy to achieve that goal. He decided that he would make sculptures in his off hours, have some shows, get recognition, and use this resumé to get himself a teaching job. His program proved successful. Andrews began making sculptures of wood, wire, and concrete at night. He had a show at the Santa Barbara museum, got a dealer in Los Angeles, won a prize at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art annual in 1957, and *Art in America* featured him as a rising "new talent." The sculptor then applied for jobs in New York and California: he was offered both. He accepted the job at UCLA because, as he remembered, "I had this very strong feeling that there was a real sort of shift of emphasis, a real interest and focus
of art beginning to develop on the west coast in California." For Andrews, being a college teacher and being a part of a vital cultural movement were not antithetical.25

Over time, even critics of "academic" artists accepted positions in colleges and universities. For example, in the 1960s Morton Feldman criticized Babbitt as the leader of the "academic avant-garde." In 1972 Feldman accepted the Edgard Varèse Chair of Music at the State University of New York, Buffalo. In the early 1960s, Irving Howe began teaching, first at Stanford, then at the City University of New York. Even Kenneth Rexroth succumbed to the lure of the academy and taught at the University of California, Santa Barbara, from 1968 to 1974.26

CONCLUSION

The integration of the American vanguard into what has been called the "knowledge-industrial complex" had paradoxical effects on the movement. On the one hand, the establishment of a sizable portion of the avant garde on university campuses signalled success for cultural radicals. A new culture was, after all, the goal of radical innovators. To be accepted into such traditionally conservative institutions indicated a transformation in the culture. In addition, members of the advance guard could further the goal of cultural renewal through their teaching.27
On the other hand, the academization of the avant garde suggested to many that the movement had ceased to be trail blazing and had become routinized. In 1955 a poet characterized the job of the contemporary writer to be consolidation because "there is no place else to go since there is a limit to how much play with punctuation or typographical composition is still interesting to us." Abstract expressionist painter James Ferren noted in a lecture given at the University of Florida in 1958 that, "when the participating artist is asked to speak about the avant-garde, the crucial, generative phase has obviously passed.... The period called 'consolidation' has arrived." By the late fifties, abstract expressionism was becoming a mannerism. Artists turned to other styles. As artists came to the universities in California in the 1960s they took a West coast vanguard style of assemblage and happenings called "funk" developed by such innovators as Bruce Connor and Wally Berman and created an academic style called "Funk," characterized by critic Thomas Albright as "scholasticism's form of comic relief."\textsuperscript{28}

More importantly, acceptance into the academy did not put vanguardists at the intellectual center of the university. American multiversities of the postwar years had no center. Cultural radicalism became just one more option in a pluralist system whose disparate parts had only the most tenuous of relations. If any goal linked the various parts of the university, that was the responsibility to provide students with professional training for their desired careers. Just as the reformed universities of the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries validated the new middle-class professions, vanguard educators found themselves training students for the now respectable middle-class careers of creative writing instructor or academic composer of electronic music.

As constant innovation became the accepted definition of artistic practice, the ability to "make it new" lost cultural meaning and became merely a necessary career skill. In the competitive worlds of academia, publishing, and the East and West Coast art worlds, a vision of a redeemed culture became less important than the student's ability at, as one art instructor put it, "hustling, conning, and whoring." These, of course, were the same skills of the advertiser and salesperson in a competitive culture of consumption. The main thrust of American higher education in the postwar world was to train the managers of the consumer culture. The integration of cultural radicals into the academy signalled not the triumph, but the domestication of the advance guard.29
Notes to Chapter VII

1. Throughout this work I have used the term "culture" in the broad, anthropological sense. In this chapter I must use the term in the narrower sense of artistic and intellectual activity.


24. The statistics for the 1920s are cited from Lewis Coser, Men of Ideas (New York: Free Press, 1965), p. 269. Coser also cites that 40% of contributors to little magazines in the 1950s were from universities. However, these figures are skewed in a way that is unrepresentative of the avant garde because of changes in the nature of little magazines during this time. The growth of academic quarters and other establishment reviews in the decades since the twenties, and especially in the 1940s and 1950s, has made the designation "little magazine" less precise than it was in the first decades of the century. Reviews such as The Antioch Review (1941- )


29. The "hustling, conning, and whoring" metaphor is quoted from Judith Adler, "Innovative Art and Obsolescent Artists," Social Research, 42 (1975), 375; and see passim for a discussion of the paradoxes of success for avant gardists in the academy.
INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores how the avant garde became integrated into the consumer culture. The story is a complex one, with many developments occurring at the same time. For analytical purposes, these various processes will be highlighted in turn, with cross-references to point out the interconnections. First the consumer culture will be defined as an economic and cultural phenomenon. Next, the alienation of avant gardists from the consumer culture will be described. Then, the process by which the avant garde became integrated into the consumer culture will be described. Attention will first be paid to the incorporation of the avant garde into business culture for prestige, public relations, and personnel management. Next, the media as an agency of cultural integration will be described, and the ways in which the media consumed the avant garde as lifestyle, status, celebrity, and fashion detailed.
Throughout the chapter, the way the self-understanding of cultural radicals contributed to and was transformed by the process of cultural integration will also be examined.¹

In one sense the integration of the advance guard into American society signalled a victory. The changes that took place in the postwar years in the predominant culture reflected the influence of cultural radicalism, especially in matters of style and taste, and to some extent in values.

But the integration of the avant garde also indicated a defeat. Reduced to a consumer novelty or a lifestyle choice, the idea of the avant garde lost coherence. Indeed, by the middle 1960s, the avant garde, because it was integrated into modern American pluralist consumer culture, had become so attenuated as to have lost almost all historic meaning. No avant garde existed any longer that could constitute a radical force for a new future.

THE CULTURE OF CONSUMPTION

Historians have described how members of the European aristocracy and emerging middle classes began to define themselves as consumption communities as early as the commercial revolution of the 17th century. A culture in which consumption shaped the mentality of the mass of people across social classes, however, did not begin to emerge fully until the industrial revolution of the 19th century. In the United States, the transportation and communication revolutions created the framework for a national market before the Civil War.
Branded goods developed as the mass market version of fashion, and advertising communicated the value of some brand over another to middle- and working-class consumers. In the first third of the twentieth century, the consumer culture reached maturity in the United States.²

What defines a consumer culture is not the purchase and use of goods but the constellation of values that delineate the meaning of consumption. The consumer culture contrasts with the older producer culture in the conception of the economy and the individual. Scarcity defined the economy of the producer culture; hard work, thrift, self-denial, and deferred gratification defined the internal qualities of the individual. In the consumer culture, however, abundance characterized the economy. Adherents of the new value system emphasized leisure, spending, and self-fulfillment. In an economy of abundance people were persuaded that gratification no longer need be deferred: in the consumer culture one could have everything immediately. For the other-directed denizens of the consumer culture, individual qualities such as being liked or striving to develop an attractive personality replaced the inner-directed, producer culture emphasis on having a strong, moral character.³

The consumer culture was not just a creation of twentieth century merchants and advertisers, however; intellectuals contributed to the creation of the new culture. From European Romanticism emerged not only the concept of avant gardism but also the ideology of
consumption. In particular, the romantics defined a new form of hedonism, what Colin Campbell has called "modern self-illusory hedonism." Traditional hedonism focused on the maximum enjoyment of pleasurable objects and activities, such as food, drink, music, games, or sex. Romantics also argued that the search for pleasure was intrinsically good and that the emotional experience of artistic enjoyment brought about moral renewal. The new component added by the romantics was a belief in the power of the imagination to create and fulfill desires. A line from John Keats's poetry may serve to illustrate the importance of the daydream for romantics: "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter." The daydream would become the foundation for modern hedonistic consumption as advertisers focused people's imaginative associations on goods and the idea of consumption.4

PROSPERITY, CONSUMPTION, AND THE CRISIS OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The American consumer culture reached maturity in the prosperous years that followed the Second World War. The postwar economic boom resulted from several causes. Americans accumulated personal savings from high-paying war work. Technological development created new industries in plastics and electronics. Government policy, such as support for suburban housing through low interest loans and support for aerospace and other industries needed to fight the Cold War, also contributed to economic growth. In the 1950s many Americans worked less and earned more as working hours went down and wages and
salaries went up in most occupations. The types of jobs at which people labored changed, also, as fewer Americans worked in factories and the majority found employment in clerical, sales, managerial, and other "white collar" occupations. By the end of the fifties the majority of Americans were middle class, as defined by income level; only one third of Americans were middle class in the years before the Great Depression. For many Americans, consumption symbolized having "made it" to the middle class. Millions of Americans moved from the cities to new housing developments on the urban periphery. They filled these houses with consumer items from kitchen appliances to television sets. Historian John Patrick Diggins characterized the postwar years as "proud decades" after Americans witnessed the triumph of the nation over the crises of Depression and War and the seeming fulfillment of the material promise of American life. Commentator Walter Lippmann observed, "We talk about ourselves these days as if we were a completed society, one which has no further great business to transact."5

Not all observers shared the complacency described by Lippmann. Members of the avant garde, of course, felt deeply alienated from American society, but they were not the only individuals to criticize the social implications of the postwar political economy. Non-avant-garde social critics such as William Whyte and David Riesman expressed concern about the new "managerial personality." These critics argued that the idea of the individual adhered to by Americans from the 18th century forward no longer reflected social
realities. The traditional American conception of individualism emphasized being in charge of one's economic, social, and political destiny. The farmer, the entrepreneur, the professional all depended on their own resourcefulness and hard work for success. In the postwar years, Riesman, Whyte, and others described the new, bureaucratic context in which many Americans found employment as one in which the individual was no longer the complete master of his destiny. As salaried employees, white collar workers depended on others for their livelihood. Individual qualities of personal character seemed less important in the context of carrying out of bureaucratic functions; one was encouraged to follow the rules and get along with others in the organization. The postwar prosperity meant increased opportunity for many Americans but also challenges as the meaning of individual existence became less clear.

Consumerism offered a solution to these "problems of prosperity" in the construction of a distinct image through consumption. The values marketed by the consumer culture emphasized individual self-expression and the freedom to define one's own life "style." For example, in 1952, the editors of House Beautiful announced a new era of "free taste." Joseph A. Barry described a "Second American Revolution," not a political one but a "style" revolution. The people of America, Barry declared, "are writing another Declaration of Independence—this time from the would be dictators of the American home." Rather than bow to the prescriptions of the editors of fashion and decorating magazines or distant Parisian designers,
Barry contended, Americans increasingly exercised "the courage of their tastes" by "taking over the direction of their own homes and their lives." Citing Riesman's _The Lonely Crowd_, Barry argued that the chief problem facing Americans in the early fifties was "how to be an individual in a society dependent on mass production." His answer: "like life in nature, you must give your personal expression, your taste, free play—or you will emerge like an end-product on an assembly line of canned culture." One's home should not, he said, be a "rubber stamp" of official taste, or mirror the "impersonalism" of the office environment. By choosing "free taste," Barry contended, Americans were "reclaiming their manhood" from conformist society. "They are," he declared, "today's happy warriors. They believe in one thing: free taste exercised by free men." He concluded, echoing the _Communist Manifesto_, "The truly free man cannot be beaten.... He—no you, you have a world to discover and possess, especially yourself."7

These articles and illustrations described the development of a personal style as an individual exercise in freedom. This idea of personal lifestyle derived from Romanticism and avant-garde ideas about individual self-expression, as discussed above. The political, sociological, and psychological context of these essays transformed the home into a decisive center of action in Cold War America. But behind the rhetoric of freedom there remained the coercion of consumption. The editor of _House Beautiful_, Elizabeth Gordon, encouraged the "other-directed-personality" (diagnosed by Riesman) by
her advice to readers to look for the signs of changed style not just "in your own purchases," but "in the new possessions of your friends" and "in the 53 pages [in House Beautiful] that follow." These pages included an essay by critic Joseph Wood Krutch advising readers on "How to Develop Discrimination." The editors also provided what they described as a "forecast of American taste—your taste," with seeming obliviousness to the self-fulfilling nature of such a forecast. 8

THE ALIENATION OF THE AVANT GARDE FROM THE CONSUMER CULTURE

Members of the postwar avant garde were alienated from the American consumer culture. Most vanguardists believed that materialism was the basic value of the American people and a central problem that needed to be solved if American culture were to be renewed. In 1951, avant-garde editor Horace Schwartz noted in his magazine, Good, that the cultural tradition of the United States seemed often to "consist in the pitiful phrases 'free enterprise,' and 'American Way of Life.'" This critique of commercialism was not new, for either the American avant garde, or for the avant garde in general. Consistent with the historic patter, postwar vanguardist critics argued that Americans seemed mostly interested in economic advance. Progress seemed to be defined only in material, economic terms. Furthermore, vanguardists argued, Americans based aesthetic and other moral (for aesthetic questions were moral questions to advanced intellectuals) evaluations on quantitative measures such as price or the possibilities for profit or social advancement. So
intent were Americans on economic success, wrote surrealist Parker Tyler in 1945, that their imaginations were "inflamed...with the sense of material luxury." In 1961, poet Gary Snyder declared that, "Modern America has become economically dependent on a fantastic system of stimulation of greed which cannot be fulfilled, sexual desire which can not be satiated, and hatred which has no outlet except against oneself or the persons one is supposed to love." 

As inhospitable as this context seemed to cultural radicals, little magazine editor James Boyer May argued that such an environment was fertile ground for the avant garde. May noted that the largest number of little magazines came from countries that were "hosts to conformative negativisms" while at the same time not outright dictatorships. "Thus," May continued, "their largest numbers have budded in the U.S.A., 'free' world leader with a science-guided industrial economy emphasizing material welfare." May's point supports Renato Poggioli's contention that the only authentic bourgeois art is anti-bourgeois. The conformism and material striving of America in the fifties seemed to be the perfect setting for a new vanguard.

But whether or not the materialist ethos of the United States was advantageous to avant-garde creativity, members of the postwar vanguard felt alienated from their society. Many cultural radicals, indeed, did not consider the prevalent value system to be conducive to great art. Abstract expressionist painter Clyfford Still withdrew his paintings from sale in the late forties, declaring his works "anachronistic" because
they deny so explicitly the premises on which our present scientific and commercial world is founded that they cannot perform the role of social amenities required without emasculation of their most vital content. I am merely being consistent to my principles when I withdraw them from public exploitation.

Composer Harry Partch did not have much hope for the "significant evolution of American music" given the "American genius for perverting a spark of individual imagination into a commodity for nationwide distribution." And indeed, how could one expect otherwise, when, according to Beat poet Gregory Corso, writing in 1961, the most powerful spokespeople for American values were not Franklin or Jefferson but "strange red-necked men of industry." In the decades after World War II, radical intellectuals felt completely alienated from a culture defined by the quest for profit, economic success, and social status. Furthermore, they regarded the situation as harmful to the true human spirit, stifled by materialist values.11

Members of the avant garde thought that the pursuit of material success was not only a wrong-headed goal but demeaning to the human spirit as well. Because humans were, in the vanguard view, creative, spiritual beings, too much attention to material concerns caused the spirit to atrophy. Incapable of creative expression or appreciation, the true self was destroyed. In 1945, poet Wendell Anderson described the younger generation as "already slave material for the assembly line, the yoke of a union and a job, good voters and enjoyers of their necessities...the gadgets...the luxuries of our modern world...which is around their ankles and necks like a ball and
chain." This enslavement to the material boded ill for the future of the United States. Citing his favorite authority, Allen Ginsberg wrote to his father, Louis Ginsberg, that "Whitman long ago complained that unless the material power of America were leavened by some kind of spiritual infusion we would wind up among the 'fabled damned.'" Members of the avant garde did not distinguish between militarism and materialist values. In the 1950s, most cultural radicals agreed with little magazine editor David Koven that both were linked: "The dynamics of the society lead only to war and destruction," Koven wrote in 1956. "Remember, without a war, or the threat of war, this whole economy would collapse." Thus, these critics contended that the unhealthy value system of the American people, combined with the great military power of the government, placed more than just the future of the country at risk, but the world as well. In 1949, editor Jay Waite of Gale declared that the United States was like "a child with two shotguns, four knives, a bottle of acid and nothing to do with his time": in short, a menace to himself and to others.¹²

Avant-garde alienation from post-war prosperity also resulted from the vanguardist's own uncertain economic role and social status. Without official patronage, creative intellectuals since the nineteenth century have lived in a difficult and ambiguous position, forced to be a producers in a free-lance art market, but regarded by members of society as parasites who consumed without producing anything of "real" value. Members of the avant garde preferred, of
course, to think of themselves as producing work that was important to their society, and they rejected the idea of economic success if it meant compromising their principles. Beat poet Gary Snyder remembered that in the fifties he and his colleagues had "a choice of remaining laborers for the rest of our lives to be able to be poets." But even if artists preserved their integrity, could they be heard? "The poet," declared writer Jay Waite in 1949, "is forced to labor under conditions that demean his person and atrophy his art. He can’t be found for the jumble of stuff and things; he can’t be heard above the roar of production." Under these circumstances, the temptation was great to say, as Contour editor Christopher Maclaine suggested in 1947, "To hell with Art," and join the Chamber of Commerce. The alternative was to labor to change society.13

THE INTEGRATION OF THE AVANT GARDE INTO CORPORATE CULTURE

Given the hostility between the avant garde and the consumer culture, how did the integration of the one into the other occur? One agency of the domestication of the avant garde was business people who integrated the avant garde into corporate culture. The other agency was the mass media. For American businesspeople, it turned out, contributed to the commercial integration of the avant garde through the use of innovative art in advertisements and design and in corporate collections and sponsored exhibitions. And members of the art world also helped assimilate the avant garde into corporate culture by applying the latest commercial marketing techniques to the sale of art will also be described.
The process of commercial canonization began in the 1920s when American advertisers and designers began to use avant garde images and motifs. Members of the advertising elite of the 1920s understood themselves to be "modernizers." They believed that part of their role, beyond selling the client's product, was to educate people about the changes taking place in society and culture in the industrial world. Many of them turned to avant-garde artists for images the advertisers considered to be appropriate for a technologically advanced, urban, industrial world. Advertisers also believed that association with high art brought prestige to their products. Modern art, adman Earnest Calkins said, "offered the opportunity of expressing the inexpressible, of suggesting not so much a motor car as speed, not so much a gown as style." Thus, advertisements in magazines such as the Saturday Evening Post and the Ladies Home Journal introduced Americans who had no exposure to museums and galleries to innovative art by, or in the style of, such artists as Picasso, Sheeler, and Demuth. 14

During the 1930s most advertisers returned to more traditional designs as competition in a depressed economy turned their attention from aesthetically appealing ads to basic hard-sell styles. An exception to this trend was the promotion of modern design by industrialist Walter Paepcke, whose firm manufactured packaging. In 1935, Paepcke established an art department in the firm to develop new designs for everything from stationary to advertisements. Paepcke hoped that the association of the company with modern design
and art would create the image of a company dedicated to innovation and also contribute to cultural uplift.  

Paepcke's explanation for the ad campaign applied to all of his design interests. "Simplicity, conciseness, [and] unity of design and thought and line," Paepcke said, would characterize the advertisements. Text would be limited and the illustration emphasized in order to give the viewer "something interesting to look at which he could associate with us" and thus associate the company with "originality, imagination, and taste." In this way, he concluded, "the techniques of modern artists would identify us with current developments in applied graphic art which were—and are—so important to packaging." Over the years, the company used in their advertising work by artists such as Willem de Kooning, Man Ray, Fernand Leger, Henry Moore, Jean Helion, and Herbert Bayer. A writer in Harper's described Paepcke's company as the "most daring" corporate advertiser because the company "used abstract paintings in full color for their decorative and shock effect in magazines." Other American businesses soon followed the example of the container firm in the use of contemporary art in advertising.

Direct industrial patronage of the arts also became an increasingly important source of funds for the art world beginning in the late thirties. But industrial patronage would become even more significant in the postwar decades. Corporate patronage included the sponsoring of contests, performances, tours, and exhibitions. For example, in 1945 a major cola manufacturer began sponsoring an annual
painting competition, offering thousands of dollars in prizes, a national tour, and the printing of twelve of the paintings in a widely distributed calendar. The firm sponsored this show, as other firms did, as a mixture of public relations and advertising. Most companies supported very conventional works, but many corporations always included some avant garde work.17

Merce Cunningham and his avant-garde dance company, for example, benefited from corporate sponsorship. A chance meeting at a cocktail party between the development director of the dance company and a director for a multinational oil company resulted in funding for part of a South American tour by Cunningham and his dancers. Concerns about public relations and politics motivated the managers of the Venezuelan subsidiary of the oil company to fund Cunningham. The businesspeople wanted to pacify criticism of the firm by student activists. Knowing the appeal of avant-garde culture to students, the company financed a week of dance concerts by Cunningham’s company in Caracas and distributed thousands of free tickets to students. John Cage said that the week in Venezuela was "the best thing on the whole tour." The oil company reaped public relations benefits that brought them increased stability.18

Corporations also served as patrons by purchasing art for their own private collections. In the early 1960s, the managers of a large public relations firm established a division devoted to helping corporate clients buy paintings and sponsor exhibitions. Under the leadership of David Rockefeller, a large New York bank developed an
extensive collection of avant-garde paintings and sculptures. Corporate managers collected art as an investment and as a form of personnel management. As had Walter Paepcke before them, businesspeople in the postwar years believed that innovative art in their offices would inspire their workers to innovation. For example, in 1962, the managers of a major cigarette manufacturing firm decided to redecorate their corporate offices in a modern manner, including new designs in furniture and avant-garde art. A company spokesperson explained the criteria used by company officials to choose art for the corporate collection (and also art for corporate sponsored avant-garde exhibitions): "Art that would shatter the routine view of things, that would force all of us to see things from new perspectives, that would coax us into thinking of things in novel ways." These words also describe the goals that avant gardists had for their work. In this particular corporate context, however, "new perspectives" meant new ways to market a product. Here, as elsewhere in the business world, the avant garde suffered the ironic fate of becoming a tool for corporate image making.  

At the same time that Walter Paepcke brought art into business, a public relations expert and artist's agent named Reeves Lewenthal decided to bring business methods to art. Lewenthal's experiences in the art world and the business world convinced him that members of the former used ineffective and outdated marketing techniques. "The gallery system," Lewenthal contended, "is doomed. The rich collector
class is dying out. There is no use in the galleries’ sitting around and complaining and waiting for the few old collectors who are left to come in and buy an occasional picture. American art ought to be handled like any other American business." Accordingly, in 1934 Lewenthal founded the Associated American Artists to market prints by American artists to middle-class purchasers. Lewenthal first attempted to sell $5.00 prints in department stores but went on to have his greatest success selling prints through mail-order. In the 1930s and 1940s the Associated American Artists featured the accessible modernism of regionalist painters Thomas Hart Benton, Stuart Curry, and Grant Wood. Lewenthal also promoted his artists to advertisers, as in a cigarette campaign that featured the paintings of Benton. In this way, he, as well as others, contributed to bringing avant-garde art into advertising.20

In the postwar years, Lewenthal, ever sensitive to shifts in taste, began to sell abstract prints and sculptures at stores in New York, Chicago, and Beverly Hills. He updated his mail order business to include popular consumer items such as fabrics, ceramics, greeting cards, calendars, lamp shades, and place mats. Many of these items featured abstract styles. Thus, Lewenthal continued to contribute to the domestication of modernism. By the 1950s, however, Associated American Artists faced stiff competition from interior design firms, furniture makers, and other household accessory manufacturers who also produced items featuring avant-garde styles.21
In 1962, painter Ad Reinhardt declared, "No art as a commodity or a jobbery. Art is not the spiritual side of business." Like many cultural radicals, the commercialization of the advance guard concerned Reinhardt. If the avant garde did not quite become the spiritual side of business, the movement certainly became an important part of the business side of business. In an economy of abundance in which consumption was the goal, the avant garde fulfilled a need. Innovation assimilated to design and advertising aided in the construction of product images. Innovation integrated into public and personnel relations helped to shape corporate images. Such was not the goal of members of the avant garde. The realities of the market economy required avant gardists to accept money from whoever was buying. But both cultural radicals and businesspeople of the twentieth century challenged the values of the producer culture. The members of the avant garde advocated liberation through creative self-expression. The corporate leaders advocated liberation through consumption. In the end, the merchants of consumption defeated both producer and avant garde cultures. By the 1960s, creative self-expression and consumption were all but indistinguishable.22

THE MEDIA AND THE MEDIATION OF CULTURE

The mass media also functioned as a promoter, connecting the vanguard with the consumer culture during the postwar years. Along with national advertising, the mass media was a key institution in
the dissemination of consumer-culture values. Both advertising and
the media developed their modern form at the same time, and both
tended to communicate prepackaged and fragmentary information with
the intent that their products be consumed rather than understood.
Advertisers and the editors of mass-market magazines denuded the
American avant garde of cultural concerns and reduced the movement to
celebrity, lifestyle, status, and fashion.\textsuperscript{23}

Throughout the twentieth century the editors and writers of the
mass media functioned as gatekeepers who controlled the information
that reached the public. While the rhetoric of the media proclaimed
their objectivity, certain institutional factors operated to distort
the information presented in the media, thus projecting the avant
garde to the postwar public through a defective lens.

Three characteristics of the mass media account for these
distortions. The first was the fragmentation of information. The
mass media presented information as a plethora of facts about the
world with little context of meaning or interpretation. The media
created what Neil Postman called a "peek-a-boo world" in which first
one event or person pops into view, disappears, and is followed by
another.\textsuperscript{24} The second distorting characteristic was the use of
sensationalism. Editors favored stories that appealed to the
emotions of their readers, especially feelings of wonder, excitement,
or fear. Such an editorial strategy favored the presentation of
"odd" behaviors or images over the presentation of serious ideas,
such as those of members of the avant garde.\textsuperscript{25}
The third characteristic was the creation of pseudo-events. Pseudo-events, according to Daniel J. Boorstin, are manufactured occurrences presented in the media for self-serving motives. The phenomenon of celebrity is the pseudo-event most relevant to the avant garde. Celebrities are individuals well known for being well known, whatever meritorious contributions they may have made to society. Typically they are entertainers who are not intrinsically important. The concept of celebrity unites fragmentation with sensationalism and focuses public attention on personality rather than ideas or other substantive content. Altogether, these three characteristic distortions of the modern mass media would have a particularly deleterious influence on modern avant garde movements.

CELEBRITY AND THE AVANT GARDE

The model of artist as revolutionary leader heroically showing people the way to the future has been a standard one since the Romantic period and was especially prominent in the age of the avant garde. In the twentieth century, the hero has been transformed into the celebrity. Personality has become the focus of presentation rather than ideas or accomplishments, which are often lacking for celebrities in any case. Often such presentation serves commercial purposes, as in the notorious case of conductor Arturo Toscanini who, throughout the middle decades of the century, personified the nexus of celebrity, culture, and commerce in his job as conductor of the
NBC Symphony Orchestra. In the postwar years, painter Jackson Pollock emerged as an avant-garde celebrity and established a pattern that would be followed by other artists with increasing frequency as the years went by.27

The example of Pollock demonstrates how the media made avant-gardists into celebrities separated from their intellectual and social context. Of all the abstract expressionist painters who could have been highlighted, the choice of Pollock was fortuitous from a media standpoint because Pollock was a shy man and tended to direct attention to his works rather than theorize about them. That is not to say that Pollock lacked ideas or intentions, only that he was less communicative about what he was about than were other abstract expressionist painters such as Motherwell, Newman, or Still. Indeed, Newman and Motherwell wrote extensively about their aims and ideals. Pollock’s limited “paper trail” and reluctance to express theoretical concerns therefore provided an unusual opportunity to transform him from radical innovator to celebrity artist.28

The editors of Life magazine decided to publish a feature story on Pollock after the painter was mentioned in the “Life Round Table on Modern Art” in October 1949. The article appeared in August 1949, and the writer focused almost exclusively on personality and work methods, saying nothing about the artist’s motivations or the intellectual milieu from which his work came. The Life writer noted “inexplicable” qualities of Pollock’s paintings and decided to make these qualities the center point of Pollock’s personality. He was
described as "brooding and puzzled-looking." The accompanying photograph showed the painter with furrowed brow, crossed arms, a cigarette dangling from his mouth, standing before one of his large canvasses. The tone of the piece was patronizing, the author getting much fun out of Pollock's use of a trowel and the ash and insects that accidently ended up in the paintings. But Pollock was also described as an independent man whose work was an expression of his personality and as the only one who knew when a painting was completed. Pollock's quirky paintings were presented as a result of his quirky personality, but it was his personality. In a bureaucratic society, he was a rebel who followed his own intuition, a man as self made as his art.²⁹

The moody rebelliousness of the public Pollock found a counterpart in the popular method actors of the fifties: Montgomery Clift, Marlon Brando, and James Dean. The editors of Time made the comparison explicit in a 1956 article about Pollock and other abstract expressionists entitled "The Wild Ones," after the 1953 Brando film, The Wild One. The image of Pollock as a Brando character became established in the popular media and influenced the way other artists thought about Pollock. Painter George Segal recalled stories about Pollock from his student days at New York University: "They told me he was violent, deep, inarticulate, he drank too much, was passionate, revolutionary, but HIMSELF only in his paintings." Segal remembered that this description always put in his mind "Marlon Brando's brooding, pouting profile" as Stanley Kowalski in A Streetcar Named Desire.³⁰
Pollock the celebrity was not solely the creation of mass media publicity. Pollock himself contributed to this image. In the early fifties, photographer Hans Namuth began taking a series of famous photographs of the artist. Pollock became obsessed with the idea of the artist as actor and discussed with friends the appropriate "persona" for the modern artist in order to be ready for the next session with Namuth. He took to wearing cowboy boots, something he had not done since his youth, to emphasize his Western origins and the individualism, freedom, and primitivism that the West connoted (another media stereotype). Pollock completed the image by dying in a car crash in 1955 in the manner of James Dean. The linkage of Pollock and the avant garde with the Rebel Without a Cause indicated the banality of celebrity journalism. Ironically, cultural radicals were explicitly rebels with causes. Neither the vanguardists' social critique nor their desire to integrate art and life in a radically new world appeared in popular media.31

For the famous, celebrity promised financial reward. Artists discovered that through the notoriety of being a celebrity they could distinguish themselves from others and translate that distinction into increased commercial success, if not lasting fame. Thus, ambitious artists transformed the idea of avant garde innovation from a serious purpose into a marketing technique. Their ultimate purpose became to turn, as Philip Fisher put it, "a style into a brand."32
Following Pollock's example, other members of the avant garde manipulated the media more successfully than he to create a celebrity image for themselves, what Richard Hedgige described as the "artist as star." Painter Larry Rivers followed Pollock's course as artist celebrity. In the late fifties, Rivers appeared on game shows and in *Life* magazine; his marital problems and drug taking were well publicized. Likewise, Norman Mailer established the pattern of postwar celebrity writer. The title of Mailer's 1959 work, *Advertisements for Myself*, proclaimed that, as critic Lillian Feder noted, "the self has become an image." The celebrity presented images of excitement and self-fulfillment to an audience searching for, as Norman Podhoretz remarked with reference to Mailer, "not so much a more equitable world as a more exciting one." In 1958 the managers of the New York jazz club, the Five Spot Cafe, advertised it in the little magazine *Yugen* as the "Home of Thelonius Monk, jazz-poetry, [and] America's leading painters, sculptors, composers, actors, poets, people." Seemingly, there was no better place to look for artist-celebrities.33

Artist Andrew Warhol epitomized the innovative artist as celebrity. He deliberately courted fame, as if being famous as an artist was the same as being significant. In a culture of consumption he was probably right. From his youth, image concerned Warhol. In the 1950s he began combing his hair in the style worn by Truman Capote in the jacket photograph of Capote's first novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, a photograph that itself was highly stylized.
Throughout his life, he carefully constructed a public image. In the early 1960s, Warhol added to his Capote image a leather jacket and sunglasses (in the biker style of Marlon Brando from the movie *The Wild One*, also a theme for one of Warhol’s paintings).³⁴

The idea of artist as celebrity carried over into Warhol’s work. His paintings and films had the qualities of "pseudo-events" in that their significance rarely went any deeper than their surfaces. Warhol characterized his work as "empty" of feeling and meaning, commenting to an interviewer, "If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There is nothing behind it." His interest extended only to what he saw. Warhol’s use of images from the mass media, of publicity-style photographs, and the mechanical technique of silk screening, often using repetitive imagery, focused attention on surfaces. In his films, the use of the long take produced a similar repetitive quality. Warhol’s works were, as Patrick Smith argued, "homages to..." whatever object happened to be the subject.³⁵

Warhol believed that people would look at these objects because he was famous and he was looking at them, and perhaps people would see common objects as special because of their association with a celebrity. Critic Kynaston McShine described this belief as "the alchemy of fame": the ordinary transformed into the extraordinary by the celebrity’s artistic gaze. This alchemy had some parallels with historic vanguard beliefs about the integration of art and life. But in Warhol’s work the goal seemed to be the integration of celebrity
and life. The new vision he offered was that people would see soup cans as celebrities of the art world, not to learn to perceive everyday life as an aesthetic experience.36

Warhol, of course was not the first artist to use ordinary, mass-produced objects as art. Indeed, for the 1989 Museum of Modern Art Warhol retrospective, Robert Rosenblum’s catalog essay, in the best tradition of the MOMA, provided a distinguished pedigree for Warhol, including Cubism and Dada. But these earlier avant gardists relied on the authority of their vision, not their fame, much less popularity, to transform the perception of their audience. Furthermore, these earlier cultural innovators tended to oppose the institutions of the art world because they believed that these institution created the distinction between art and life. Warhol, however, based his strategy for achieving fame on the power of art world institutions such as galleries, museums, and magazines to create an artist’s reputation. He relied on these institutions to validate his vision and make him a credible artist.37

With celebrity status came the opportunity to make money. The artist’s name on a work made the painting valuable. Throughout the 1970s portraits commissioned by collectors and celebrities provided Warhol with a large part of his income. Warhol’s name associated with a product made the merchandise valuable. Warhol advertised his services as product endorser in the Village Voice in 1966: "I’ll endorse with my name any of the following: clothing, AC-DC, cigarettes, small tapes, sound equipment, Rock ‘N’ Roll records,
anything, film, and film equipment, Food, Helium, WHIPS, Money; love and kisses Andy Warhol." Over the next decades he endorsed two airline companies, a liquor interest, an electronics firm, a news magazine, a shampoo, and an investment banking firm. 38

Warhol indeed created a "brand" for himself, producing art and films in quantity in a studio he knowingly called "The Factory." In Warhol's hands, the avant garde became not a movement but a media event. The bias of modern mass communications towards sensation and celebrity, as well as the Romantic tradition of describing the artist as a bohemian rebel, combined to create celebrity vanguardism. Because the members of the avant garde tended to describe their alienation in personal and individual terms rather than social ones, the cultural concerns of the avant garde could be ignored and the eccentricities of personality brought to the fore. Perhaps because of his experiences in advertising and commercial art, Warhol grasped, almost intuitively, how the media worked. He combined his media knowledge with the rhetoric of the avant garde to re-create himself as a celebrity, thus helping further to integrate the advance guard into the consumer culture.

THE AVANT GARDE AS LIFESTYLE

The mass media contributed to the integration of the avant garde into society by focusing on superficial aspects of the artist: his or her taste in clothing, music, and hairstyle; cleanliness; vocabulary; and employment (or lack thereof). The media drew
attention to that constellation of qualities that would come to be called "lifestyle." This focus on lifestyle would be particularly true for the beat vanguard. The beat movement attracted attention in 1956 with the Howl obscenity trial. The publication of Kerouac's On the Road the next year created even more publicity, beginning a beat fad among many younger Americans. Initial discussion of the beats in the mass media tended to be at least grudgingly favorable and to demonstrate that the writers had at least some understanding of what cultural radicals were about. For example, literary critic Gene Bara wrote in the New York Herald Tribune that the beats were "mystics, and their mystique is the self." Other reviewers described Kerouac as the F. Scott Fitzgerald or Ernest Hemingway of the post-World War II generation. In some cases writers felt positive expectation about how the movement might develop. Leslie Cross wrote in the Milwaukee Journal in 1957 that "the winds from the west are free and may (let us hope) whisk away at least some of the stuffiness that has settled over so much American writing in the 1950s."

The situation changed rapidly as journalists turned from attempts at serious explanation of the writings of the new American vanguard to caricature and ridicule. Norman Podhoretz's condemnatory piece in the 1958 Partisan Review, "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," seemed to set the tone for subsequent commentary. Podhoretz denounced Ginsberg, Kerouac, and the others as irrational, immature, and incompetent. Journalists linked the beat vanguard to the alleged youth rebellion, another media stereotype of the decade, and to movie star James
Dean. Journalists assumed that the beat writer was inarticulate, withdrawn from the world, and a literary poseur. Following the sputnik launchings, San Francisco newspaper columnist Herb Caen coined the derisive nickname "beatnik," that helped to further the media theme that the beats represented an adolescent phase rather than a serious vanguard movement. A Time writer described them as a "pack of odd balls who celebrate booze, dope, sex and despair." The level of discourse is illustrated by the fact that writers in Time and Life mentioned that beat poet Gregory Corso boasted that he never combed his hair, "although," Corso was quoted as saying, "I guess I'd get the bugs out of it if I did."40

In this way, the attention of the mass media turned increasingly from the literature and ideas of the beats to descriptions of their "lifestyle." The lead-in photograph illustrating Paul O'Neal's Life magazine story on the beats summed up the superficial presentation. The photograph, allegedly depicting a beat "pad," had been, according to the caption, "recreated in [a] studio shot using paid models." The picture included, however, everything a prospective beat needed for "uncomfortable living:" a mattress on the floor, bongos, marijuana, empty beer cans, a typewriter with an unfinished poem, Charlie Parker and Miles Davis, a "beat chick dressed in black," and a "bearded beat wearing sandals, chinos and turtlenecked sweater." The stereotype became so pervasive that when a San Francisco television station sent a camera crew to North Beach to film a poet's "pad," the journalists did not believe that the neat apartment,
filled with books, paintings, and attractive furniture of a contemporary design, presented the appropriate appearance. The producer covered the coffee table with cigarette butts and liquor bottles and then began filming. The almost complete identification of beat with a particular lifestyle rather than intellectual content could be seen in this description of Japanese so-called "Zen beatniks" published in Look in 1963: "Along with blue jeans, dark glasses, coffee milling and an anti-haircut movement, Japan's beatniks have adopted freethinking and free-acting with amazing alacrity."41

The avant garde became a commercial property. A San Diego department store began to advertise a line of "beachnik" swimsuits. A beat character was added to the popular television program "Dobie Gillis" as well as to the radio soap opera, "Helen Trent," and to the comic strip, "Popeye." MGM produced a movie, The Beat Generation, and a publisher of pulp fiction issued Beatnik Party whose characters, according to the cover copy, were "crazed with strange desires" and "sinful passions." A group of clever avant garde poets and photographers in New York City established a "Rent-a-Beatnik" service in the late fifties and were very successful until the IRS closed them down for nonpayment of taxes. Jazz musicians popularized by the beats (Jack Kerouac appeared on album covers) became successful, and young people copied the jazz musician's "style:" Gerry Mulligan's haircut, Dizzy Gillespie's beret. Jazz performers also made advertisements for cigarettes, clothes, hair products, and
of course, records. In 1966, poet John Ashberry complained that "Grove Press subway posters invite the lumpenproletariat to 'join the Underground Generation' as though this were as simple a matter as joining the Pepsi Generation which it probably is."42

Besides journalists, cultural radicals themselves contributed to the reduction of the avant garde to lifestyle accoutrements to be picked up by rebellious young people. Writer Lawrence Lipton wrote The Holy Barbarians (1959) as an explanation and defense of cultural radicalism. The effect of the book, however, with its glossary of beat terms, stereotypical photographs, and superficial discussions of Zen Buddhism, drug taking, and other bohemian behaviors was to further the trivialization of the advance guard. Lipton had pretensions of being a serious avant-garde artist, but he made his living as a hack writer of short stories, radio scripts, and, with his wife, a series of very successful detective pot-boilers. As Lipton wrote to Kenneth Rexroth, "I was capable of doing the very thing I had the most contempt for—and doing it well." The irony was compounded by Lipton's failures at serious fiction and poetry in the 1940s and 1950s.43

Lipton moved to Venice, California, in the mid-fifties, attracted by the low rents. There he met the bohemian community made up of Stuart Perkoff, Wallace Berman, and others. In the Venice avant garde, Lipton believed he had found the embodiment of his idea of the poet as "New Barbarian," a concept he described in a long poem. The new barbarian would, Lipton declared,
Lipton decided that his future as an avant gardist lay with the popularizing of the Venice vanguard. Lipton’s thought, such as it was, presented a mass of contradictions. He did not believe in commercialism, but he did believe in commercial success. He thought that if a book or a poem were good, then millions of people would want to read it, and that if an idea were true, then millions of people would change from their old ways of thinking and accept the new. Lipton believed that the avant garde needed only a skilled publicist to succeed. All he had to do was present to “the public” the ideals of the avant garde: their voluntary poverty, their dedication to creativity, the liberation they found in drugs, jazz, and free love. Published at the time of the beat fad, the book received much media attention and became a best seller. Although the Venice community and the beats had little direct relationship, the two elided together in the public mind, a union that Lipton implied in his book and did nothing to dispel.44

Combined with the presentation of the avant garde in the mass media, Lipton’s work contributed to the integration of the avant garde as lifestyle. Consider, for example, the contrast that Lipton drew between the 1920s and the 1950s vanguards:

In the 1920s, Chuck Bennison [pseudonym for a Venice bohemian]...would have quit his advertising agency job, as Sherwood Anderson did, but he would not in the twenties have shed his necktie, put on Levis and gone to live in poverty in a slum,
seeking "new ways of knowing" through pot and trance and far-out jazz as he did in the fifties. Sherwood Anderson's was not a total rejection of American lifeways and values.

Nor would the young people and tourists who began to flock to the Village and North Beach truly reject American values. They would tend to focus on the most easily applied avant garde "ideas": levis, jazz, and, in the middle and late 1960s, marijuana. Cultural slumming became common as many young Americans concluded, as novelist Ronald Sukenick summarized, "all right, if art is life, then who needs art?"

John Cage heard from a friend that her teenaged son came home from work one day and announced that he would not be home for a couple of days. "What's up?" Cage's friend asked. The son explained, "Tomorrow night after work, I'm driving to Albany with Danny Sherwood [a friend] for a cup of coffee, and I'll be back for work the following day." When the boy's mother pointed out that he could have a cup of coffee in the kitchen without driving all night, he answered, "Don't be square. Read Kerouac." The story was not atypical. Joyce Glassman, Kerouac's lover at the time, wrote from New York City to Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky in 1957 that "HOWL is being sold in drugstores now and the West End is full of young, would-be hipsters who laugh and say 'Well, I'm on the road,' or 'Think I'll go to Frisco today.'" Writing back to the Oklahoma-based White Dove Review, Greenwich Village correspondent Wes Whittlesey reported that while the Village was the place for the avant garde, and many really believed in freedom and creativity, many more used
the idea of "freedom of conscience" as a "license for sexual promiscuity." Poet Stuart Perkoff distinguished between "working artists" and "beatnikians," whom he characterized as "non-doers who have all the personality of a used condom [and]...really are a drag."[46]

The integration of the beat "lifestyle" into postwar society was fraught with additional ironies. The writers for Time, Life, and other media presented the beat vanguard as silly and deplored their lack of moral values. At the same time, however, they popularized the superficial aspects of the vanguard rebellion among young people who felt alienated from the bourgeois conformity of the decade. In part what the media did was to control the rebellion. By discrediting the substance of the vanguard critique of America, the mass media popularizers enabled a "safe" rebellion that did not undermine the consumer culture but created a new consumption community.[47]

The members of the avant garde, ironically again, contributed to the making of the consumer culture. A motivational psychologist, speaking in the 1960s, described one of the difficulties in changing from a producer to a consumer culture: "We are now confronted with the problem of permitting the average American to feel moral...even when he is spending; even when he is not saving.... One of the basic problems of prosperity...is to demonstrate that the hedonistic approach to his life is a moral, not an immoral one." Cultural radicals also rejected producer values. Rather than restraint, they
argued for liberation; instead of deferred gratification, they called for self-fulfillment. With the quest for self-fulfillment, cultural radicals contributed unwittingly to their own undoing. Confusing self-fulfillment with self-indulgence, journalists, businessmen, and advertisers linked the avant-garde quest for a new culture with the emerging corporate culture of consumption by, first, disassociating the ideas of members of the advance guard from their actions and, second, by focusing on superficial qualities.48

The success of the consumer culture was indicated by writer David Boroff in the New York Times Magazine in 1964. Boroff commented that the Beat rebellion was long dead. "It offered a ready-made vehicle for rebellion and protest...a few years ago," but today, he declared, "college intellectuals are far too sophisticated for such simpleminded gestures." Kerouac, the writer continued, if read at all, seemed to the students "a relic from the past." But Boroff also noted the continuing influence of the media image of the movement:

Bohemianism as a cult has virtually disappeared from the campus, yet it is everywhere. It has been assimilated into the mainstream. The young woman with loose-flying hair and black stockings may well be majoring in elementary education, and the young man with a beard is a pre-law student having his last fling. Bohemianism is dead, but its artifacts are all around. Reduced to a lifestyle, the avant garde became one more commodity of the consumer culture.49
THE AVANT GARDE AND STATUS

The mass media further integrated cultural radicalism into American society by associating vanguardism with status. Journalists associated the avant garde with wealth, fashion, and success. These associations made for a more favorable reception of cultural radicalism than would otherwise have occurred. But the presentation of the advance guard as a lifestyle symbol of status trivialized the important cultural concerns of the movement. Radical innovators did not envision that alienation would end in social climbing.

In 1951 writers and photographers for *Vogue* connected the avant garde to high fashion. In the spring of 1951, for example, *Vogue* magazine featured the latest in evening wear from Saks Fifth Avenue and Lord and Taylor modelled before paintings from Jackson Pollock's show at the Betty Parsons Gallery. The paintings behind the models included canvases that would become among the artists most famous: *Lavendar Mist* and *Autumn Rhythm*. The author of the brief text noted that some observers described the paintings as "idiotic," while others thought them the work of a "genius." "Among the latter," the writer commented, "are some of the most astute private collectors and museum directors in the country." Jackson Pollock's understanding of myth and symbol that gave meaning to his work was not mentioned in the text and implicitly denied by the functional use of the paintings as backdrops. Pollock's message was reduced to style, even fashion and sophistication, without content or intentionality.50
In 1955 the editors of Fortune presented the avant garde as a smart investment. "Is it possible to draw useful parallels between investment in the art market and investment in the stock market?" asked two writers for that magazine in 1955. "Roughly, it is," they answered. The commentators compared old master paintings to "gilt-edge securities"; paintings associated with modernist movements, such as impressionism and the School of Paris, to "blue chip" investments; and the works of the contemporary avant garde to "speculative or 'growth' issues." Among the radical innovators mentioned as good speculative investments were Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell, Clyfford Still, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Larry Rivers, William Baziotes, and Franz Kline. By 1958 a writer for Life could describe "a worldwide boom in the advanced styles of U.S. painting which are still controversial at home." The writer's tone suggested that Americans might learn something from the "record crowds" turning out in Japan and Europe to see the new American work and maybe pay more favorable attention to contemporary artists.51

In the 1960s the Saturday Evening Post ran a cover story on choreographer and dancer Merce Cunningham. The cover photograph featured Cunningham in lurid makeup designed by Robert Rauschenberg. But lest the Post’s readers got the wrong idea, writer Donal Henahan noted that Cunningham had been praised in the pages of the New York Times, had received numerous grants from prestigious foundations, and oversaw an organization with a budget in excess of $200,000. Henahan described Cunningham as the "son of a country lawyer," who had become "the leader of the dance avant-garde." Cunningham’s work might be a
trifle strange, but he represented the American tradition of hard work rewarded by success: the avant gardist as Horatio Alger hero.52

In 1958 an article in Life carried the heading, "From Shock to Respect." The reference was to public responses to innovative art work but aptly described how writers and editors for mass media publications changed their tone toward the advance guard from dismissive in the 1940s, to a mixture of condescension and respect in the early fifties, to acceptance by the late fifties. The change occurred as members of the avant garde gained respect and acceptance from cultural and commercial institutions. For example, John Cage's 1943 New York debut conducting a percussion ensemble received a condescending notice in Life magazine. The writer described the performers as "earnest, dressed-up musicians" and noted that "the audience, which was very highbrow, listened intently without seeming to be disturbed at the noisy results." An article in Newsweek of 1946 referred to paintings of Robert Motherwell and Adolph Gottlieb under the heading, "A Way to Kill Space."53

Beginning in the late forties, the tone in the popular media became, if not sympathetic, at least more open to modernist and radical work. In Promenade in 1949, critic Alfredo Valente discussed the psychological themes of the work of Adolph Gottlieb in a fair manner, concluding that "for those clinically interested, this show is outstanding for what is happening in the neon-lighted ateliers." In 1956 a writer for Time magazine joined praise and disdain for the abstract expressionists: "Advance guard painting in America is
hell-bent for outer space. It has rocketed right out of the realms of common sense and common experience. That does not necessarily make it bad." By the end of the fifties, *Time* and *Life* writers celebrated the "coming of age" of American art as represented by avant gardists such as De Kooning. By the 1960s John Cage received sympathetic notice in the *Saturday Evening Post*. As avant gardism became established in the art world, the style watchers of the mass media revised their tone. They did not want to be left behind.\(^5^4\)

Avant gardists, such as Warhol, were not unaware that what they were doing had status appeal. Whipple McCoy, who edited a little magazine for editors of little magazines in the 1940s, believed that increased advertising could earn editors the money they needed to continue publishing their magazines. He recommended little magazines to advertisers because "the influential, intellectual and prominent people who read, write, and/or edit little magazines are not only more educated and informed than the average, they also represent a far greater buying power." Many cultural radicals took a more sardonic approach to the status appeal of their work. In 1960 Walter De Maria designed a happening that he called the "Art Yard." The Art Yard was a hole in the ground, and digging the hole was a key part of the event. De Maria envisioned "artlovers and spectators" who "would come to the making of the yard dressed in Tuxedoes and clothes which would make them aware of the significance of the event they would see."\(^5^5\)
The audience receptive to avant-gardeism, including art lovers and speculators, expanded in America in the postwar years because more Americans had the money, leisure, and education necessary to appreciate cultural activities. Some people in this audience had sympathy for the aims of the avant garde; others viewed innovative culture as a means of status differentiation. The media played an important role in the creation of what critic Thomas Hess called "black-tie Dada." By integrating the avant garde into the status anxieties of the middle and upper classes, the media, once again, transformed cultural radicalism into a style option. The domestication of a whole century of vanguard activism was captured in an advertisement for Show magazine in 1964:

From the backyard cookout to the business conference, conversational reference points have shifted in the last few years. Eliot is more T. S. than Ness, Danny Thomas' view of Toledo has lost ground to El Greco's, and the Ives who have it are both Burl and Charles. In the midst of today's cultural renaissance, you've got to know who's who and what's what in the very lively arts.

One's sure guide, of course, was Show.56

PLURALISM AND THE INTEGRATION OF THE AVANT GARDE AS NOVELTY AND FASHION

A fluidity of movements marked the avant garde from the beginning. These movements shared a more or less consistent world view and sense of purpose. In postwar America, these continuities dissolved as the concept of the avant garde came to be reduced to stylistic innovation alone. Several interrelated factors caused this development. One cause was the integration of the avant garde into
the consumer culture through celebrity, status, and lifestyle promotion in the media, as discussed above. Another cause was the institutionalization of the avant garde in galleries and museums (see the discussion above). A final way the avant garde became integrated into the culture of consumption was as a fashionable novelty in a pluralistic society.

In the 1950s, American sociologists popularized the concept of pluralism to describe the eclectic mixture of ethnic and interest groups in American society. In time, the word would become a media shibboleth for the various world views, lifestyles, and other sociological varieties that, commentators argued, characterized American society. Pluralist theorists glossed over real differences of race and class that divided American society. They did so in part because the postwar prosperity raised the standard of living of so many Americans. Furthermore, the values of the consumer culture permeated through all levels of American society, creating something of a new consensus.57

This was the context for the breakdown of the avant garde from a cultural movement to a mere quest for novelty. Cultural radicals would come to provide style obsolescence in the arts just as manufacturers did for consumer goods.

The modern consumer culture was predicated on the belief that consumption can satisfy psychological needs. Through the fashion system, consumers are constantly presented with superficially "new" choices to meet those needs. Style obsolescence, the most developed form of fashion, originated in the development of branded goods in
the late 19th century. Manufacturers transformed packing into packaging in order to distinguish their product from another maker's. Automobile manufacturers took this idea one step further with the annual model. Now not only were the cars of one company distinct from another in design, but the design changed regularly. The same company could offer to consumers a new choice every year. Through advertising, manufacturers educated consumers about the latest designs and helped consumers to see that the styles of last year were "out of date." Producers applied the idea of style obsolescence to a whole range of consumer goods, such as furniture and appliances, and stimulated regular demand for goods only superficially obsolescent.

Consumption and the avant garde intersected in the area of design. The integration of art and life through good design of utilitarian objects was the goal of the German Bauhaus. Designer Lázlo Moholy-Nagy characterized the goal as "design for life." Moholy-Nagy was one of many former Bauhaus faculty members who found their way to the United States after the Nazis closed the school: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Joseph Albers, Walter Gropius, and Herbert Bayer, to name just a few. Many became teachers at important American universities. Moholy-Nagy, with the help of Chicago industrialist Walter Paepcke, founded the School of Design to carry on the Bauhaus program. As a result of the Bauhaus and the interest of many advertisers in modernist design, the functionalist aesthetic favored by the German designers became an integral part of American design.
Avant-garde design became domesticated in the taste-making mass media and advertising in the postwar years. For example, the "free taste" promoted by the editors of House Beautiful in 1952 tended toward Bauhaus-inspired functionalism in furniture design and geometric abstraction in painting. Writer Sara Little noted that new designs in china were "clearly showing the influence of modern sculpture"; an indication, she continued, that people were "beginning to associate art forms with daily living." Little and others not only appropriated avant-garde design, they also appropriated the ideal of integrating art and life. For Little, good design could transform setting the table from "a chore into a satisfying form of self expression," comparable to the "pleasure any artist experiences in choosing his colors and composing his picture. It is one way to make creative art of daily living." Little redefined the avant-garde goal of creative liberation as consumer choice. A 1963 furniture advertisement published in Art in America pictured a businessman seated at a functionalist style desk, with a Picabia print on the wall over the credenza. The caption read, "Whether your taste be for romantic or modern idiom, you will find...[our] furniture to express it. Many distinguished art collectors are also proud possessors of...[our] furniture, in their homes and in their offices." Innovative design, status, and a canonized avant garde here come together.60

Innovative designers were aware of the possibility of being co-opted. Moholy-Nagy himself had written, "A promotion of novelty for the sake of novelty...tends to create the illusion of new organic
demands where no need exists. Usually it is nothing but an
artificial stimulation of business." Unfortunately, what Moholy-Nagy
feared came to pass. Modernist design became another tool in the
production of style obsolescence. Many members of the advance guard
considered this development a positive one. Sculptor Andrew Oliver
argued that the radical innovators, "by opening up the boundaries of
art, ...[were] helping a lot of people realize that there's value in
doing things with style." This style awakening seemed to be
confirmed by investigators for the Stanford Research Institute, who
reported in 1960 that "better off and better educated" consumers were
"consciously turning from mass conformity" through the purchase of
product innovations, especially in automobiles and appliances. This
same group of affluent and educated Americans constituted what Alvin
Toffler termed the "culture consumers." They increasingly spent
their leisure time (and budget) on cultural activities, including
avant-garde culture.61

The members of the avant garde also contributed to the subsuming
of the movement by the culture of consumption. Beginning in the late
fifties and continuing to the 1990s, avant garde innovation produced
an incoherent pluralism rather than a cohesive movement for change.
This pluralist confusion originated in the vanguardist link between
innovation and cultural renewal. Cultural radicals believed, as we
have seen, that, through artistic innovation, they could create a new
social vision among people. They tried, therefore, to open the
fields of creativity by emphasizing the process of creativity and the
destruction of boundaries that separated art and life.
Cultural radicals did not succeed at social reconstruction in part because they did succeed in widening the field of acceptable innovation. John Cage gives some idea of the change in his hyperbolic recollection that "when I was young, you had either to follow Stravinsky or Schoenberg. There was no alternative. Now, of course, there are 1,001 things to do, and I think that that's partly a result of a kind of step that not only I took, but others took."

In 1958, composer and critic William Flanagan described the state of music as "chaotic" because of the diversity of styles and attitudes.62

Likewise, the "New York School" that emerged as the successor movement to abstract expressionism included a diversity of stylistic approaches that belied the contention that a school existed. In 1967, painter Paul Branch declared, "There is no avant-garde today. Everything gets known too quickly for there to be any space between the scouting party and the main body of troops. Perhaps there is an avant-garde of quality— but there is no particular look or unifying style that embraces the few works that have real quality."

Similarly, Donald Allen divided the poets in his New American Poets anthology into five more or less coherent groups based on the different aesthetic ideas of the writers. Critic Sonya Rudikoff described the problem of pluralism in 1957 in the Partisan Review. Noting that artistic generations now lasted only a few years, Rudikoff asked, "Where, who, what, is the avant-garde today?.... If
Larry Rivers, say, is avant-garde, then is de Kooning one of the Old Masters? And then presumably Miro, Matisse, Picasso are prehistoric, the giant race before the Flood."63

At the same time, as discussed in chapter 5, a shift in focus by many cultural radicals from the future to the present changed the context of innovation. Regeneration became a completely individual matter rather than a cultural one. Without belief in a common culture, vanguardists found the distinction between purposeful innovation and change for the sake of novelty increasingly difficult to maintain. Poet Gregory Corso, in a letter to his publisher, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, indicated the ambiguous situation in which cultural radicals found themselves. Citing and revising Ezra Pound's dictum, Corso wrote, "Make it new? aye, but better than that—make it ever new!" To "make it ever new" could be an affirmation of continuous cultural regeneration— or it could be a justification for what critic Irving Howe termed "a neurotic quest for novelty," without a larger purpose.64

California painter David Park described the changes that took place in his style in the late 1950s: "Art ought to be a troublesome thing, and one of my reasons for painting representationally is that this makes for much more troublesome pictures." Park reduced avant-garde alienation and innovation to a simple formula resulting in work that is defined as "new" in terms of being different from the prevailing avant-garde style but not in terms of the artist's relationship to a culture in need of renewal. John Cage answered critics of the ever increasing pace of artistic innovation with a
metaphor from Norman O. Brown: "He sees art as food going right through the body...and then...you use it up and you need something new." Noting that no one would ask him to regurgitate a steak he had eaten ten years before and eat the meat over again, Cage concluded, "We must have something else to consume." Just as the culture consumers desired new designs in automobiles, they desired new designs in art, an art valued for being new and no longer seen as threatening by the middle class. In this way, avant gardists provided what the consumers wanted and reduced innovation to a self-conscious quest for novelty. In 1969, critic Harold Rosenberg concluded that the "avant-garde today means a flurry of fashion, whether in painting, sex, or insurrectionary politics." And, he added, "the period required for 'fashionablizing' an avant-garde has become shorter and shorter." 65

In all these ways, innovation became yet another means of integrating the advance guard into the American consumer culture.

CONCLUSION

Many cultural radicals were aware of what was happening to them and were appalled. Poet Robert Duncan wrote to his friend, Robin Blazer, in 1957 that "the real necessary retreat [for the poet] is from the whole god-damned promotional and their exploitation thing." The editors of the Provincetown Quarterly declared in their inaugural manifesto that they rejected conformity to "Madison Avenue," and that "it is the duty of the artist to paint towards self-realization and not for a market quotation." Avant gardists tried to find ways of
avoiding commercialization. Conceptual artists such as Donald Judd and Robert Morris argued for a highly theoretical and ephemeral art that could not be commodified. Pop painter Robert Indiana described abstract expressionist paintings as "decorative" and thus likely to become standard decoration "in the American home." But Indiana was certain that pop art would not suffer the same ignominious fate: "There is a harshness and matter-of-factness to Pop that doesn’t exactly make it the interior decorators Indispensable Right Hand." He was wrong, of course, and pop art was the post popular art movement of the 1960s.66

Ironically, the members of the avant garde contributed to the making of the consumer culture. A motivational psychologist, speaking in the 1960s, described one of the difficulties in changing from a producer to a consumer culture:

We are now confronted with the problem of permitting the average American to feel moral...even when he is spending; even when he is not saving.... One of the basic problems of prosperity...is to demonstrate that the hedonistic approach to his life is a moral, not an immoral one.

Cultural radicals also rejected producer values. Rather than restraint, they argued for liberation; instead of deferred gratification, they called for self-fulfillment. With the quest for self-fulfillment, cultural radicals contributed unwittingly to their own undoing. Confusing self-fulfillment with self-indulgence, journalists, businesspeople, and advertisers linked the avant-garde quest for a new culture with the emerging corporate culture of
consumption by, first, disassociating the ideas of members of the advance guard from their actions and, second, by focusing on superficial qualities.68

The success of the consumer culture was indicated by writer David Boroff in the New York Times Magazine in 1964. Boroff commented that the Beat rebellion was long dead. "It offered a ready-made vehicle for rebellion and protest...a few years ago," but today, he declared, "college intellectuals are far too sophisticated for such simpleminded gestures." Kerouac, the writer continued, if read at all, seemed to the students "a relic from the past." But Boroff also noted the continuing influence of the media image of the movement: "Bohemianism as a cult has virtually disappeared from the campus, yet it is everywhere. It has been assimilated into the mainstream. The young woman with loose-flying hair and black stockings may well be majoring in elementary education, and the young man with a beard is a pre-law student having his last fling. Bohemianism is dead, but its artifacts are all around." Reduced to a lifestyle, the avant garde became one more commodity of the consumer culture.69
Notes to Chapter VIII

1. These categories are suggested by Adrian Marino, "Le Cycle social de l'avant-garde," *Review de l'Institute de Sociologie* 3-4 (1980), 631-642.


31. Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, Jackson Pollock: An American Saga (New York: Clarson N. Potter, 1989), p. 621. Naifeh and Smith perpetuate the media image of Pollock's art to his publicity: the tortured art of a tortured soul. Peter Fuller also tends to do this; see Beyond the Crisis in Art (London: Writers


43. Maynard, Venice West, 22-59; Lipton quoted on p. 23.


52. Donal Henahan, "Experiments in Movement: Merce Cunningham," *Saturday Evening Post*, 19 October 1968, pp. 40-45. This issue of the Post also included an interview with Vice President Hubert Humphrey about his candidacy for President and a guest editorial by General Curtis LeMay advocating nuclear proliferation.


57. Pluralism is discussed in, among other works, Diggins *Proud Decades*, pp. 252-253; and Polenberg, *One Nation Divisible*, pp. 103-105.


68. The quote is from D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, p. 305. Casey Nelson Blake points out, in the context of the early twentieth century van, that the consumer culture was not the only alternative to Victorian gentility; see Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 7-8.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION: THE PARADOXES OF SUCCESS,
1965-1990

INTRODUCTION

The German philosopher, Jurgen Habermas, pronounced this verdict on modernism: "Modernism is dominant but dead." Habermas described the ironic fate of the avant-garde. Vanguardists strove to transform their culture. By the middle of the twentieth century, the vanguard nemesis, the genteel culture, had been destroyed. As was described above, a new culture emerged in which advance guard influence was strong. But this was not the culture envisioned by radical innovators. In part, the avant-garde had succeeded. But in their success was their dissolution.¹

At the end of the twentieth century the language of the avant-garde was often still used. But the reality was that alienated vanguardists had become culturally integrated, innovation had become convention, and few intellectuals still believed in a future cultural redemption.
ALIENATION TO INTEGRATION

The argument of this work is that by the 1960s the avant garde had become integrated into the American consumer culture and that this destroyed the avant garde. The objection could be raised, I have noted, that the integration signalled a victory for the avant garde. Thus, the counter culture and new left could be pointed to as examples of how avant garde ideas entered mainstream culture and transformed society. The counter culture, it could be argued, destroyed the stuffy, conformist culture of the fifties and opened to young people new vistas of consciousness and possibilities of lifestyle. The new left, one could maintain, challenged the cold war ideology and brought an end to the Vietnam War.2

This argument has some cogency. Members of the new American vanguard certainly contributed to the ideology of the new left and the counter culture and took part in the movements. Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder took part in the 1967 Human Be-In at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. In 1968 Ginsberg joined the protest against the Vietnam War at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago and chanted mantras to keep the peace between demonstrators and the police.3

But the movements of the sixties really demonstrate the paradoxes of avant garde success. Many of the activists of the New Left and proponents of the counter culture, especially in the early stages of the movements, believed that they would witness the transformation of
American society. Instead the media distorted the movements and integrated them into the consumer culture just as the cultural radicals before them had been integrated. The coverage of the new left by the news media trivialized, polarized, and finally marginalized the movement. While a few leaders became media celebrities, the movement disintegrated into factionalism and nihilistic violence. The counter culture became just another consumer culture lifestyle. The music of the movement, rock and roll, became a mainstay of the established record companies. The dress of the hippies became a counter culture conformity that produced high sales for the manufacturers of denim. As one underground journalist observed in 1970, "The Establishment is slowly finding ways to exploit the radical movement."^4

The integration of the counter culture occurred not just because of the opportunism of the merchants of consumption but also because the young never really repudiated the values of the consumer culture. They bought different things than their elders—marijuana rather than alcohol, blue jeans rather than three-piece suits, stereos rather than washing machines—but the young defined their lifestyle by their purchases as did millions of other Americans unsympathetic to counter culture aims. As vanguard publisher Don Carpenter observed to his friend, poet Philip Whalen, in 1966, "The hippies...all fancy themselves enemies of the state but in fact they are not. Enemies of the state are known by what they put on paper, not their haircuts, clothes and drug taking habits, all of which can
be be shucked off in no time and model citizens emerge." In the
movements of the 1960s, avant garde ideals reached and motivated to
action a large number of people but the results were hardly what
vanguardists desired.5

The opposite of alienation is integration. The paradox of the
avant garde since the 1960s is that the two have not been mutually
exclusive. The art of political protest is a case in point. The
Civil Rights and Anti-War movements of the 1960s inspired many
innovative artists to respond with their own work, and during that
decade, political art assumed an importance that it had not had since
the 1930s, an importance that continued through the 1980s. Artists
organized exhibitions, demonstrations, and other activities to
protest, in the words of the organizers of the 1970 New York Art
Strike, "war, racism, and oppression." Frederic Rzewski, for
example, was an activist composer. His compositions included a
cantata, Struggle, based on texts by Frederic Douglass, and the song
Attica, based on a text Rzewski found in the 1960s underground
magazine Ramparts. But Rzewski did not find himself on the periphery
of American culture. His theme and variations on a Chilean
revolutionary folksong, "El Pueblo Unido Jamas Sera Vencido,"
premiered at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., with pianist
Ursula Oppens. In the 1980s Robert Rauschenberg founded the
Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Interchange (ROCI) to use art to
promote intercultural understanding and peace. The project received
favorable notice from Time magazine critic Robert Hughes, who
declared that "in the ROCI project one may eventually see the flowering of Rauschenberg's mature identity, the arcadian as utopian, spinning a poetry of affirmation out of an opaque and hideously conflicted time."6

Protest art, born of alienation from the prevailing culture, thus gained acceptance into institutions of culture. This is not to say that everybody liked the work or approved of the message. But the integration into American society indicated an important change in the context of avant gardists. Where alienated protest is expected, the work loses a great deal of impact.

Innovative artists of the seventies and eighties also continued to be integrated into the commercial world. In 1968, David Rockefeller was instrumental in the founding of the Business Committee for the Arts (BCA), an institution dedicated to encouraging, through publicity and education, business contributions to the arts. A manager for a multinational oil company declared that the company funded art projects because "the arts serve...as a social lubricant. And if business is to continue in big cities, it needs a lubricated environment." Many business leaders seemed to agree: in 1985 business contributions to the arts totaled $698 million (compared to $163 million from government sources).7

Corporate managers funded, generally through their public relations and advertising budgets, a variety of arts projects for the reasons discussed in Chapter 7: to improve the image of the firm and to increase sales. Business people also argued that the arts were an
essential tool to winning the Cold War against Communism. In answer to a 1969 survey of industrialists sponsored by BCA, a majority of respondents agreed with the statement that

the ultimate dedication to our way of life will be won, not on the basis of economic achievements alone, but on the basis of those precious yet intangible elements which enable the individual to live a fuller, wiser, more satisfying existence. We must...[bring] our cultural achievements into balance with our material well-being through more intimate corporate involvement with the arts.

Some corporate executives linked support for the arts with conservative economic policy. Businessman William Blount declared in a 1980 BCA pamphlet that

art and commerce...each require as much freedom as possible to survive and prosper.... are we [businesspeople] instruments of the federal government? No,...we fight against it. So does the artist.... [Freedom] is being persistently eroded everywhere by ill-advised and ill-conceived regulation, taxation, and other forms of government control.... So we are engaged in an important work in furthering the arts.... [We] are helping to keep open those avenues of freedom along which art and commerce both travel.

Though business leaders tended to sponsor traditional forms of art, they also funded the avant garde. A BCA publication reproduced a 1968 advertisement for Merce Cunningham’s dance company and the Brooklyn department store funding the performance. The copywriter, noting proudly that the firm was the first to have a private subway station and to give an elephant to the zoo, declared that the company was "not only contemporary but also often in the avant-garde!" This text indicates not only how conventional the avant garde had become by the late 1960s, but also how the meaning of avant gardism was not understood. In the 1970s and 1980s the managers of a Minneapolis
bank collected what they described as "radical and upsetting" works, such as photographs by the English artists Gilbert and George. Lynn Sounder, the curator of the collection, explained: "Art is the most powerful visual symbol of this organization's commitment to change, which is why our collection upsets people." In the seventies and eighties advertisers also continued to find so-called avant garde art useful to sell products. Composer Philip Glass, dancer Twyla Tharpe, and painter Ed Ruscha were among the many innovators who made advertisements in this time period. All of these presentations and uses for the avant garde indicate the trivialization of the movement that occurred as cultural radicalism became tamed and integrated into American commercial culture.9

The avant garde also became integrated into American society through government funding. Government funding for the arts became increasingly important from the 1950s forward, first through state and local arts councils, then through the federal programs of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Thus, for example, the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, with state and local funding, presented avant garde film, music, and dance. The NEA, through grants to the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines (CCLM), funded the publication of innovative literature in little magazines. Work connected to the historic avant garde never figured prominently in NEA or NEH budgets, and not all innovators welcomed the money awarded their colleagues, but that innovations once (and sometimes still) considered radical
could receive funding from government agencies indicated further that an alienated vanguard had become increasingly integrated into American society in the last decades of the twentieth century.10

In 1959 the administrators of the University of Chicago censored the Chicago Review because the editors intended to publish excerpts from William S. Burroughs's novel, Naked Lunch. Something over twenty years later, Burroughs was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Yesterday's avant garde had become today's literary establishment. Increasingly, today's "avant garde" was also today's establishment. Alienation did not preclude a creator's integration into society. Furthermore, from the mid-sixties forward, continuous artistic innovation was solidly integrated into institutions of American culture.11

INNOVATION TO CONVENTION

The pluralism in which American art and literature became embedded in the 1960s became even more pronounced in the following decades. Music historian Nicholas E. Tawa characterized the postwar musical scene as "a most wondrous babble," and the phrase aptly described the diversity of American art and music in the last decades of the twentieth century. Was there amidst this confusion an authentic avant garde movement? Some commentators argued that there was. Douglas Davis, in a 1982 essay in Art in America, contended that new forms such as earth sculpture and performance art represented an advance guard determined to resist the commodification
that consumed their predecessors. Likewise, Richard Kostelanetz maintained in his 1982 collection, *The Avant-Garde in Literature*, that a new literary avant-garde emerged in the 1960s defined by a self-reflexive concern with language and a tendency to "miscegenate" across accepted genre boundaries. Art historian Henry M. Sayre argued in 1989 that after 1970 "a distinct and definable avant-garde in American art and literature ... [had] organized itself in opposition to an apparently recalcitrant set of assumptions, shared by mainstream museums, galleries, magazines, publishers, and funding agencies, about what constitutes a 'work' of art."\(^1\)

These commentators argue ably for the continued existence of the avant-garde in America. They posit a community alienated from American culture, producing radically innovative work that is typically resistant to integration into the commercial world of art and publishing. Most of these innovative artists believed that their work challenged the perception of viewers, and some of these creators argued further that the resulting new perceptions can contribute to changing the culture. Sayre, Kostelanetz, and Davis contended that the argument thus far presented is wrong; the avant-garde is not dead but continues to operate in American culture.\(^2\)

These arguments can be tested against in the case of a contemporary movement claiming avant-garde status: the feminist art movement. Probably the strongest candidate among recent innovations for avant-garde status. While largely resistant to commercial integration, the feminist van is well integrated into institutions of
contemporary American culture and represents the paradoxical success of the avant garde. Cultural radicalism has become a convention in modern America, rather than a revolutionary movement for cultural renewal.

In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist artists constituted a new movement. Women alienated from a commodified and male-dominated art world created works that expressed women's experience. Judy Chicago remembered an early show at California State University, Fullerton, at which she clearly stated her feminist intentions, and yet "male reviewers refused to accept that my work was intimately connected to my femaleness." Instead, these critics interpreted Chicago's and other women's work in formalist terms. The most extreme example was the work of a friend of Chicago's who included bloody tampons in her piece. A critic described these as "white material with red spots."14

The feminist innovators also discovered that while they could learn from male vanguardists, these men, too, often did not appreciate the challenges facing talented women, in art or any field. Dancer Yvonne Rainer, while appreciative of John Cage's important contributions to vanguard aesthetics, criticized his stated purpose of not attempting "to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements on creation, but simply to wake up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent..." Rainer contended that "only a man born with a sunny disposition" could make such an apolitical statement. She affirmed the use of chance techniques developed by
Cage, but not "so we may awaken to this excellent life; on the contrary, so we may the more readily awaken to the ways in which we have been led to believe that this life is so excellent, just, and right."  

The work of the feminist vanguard has taken a variety of forms, but has generally been motivated by the goal of creating a future in which women's experiences and perspectives would be recognized as important in the same way that male experiences and views had long been accepted in the art world. For example, in the 1980s the Guerilla Girls, the self-styled "conscience of the art world," used posters to inform and denounce the discriminatory practices of New York galleries and other institutions of the art world. Some of the most innovative feminist works have been performance pieces. In Interior Scroll, for example, Carolee Schneemann disrobed, outlined the contours of her body with paint, read from a text while assuming various poses from a life modelling class, and then read from another text that she unraveled from her vagina, which commented on the differing perceptions of men and women. Other women have pursued collaborative approaches, often using traditional "women's" skills such as weaving and pottery making, as in Judy Chicago’s 1979 installation The Dinner Party. Composer Pauline Oliveros designed works that combined meditation, music, and theater. In pieces such as Crow Two (1975), she instructed the musicians to meditate rather than continue playing for the benefit of the audience. Oliveros thus challenged basic notions of art and performance by using ritual to
create a nurturing environment. These artists, as well as others such as Laurie Anderson, Jenny Holzer, Cindy Sherman, and Barbara Kruger, have continued to challenge traditional notions of art as well as to challenge the acceptance of commercial and sexist values in the avant-garde tradition.¹⁶

While these women artists did experience alienation from their society and much of their work proved to be both shocking to the sensibilities of many Americans and resistant to commercial appropriation, they were not avant garde in the historic sense. The feminist movement was integrated into universities, museums, and state and federal funding sources. For example, in 1968 Schneemann presented her performance piece, *Illinois Central*, at three different campuses of the State University of New York. She presented her 1974 piece, *Up To And Including Her Limits*, at the University Art Museum at the University of California, Berkeley. For many of her performances Schneemann received money from the New York State Council for the Arts and the NEA. Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* was installed at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Pauline Oliveros taught at the University of California, San Diego, where *Crow Two* was performed, and was composer in residence at Stanford University, the University of Washington, Wesleyan University, the Walker Art Center, and the Cleveland Museum. Laurie Anderson not only had commercial success with her performance videos and tours, but she was one of several feminist artists, including Cindy Sherman and Jenny Holzer, shown in 1990 at the Hirshhorn Museum of the
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Such strong and steady support from institutions of the established culture indicate that innovative art remains integrated into the culture.17

This is not to say that everyone in late twentieth century America approved of what these, and other artists, were doing. In the 1980s and 1990s, critics of NEA grants to radical artists created a great deal of controversy. A case in point is that of feminist performance artist Karen Fenley. In 1990 an NEA panel awarded Fenley a grant. Critics objected to the award on the grounds that the nudity Fenley included in her performance was obscene. The artist maintained she was making a statement against pornography. NEA chair John Frohnmayer sided with the critics and disapproved the grant. The result was a well-publicized controversy between innovative artists and their supporters and critics of the artists and the NEA. Another feminist performance artist, Rachel Rosenthal, turned down her NEA grant in protest.18

While not wish to diminish the reality of the "culture war" taking place in the late twentieth century, impugn the integrity of these artists, or deny the validity of many of the criticisms of contemporary America that they raise, these events must be put in perspective, however. Fenley's opponents did not deny her right to perform. Indeed, within a month of the denial of her grant, she performed at Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center, a place that has as good a claim to being the heart of the cultural establishment in modern America as any. The controversy was about the use of public
funds for such a performance. Martha Wilson, the director of a performance space in New York city that received NEA grants to stage innovative works defended the grants: "The artists today are saying, 'I'm proud of being an American; I pay my taxes; I'm a loyal citizen, and I have a right to be supported as a member of my culture.'" For artists to claim both the status of being avant garde and the right to public monies is clearly a contradiction in terms. This is not to say that they should not be funded or not, or to argue that if Finley, Rosenthal, and others refused such funding they would become avant garde. These events further demonstrate that innovation without a sense of alienation has become the norm. In part this represents the success of what formerly might have been the avant garde.19

The cultural innovators of the twentieth century largely succeeded in their goal to destroy the Victorian producer culture concepts of culture and aesthetics, replacing them with notions of art as a rebellious and continuously innovative activity. The avant garde has, in short, become a convention of late twentieth century culture. This is not to say that it is an uncontested convention, but that from the 1960s forward, the idea of avant gardism has been so well integrated into the commercial and cultural institutions of modern America that to speak of a van leading the way to the future has ceased to be socially and culturally meaningful. The future dreamed of by previous avant gardists is now, or at least as much of it as we are likely to get.
Ihe conventionality of the avant garde can be seen in the general acceptance of the avant-garde definition of art, the relations between innovative art and commerce, and the continued institutionalization of the new art into the universities. By the last decades of the twentieth century the avant-garde understanding of art had become, in an attenuated form, the standard definition of art in popular usage. In 1992, a New York Times writer declared, "Science, like art, has to do with challenging our presuppositions, shaking up our world view, changing us." The focus on innovation and changed perception presented in this definition states avant garde aims. The idea of alienation is, significantly, missing. But when people expect art to shock them, to "challenge them," the artist who produces such work is not likely to experience alienation. That the writer here was using art to define science indicates that he assumed his audience would accept this definition of art. The writer appeared oblivious to the ahistorical character of his definition, another indication of its conventionality. But such a definition of art would not have been possible before the late 19th century; it is a measure of the success of the members of the avant garde that their definition of art should be the frame that defines all art.20

The idea of the avant garde as a convention of commerce was illustrated by the uses of the innovative artists by real-estate developers. In the 1970s the movement of artists to the SoHo section of Manhattan resulted in the well-publicized revitalization of a decaying industrial district. By the 1980s, developers exploited
this process for their own profit. Developer J. Burton Casey described in a BCA pamphlet how his company included artist residences in the redevelopment of an Austin, Texas, warehouse district. Using money from the promotion budget of the project to subsidize low rent studios for artists, the firm managed to persuade people that "it was avant-garde/cutting edge to locate in that part of the city rather than feeling as if they were moving to the slums," Casey reported. The Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art served a similar function in the redevelopment of the Los Angeles city center in the 1980s. The examples could be multiplied of the links between art, especially innovative art, and urban redevelopment. American businesspeople continued to find uses for what had been an alienated avant garde.21

In the decades since the 1960s, the avant garde continued to be a convention at American universities. In 1989, for example, at the Ohio State University, a multi-million dollar art center was opened dedicated "to present the leading edge of the arts of our time...and to encourage the creation of daring new works for the future." The rhetoric supporting the Wexner Center was that of the avant garde. First exhibits illustrated the same process of legitimation through historization that was discussed in Chapter 8. The genealogy presented at the Wexner Center focussed on the innovators from the late fifties forward, including, John Cage, described in a brochure as "the patriarch of experimental music"; and pop, conceptual, and minimalist art. The conventionality of the Wexner Center was further
demonstrated by the performances scheduled for the first year. These included established figures such as the Martha Graham Dance Company and Trisha Brown, and the latest "stars" of performance art, including Laurie Anderson, the Kronos Quartet, Karen Finley, and Rachel Rosenthal.22

In an age during which so much art is self-reflexive, there was remarkably little reflection on what being avant garde meant. At the Wexner Center, new works were presented not so much as radical breaks with the past but as part of an historical continuum of art history. In this manner the avant garde was historicized and legitimated. Critic Hilton Kramer pointed out the appropriateness of the fact that construction of the Wexner Center was largely funded by Columbus, Ohio, retail magnate Leslie Wexner. Having made a fortune by making the chic and trendy affordable and marketing it to middle-class young people, often with advertising that places the clothing in the context of the New York art world, Wexner brought the chic and trendy New York art world to the Midwestern middle classes.23

THE END OF THE FUTURE

In 1986, a writer in the Public Relations Journal declared that companies that took the "risk" to support controversial art would communicate that they were "progressive, adventurous, and concerned with the future." While business leaders may have seen the future in innovative work, most creative intellectuals did not believe that the future was connected to their work. In the last decades of the
twentieth century, the Cagean aesthetic with its focus on celebrating the present moment continued to influence many. At the same time, other intellectuals, influenced by structuralist and post-structuralist thought, argued that the language we use to describe our world also to a large extent created that world. As a result, these commentators argued, it was impossible to go beyond the subjective and describe or prescribe a future for others. As a result of these developments, the idea of the future became an irrelevant abstraction.24

From the 1960s radical innovators rejected the idea that their work communicated significantly to their culture. Painter Jasper Johns declared in 1964, "I am concerned with a thing's not being what it was, with its becoming something other than what it is, with any moment in which one identifies a thing precisely, and with the slipping away of that moment, with any moment seeing or saying and letting it go at that." Novelist and critic Raymond Federman wrote in his 1975 essay "Surficticn—Four Propositions in the Form of a Manifesto" that "the writer will no longer be considered a prophet, a philosopher, or even a sociologist who predicts, teaches, or reveals absolute truths." Rather, Federman declared, the writer "will stand on equal footing with the reader in their efforts to make sense out of the language common to both of them, to give sense to the fiction of life. In other words, as it has been said of poetry, fiction, also, will not only mean, but it will be!" The new attitude is founded on the rejection of the cultural concerns that preoccupied
members of the historic avant garde. Johns, Federman, and other intellectuals rejected the idea that their work communicated a collective unconscious or mythic concerns of humanity. They saw their work as constructed objects, no more. 

Structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers of the late twentieth century argued that language defined people’s mental landscape and delimited what they could perceive. Whatever might be "out there" on the other side of an individual’s subjectivity was alien to him or her. Nothing comes to a person’s mind except through filters of perception and language. The life he or she perceived, therefore, was, as Federman said, a "fiction." The change from the historic avant garde notion that perception was the way to liberation, to the notion that people were all more or less prisoners of their own perceptions, is astounding.

Both ideas are rooted in the rejection of older notions about an immutable givenness to the world. The first generations of avant gardists challenged the Victorian producer culture picture of a stable world by arguing that by changing the premises of perception, the world changed. In the late twentieth century, intellectuals came to the conclusion that if there was no immutability at all but only our own subjectivity, then no one subjective picture could be privileged over another. Therefore, no one could describe the future for anyone else. One individual’s description becomes prescription for another.
CONCLUSION

The condition of pluralist disorder and presentism that characterized the late twentieth century West is often described as postmodernism. The term postmodern is fraught with ambiguities, not least of which is the question of whether such a thing as postmodernism even exists at all. Some critics have argued that all the qualities of modernism are present in the successor: the synthesis of styles and forms, self-reflexive irony, self-consciousness about the work of art as a work of art, the rejection of history. There are, indeed, many continuities between the two. There is one key distinction, however: what Jean François Lyotard characterized as the central idea of postmodernism, the disbelief in metanarratives. Metanarratives are the stories that create a unified culture. They describe where a culture has been, what gives meaning and purpose to life, and where the culture is headed.26

The avant garde emerged from a conflict over metanarratives at the end of the nineteenth century. The old culture was the producer culture. During the twentieth century, two conflicting "modern" metanarratives emerged to replace the producer culture: the modernist culture identified with the avant garde, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the consumer culture identified with modern industrial capitalism. The outcome of the cultural conflict, however, was determined less by the differences between the two than the similarities. The (dis)integration of cultural radicalism
resulted from the close ideological connections between the avant garde and the new middle class that created the culture of consumption.27

The avant garde was, as Daniel Bell points out, an ideology of abundance. The members of the vanguard rejected producer culture ideas of psychic and emotional scarcity. Avant gardists believed in the unlimited potential for self-fulfillment and cultural redemption through creative innovation. These vanguard ideals paralleled those of the promoters of the consumption ethic. The consumer ethic was also an ideology of abundance promising self-fulfillment. Redemption in the consumer culture meant the recreation of the self as popular personality, a re-creation that prominently included mass produced consumer goods.28

Unwittingly, cultural radicals contributed to their absorption through their critique of producer values, especially in the first decades of the century. As avant-garde culture and consumer culture developed, the latter proved the most powerful cultural force. The alienation of members of the advance guard ended in commodification. Commodified as celebrities, avant gardists provided entertainment. Commodified as a lifestyle, avant gardism defined a consumption community for rebellious individuals. Commodified as a status symbol, vanguardist culture created an avenue of advancement for social climbing bourgeois. Commodified as innovation, the van provided intellectual support for style obsolescence. The avant garde became integrated into the consumer culture: part therapy, part business.
The commodification of the avant garde also resulted from ideological weaknesses of the avant garde, in particular the failure of the idea of the future. In the 1950s, as we saw in chapter five, many members of the new American van began to focus exclusively on the present rather than the future. What mattered for these cultural radicals was the process of creation in the moment. This presentism resulted from an extreme individualism. The hope of redemption became completely focussed on the creative act of each individual in the present moment. This belief was, essentially, a rejection of the idea of culture. Historically, vanguardists, whatever their differences, believed in culture as a more or less unified entity defined by basic underlying beliefs that people shared often unconsciously. Alienated from the Victorian producer culture, avant gardists tried to change the premises of their culture through innovation. Members of the postwar vanguard rejected the quest for what Sidrah Stich called the "sublime symbol" or the "redemptive myth" that could unify a vanguard culture. Instead, cultural innovators pursued individual creativity in a context of pluralism. Without the focus on a culture with a future, the avant garde lost direction and purpose as a movement.²⁹

Innovation for the sake of innovation became the sine qua non of a now incoherent movement. In this context, individuals and institutions could devise their own meaning for innovations. In the universities, artistic innovation became translated into a specialized academic discipline. In business, the slogan "make it
new meant internal innovations to increase productivity and external innovations to increase consumption. Historicized as the culture of the twentieth century, by the 1960s the avant garde was no longer a radical force shaping the future.
Notes to Chapter IX


7. The discussion on business and the arts in this and the following paragraphs is based on R. Bolton, "Enlightened Self-Interest: The Avant Garde in the 80s," Afterimage, February


Avant-Garde!


13. In 1972 critic Richard Gilman also argued for the continued existence of the advance guard. Gilman contended that aesthetic innovation alone defined the avant garde and that the cultural radicalism of past vanguards was merely an accident of history. This argument is, however, untenable, given our present knowledge of the ideology of avant gardists. See Richard Gilman, "The Idea of the Avant-Garde," Partisan Review, 39 (1972), 382-396.


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