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Cultural Revolutions: Turkey and the United States During the Long 1960s

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Table of Contents

Title Page.....	i
Copyright Notice.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Abstract.....	v-vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii-x
Introduction	1-15
Chapter 1: Aesthetics and Politics Between Cold War and Cultural Revolution	16-74
Chapter 2: Make It (Second) New: Turkish Modernist Poetry	75-149
Chapter 3: Poetry and Revolution in Berkeley and Beyond: Denise Levertov in the Sixties	150-218
Chapter 4: Radicals and Rockers in the Turkish Countryside: The Revolutionary Antinomies of Anadolu Rock	219-279
Chapter 5: Transforming Consciousness, Transforming Life: The Poetry of Diane di Prima and Sonia Sanchez	280-370
Bibliography	371-378

Abstract

Cultural Revolutions: Turkey and the United States During the Long 1960s

Kenan Sharpe

This dissertation examines the relationship between social movements and cultural production in the long sixties in Turkey and the U.S. The concept of cultural revolution speaks to an oft noticed but under-theorized aspect of the period: the way movements across the world (from Cuba to France, Ghana to China) included questions of consciousness, psychic states, habits, modes of interaction, and everyday life within more concrete discussions of political/economic revolution. This project traces the theory and practice of cultural revolution through developments in cultural production. In both the Turkey and the U.S. poetry and popular music were sites of vigorous aesthetic-political debate. This dissertation compares the Turkish sixties (vastly understudied within anglophone scholarship) with the more canonical case of the U.S. and examines points of overlap and divergence in the spirit of offering a more worlded account of the period.

Chapter 1 builds on scholarship on the global sixties, the Cold War, and twentieth-century aesthetics and politics to sketch the historical and theoretical contexts for the four case studies that follow. Chapter 2 focuses on poets associated with the Second New (İkinci Yeni), an experimental literary movement that was severely critiqued by the sixties Left for being ‘formalist’ and ‘meaningless.’ My recuperative reading argues that the Second New’s seemingly hermetic modernism contains a rebuke to more ascetic factions of the Left and a call for sexuality,

everyday life, and psychic states to be incorporated into visions of revolutionary change. Chapter 3 explores U.S.-based poet Denise Levertov's anti-Vietnam War poetry that stimulated vigorous debate over the relationship of art and politics, modernism and realism. Chapter 4 centers on a genre fusing rock 'n' roll with Turkish folk music called Anatolian Rock. The music of Tülay German, Cem Karaca, Erkin Koray, Moğollar, and Selda Bağcan reveals how the encounter of Turkish youth with international mass culture produced hybrid and creative re-inventions of tradition: Left-leaning rockers produced anti-imperialist battle anthems for the Turkish peasantry performed in a musical genre associated with the U.S. Chapter 5 centers on two U.S. poets: Diane Di Prima, most often associated with the Beat writers in New York and the California counterculture, and Sonia Sanchez, a prominent poet in the Black Arts movement who wrote for and about other African Americans. Both poets focus their attention both on practical and the mystical, social reproduction and consciousness-transformation.

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Introduction

We must remember that the conditions and the very existence of social movements enable participants to imagine something different, to realize that things need not always be this way. It is that imagination, that effort to see the future in the present, that I shall call “poetry” or “poetic knowledge.” (9)

- Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*

This dissertation centers on the relationship between social movements and cultural production in the long 1960s in the Republic of Turkey and the United States of America. The concept of *cultural revolution* outlined here speaks to an oft noticed but under-theorized aspect of the world sixties: the way movements in this period sought to include questions of consciousness, psychic states, habits, modes of interaction, and everyday life within more concrete discussions of political/economic revolution.

In the sixties, revolutionaries and thinkers as varied as Kwame Nkrumah, Che Guevara, Frantz Fanon, Shulamith Firestone, Paulo Freire, Guy Debord, and Timothy Leary imagined the creation of new human beings free from the ingrained patterns of submission imposed by capitalism, colonialism, gender, racism, authoritarianism, and/or consumer society. In the period, movements across the world put forward a new conception of revolution that was not reducible to the seizure of power from one class by another, but that also aimed at a thoroughgoing transformation of everyday life, sexuality, art, language, and modes of thinking, feeling, and relating. During the world sixties new slogans like “Power to the imagination” and ‘Building a revolution by breaking inner chains’ replaced “Power to the Soviets’ or ‘Build the

Communist Party” (Westad xxi). More accurately, the politics represented within these two types of slogans were combined into a single project: cultural revolution.

Consciousness, pleasure, the psyche, and everyday life are also the terrain of the aesthetic—with committed artists harnessing their work to transform minds and bodies (Eagleton *Ideology* 23). Oppositional movements from Dada to Futurism have seen artistic activity as essential in the project of transforming subjectivity and, with it, society. The sixties represented a fever-pitch in this kind of politicized aesthetics. This dissertation traces the theory and practice of cultural revolution through developments in cultural production, more specially in the poems and songs of the period in which one can uncover imaginings of a total transformation in established ways of understanding, living, and relating.

In both the Turkey and the U.S. poetry and music were sites of vigorous cultural revolutionary debate. These often rancorous disagreements allowed activists to work through a number of critical issues: the role of art in social movements; the question of whether art is autonomous from political concerns or subject to them; the ‘progressive’ or ‘reactionary’ character of various aesthetic movements or approaches (realism, modernism, folk culture, mass culture, and anti-art); the role of nationalism and internationalism in cultural production; the effects of cultural imperialism and/or corporate cooptation; the relationship between individual and collective liberation; and finally the place of the aesthetic more generally, and subjectivity in particular, within political movements that often required ascetic discipline from its cadres and supporters. In the sixties, art was not merely expressive or decorative but was rather

a central site where movements grappled with self-definition and worked out often quite practical, strategic questions. *Cultural Revolutions* explores these issues through specific poems and songs produced adjacent to or within explicitly revolutionary movements.

While aesthetic and political developments are difficult to separate in any context, the sixties in particular were marked by an incredible convergence, on a world scale, of significant events on the political, economic, and cultural levels of social life. The turbulent year of 1968 (with the North Vietnamese Tet Offensive, riots after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in the U.S., Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia) has often been used as a metonym for these simultaneous cycles of radicalization. Recently, it is more customary to speak of the ‘long sixties’ to describe the global overlap of artistic movements, student protests, anti-imperialist struggles, capitalist development, workers movements, and uprisings by minoritized or marginalized groups.¹ In most accounts the period lasts roughly from the independence of Ghana in 1957, through the early days of the civil rights movement in the U.S., to the oil crisis and the coup against Chile’s socialist president Salvador Allende in 1973. This shared historical situation was made possible by the advent of powerful decolonization movements, the expansion of capitalism on an unprecedented global scale, and the Green Revolution in agriculture, which made the world’s population predominantly non-agricultural for the first time in history

¹ On the long sixties see Jameson’s “Periodizing the 60s,” Marwick’s *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States c.1958-1974*, Horn’s *The Spirit of ‘68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976*, and Jian et al., *Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties*.

(Jameson “Periodizing” 180). Within this truly global conjuncture, however, various local responses containing unique temporalities were possible. The point of periodization is not to reduce the various levels of social life (economic, political, and cultural) or the various regions of the world into the undifferentiated unity of some vaguely defined, Spenglerian zeitgeist. Rather, we periodize in order to mark the ‘horizon note,’ as the droning chord of traditional Indian music is called, against which individual variations and modifications stand out more starkly.

Taking any year from the long sixties, one discovers events of world-historical importance. For example, in the space of the twelve calendar months of 1967, the following occurred: the Shanghai Commune was established during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China; Valerie Solanas published her SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) Manifesto in New York; Che Guevara was captured and killed in Bolivia; a right-wing junta took power in Greece; the Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*; the Naxalbari Uprising began in India; Turkish rocker Cem Karaca first performed the influential single “Emrah” and inspired a new current of peasant-centered psychedelic music; the Detroit riot took place during a ‘long hot summer’ of urban revolts; the Dialectics of Liberation Congress was convened in London bringing figures such as Kwame Ture [Stokely Carmichael], Herbert Marcuse, R. D. Laing together in the same room; protests grow in West Berlin over the arrival of the Shah of Iran; Bob Dylan recorded *The Basement Tapes* with The Band while convalescing from his motorcycle accident; the Six-Day War broke out and in response several Middle Eastern countries would engage in an

oil embargo against the U.S. and the U.K. that would lead to the formation of OAPEC; the Summer of Love in San Francisco transformed the counterculture; Nina Simone recorded the civil rights anthem "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free"; students in Turkey began a multi-year campaign against the presence of the U.S. Navy on their shores; and Jean-Luc Godard released the *La Chinoise*.

Though 1967 was particularly eventful, every year of the long sixties provides examples of illuminating linkages between seemingly disparate occurrences. The concept of cultural revolution seeks to uncover how the release of a rock song and a peasant uprising can be seen—and were in fact seen by many at the time—as part of same project of rebellion. During the long sixties, protests and movements from Vietnam to Mexico and Paris to Czechoslovakia put forward an expanded notion of the political that called for liberation in all aspects of life: economic, artistic, physical, and affective. No understanding of the sixties is possible without recognizing how developments in popular music, literature, cinema, theater, visual art, and other media both responded to and were active in constructing the objective conditions that seemed to bring the world, at least for a time, to the brink of revolution.

Cultural Revolutions takes seriously the fusion of politics and culture— aesthetics and activism—wherever it occurs while also recognizing differences in how movements across the world understood and presented themselves. By comparing the Turkish sixties (vastly understudied within Anglophone scholarship) with the more canonical case of the U.S., and de-centering the latter through the

perspective of the former, this dissertation aims to stimulate new perspectives on the role of culture in social movements throughout the world sixties.

This dissertation brings new emphasis to existing scholarship on the Turkish sixties.² Most accounts of this eventful period of hope and struggle, student/worker uprisings and state repression, focus primarily on the exploits of politicians and militants or socio-political changes like rural-to-urban migration or import-substitution policies.³ Yet the Turkish sixties also witnessed an incredible explosion of poetry, music, the novel, cinema, drama, and art too often left out of the heavily documentary or sociological research conducted on the period.⁴ Studies focused on individual genres (the novel, music, etc.) sometimes explore the political backdrop of explicitly engaged cultural objects, but do not often explore the question of cultural production itself as a terrain of struggle in the period.⁵ Rather than trading structure

² Unless otherwise noted, the use of the adjective “Turkish” [*Türkiyeli*] in this dissertation refers to someone or something from or in the Republic of Turkey, or a text of genre written in Turkish [*Türkçe*], not to ethnicity [*Türk*].

³ See Chapter One for a summary of the important events of the period.

⁴ See volumes by Alper, Aydınoğlu, Ersan, Keyder, and Polat that explore crucial questions such as: which segments of society participated in protests and why? What were the intellectual precedents for the theoretical ideas in circulation during the sixties? How were import-substitution policies connected to conflicts among competing sections of the state elite? How did Kemalist ideology embolden students in their dissent? However, this work tends to consider aesthetic and cultural topics separately from politics and economics, if at all.

⁵ This tendency to omit culture is beginning to shift, even if little cross-genre work is being done. A recent volume on the Turkish 1960s includes a chapter each on music, literature, and political cartoons (see Kaynar’s *Türkiye’nin 1960’lı Yılları*). Başgüney’s *Literary Production: Currents and Politics in Turkey (1960-1980)* focuses on the novel and poetry. Daldal’s *Art, Politics and Society: Social Realism in Italian and Turkish Cinemas* provides a helpful guide to debates over more nationalist and internationalist currents of Turkish socialist filmmaking. Alkan’s *Promethean Encounters: Representation of the Intellectual in the Modern Turkish Novel of the 1970s* and Günay-Erkol’s *Broken Masculinities: Solitude, Alienation, and Frustration in Turkish Literature after 1970* represent path-opening approaches to political Turkish novels in the second half of the long sixties. Informed by anthropology, Karakatsanis and Papadogiannis’ *The Politics of Culture in Turkey, Greece and Cyprus: Performing the Left since the Sixties* conceives of “culture” more broadly to include Left-wing symbols, performances, and rituals in the eastern Mediterranean.

for culture, the analysis here seeks to combine the levels of social life for a more complete portrait of this rich period in Turkish history.

Approaches to the U.S. sixties often have the opposite tendency: they focus mainly on culture.⁶ The popular imagination of the sixties is filled with images of tie-dyed flower children or long-haired anti-war protestors placing daisies in rifles. In this way, political activism is reduced to easily digestible and citable tropes while ‘merely’ cultural or lifestyle phenomena (rock music, the hippies, free love) are overemphasized. In both cases, popular discourse on the period downplays the thoroughgoing revolutionary challenge posed by social actors from below and the way this militancy is intertwined art and aesthetics. Many influential studies of the sixties separate the period into a noble and idealistic early phase (the civil rights movement, Students for a Democratic Society, anti-war pacificism) and a supposedly violent, unruly, irrational late phase (Third Worldist Marxism, the Weather Underground, lesbian separatism).⁷ Similarly, these studies often describe a split between politicians (the ‘serious’ New Left and anti-war movements) and hippies (countercultural movements, the Summer of Love, psychedelic experiments, back-to-the-landers, and rock bands). While historically there were tensions between these two broad wings of the movement, more often than not they cross-pollinated and influenced each other, particularly towards the more militant tail-end of the long

⁶ ‘U.S.’ is used throughout this dissertation, rather than the more common ‘American,’ in order to distinguish between references to the American continent and to the United States of America.

⁷ See Wini Breines’ “Whose New Left?” for a catalogue of scholarly books that reproduce this dichotomy of a “good” and “bad” sixties, including Todd Gitlin’s canonical study *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. For elaborations of the problem of splitting the sixties into positive and negative period see Echol’s *Shaky Ground* (65-66) and Elbaum’s *Revolution in the Air* (35-7).

sixties; this interplay was most visible within revolutionary nationalist groups like the Black Panthers, movements explicitly seeking to transform everyday life like sections of the women's liberation movement, and among the committed artists who transcended the supposed hippie-politico split altogether.

For both the Turkish and the U.S. sixties, politics and culture must be considered together in order to do justice to the combinatory ethos of cultural revolution that defined the era. Yet placing the U.S. and Turkey within a comparative framework also raises difficulties. The scholarship on the U.S. sixties is voluminous and also weighs heavily within studies of the world sixties. While the protest repertoire (boycotts, sit-ins, etc.), countercultural movements, student politics, and mass culture of the U.S. deeply influenced Left movements throughout the world, there is always the danger of treating the country as the origin point of what was a truly international and diffuse period. Many accounts of the Turkish sixties by both scholars and former activists are at pains to downplay the influence of external developments.

This isolationist tendency in the Turkish-language scholarship is exacerbated by the fact that the Turkish sixties, despite the intensity of its struggles and the richness of its cultural movements, figures minimally if at all in most Anglophone scholarship of the world sixties. One reason Turkey remains mostly invisible even within otherwise international accounts is that it fits uneasily into the "Three Worlds" concept that still shapes many studies of the period (the capitalist "First World," socialist "Second World," and the non-aligned countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin

America). Though capitalist, Turkey was not an advanced capitalist nation like France or the U.S. As part of the Western (rather than the socialist) bloc, it did not experience anything like the Prague Spring; and was never a colony but the successor to a fallen empire, Turkey in the sixties was not undergoing a literal national liberation struggle. Distinct from the decolonizing world yet sharing an emphasis on a non-capitalist road to development, possessing dynamic artistic and countercultural scenes yet shying away from the kind of lifestyle experiments popular in wealthier countries—the experience of Turkey in the sixties offers rich perspective on the world sixties. As in Mexico, Brazil, Greece, and Spain,⁸ the Turkish sixties fused elements of the youth counterculture with anti-colonial/anti-imperialist thought and strategy in a manner characteristic of what Immanuel Wallerstein calls the “semi-periphery” of the World-System.

Chapter One sketches out historical and theoretical contexts for the four case studies that follow, first by tracing the origins of the term “cultural revolution” and then by describing how specifically it was understood and enacted in the Turkish and U.S. contexts. While culture and politics were combined by movements in both countries, the proportions were different. Raymond Williams’ periodizing theory of

⁸ Discussions of the uneasy linking of culture and politics in the following works shed light on many of the seemingly distinctive aspects of the Turkish sixties: Zolov’s *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture*; Pensado and Ochoa’s *México Beyond 1968: Revolutionaries, Radicals, and Repression During the Global Sixties and Subversive Seventies*; Langland’s *Speaking of Flowers: Student Movements and the Making and Remembering of 1968 in Military Brazil*; Guya Accornero’s *The Revolution Before the Revolution: Late Authoritarianism and Student Protest in Portugal*; Kostis Kornetis’ *Children of the Dictatorship: Student Resistance, Cultural Politics and the 'Long 1960s' in Greece*; and Kornetis, Kotsovili, Nikolaos Papadogiannis’ *Consumption and Gender in Southern Europe since the Long 1960s*.

the “structure of feeling,” as well as his taxonomy of “emergent,” “dominant,” and “residual” phenomena help account for the overlaps and divergences between the U.S. and Turkey within the larger frame of the world sixties. Finally, Chapter One outlines the major events of the Turkish sixties and discusses the Cold War context that determined the uneven and unequal relationship between Turkey and the U.S.

The four case studies (two from Turkey and two from the U.S.) that make up the core chapters of *Cultural Revolutions* fall into two thematic sections. Part I (Chapters Two and Three) focuses on debates over the political valence of various aesthetic approaches and the acrimonious debate over the relationship of art to politics. These chapters investigate what happened when influential literary figures from the 1950s encountered the sixties Left. In both cases, key elements of cultural revolutionary thought (attention to consciousness-transformation and a focus on liberation as not only political-economic but also including aspects of everyday life, sexuality, sociality) were already present in this work. The poets explored in Part I represent “emergent” phenomena of the sixties. That is, already in the 1950s their work anticipated developments that would reach their fullest expression at the height of the sixties.

Chapter Two, “Make It (Second) New: Turkish Modernist Poetry,” focuses on the writers associated with the Second New, a poetic movement that gave rise to significant controversy when it appeared in the mid-1950s and again when it reached the height of its fame around 1968. Poets Ece Ayhan, Edip Cansever, Cemal Süreya, and Turgut Uyar transformed Turkish literature with their dense images, idiosyncratic

use of language, and focus on erotic desire, psychic states, and social outcasts. The Second New came under fire by the Turkish Left for being deliberately obscure and supposedly turning their back on political events. Taking a recuperative view of the Second New, this chapter argues that not only was the movement in step with sixties movements, it actually anticipated the cultural revolutionary tendencies of more canonical movements like the New Left in the U.S. and the May '68 protests in Paris.

Chapter Three, "Denise Levertov: Poetry and Revolution in People's Park," explores the poetic evolution that led a prominent U.S. poet whose 1950s work was inspired by the modernist aesthetic of H.D., Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams to the most explicitly activist period of her oeuvre. Radicalized by the war in Vietnam, in the mid-sixties Levertov began incorporating more directly political content into her work. Even as she began to include explicit calls for revolutionary violence in her poetry, this did not contradict the aesthetic underpinnings of her poetic project. Rather, it represented a logical following-through of its formal presuppositions. Levertov's activist poetry stimulated a vigorous debate over the relationship of art and politics, modernism and realism. Exploring the various positions taken by Levertov, her close friend and fellow poet Robert Duncan, and other contemporary figures shows Levertov's poetic-politics to be not the product of aberration or eccentricity but an anticipation of and response to the sixties emphasis on consciousness-transformation as a central site of revolutionary struggle.

While Part I focuses on emergent figures with a complex and sometimes ambiguous relationship to the fully-grown movements of the sixties, Part II focuses

on art produced within and alongside revolutionary milieus that coalesced circa 1968 and grew in strength towards the mid-1970s. The figures studied in Chapters Four and Five are more concretely grounded in social movements whose politics and the aesthetic sensibilities—responding to repression, state violence, and internal fractures—were harsher and more explicit. In step with this more armored approach, these revolutionary artists represent a hinge from the earlier emphasis on subjective liberation to the later attention to practical issues of community self-defense. They combine the focus on liberating individual subjectivity with an emphasis on arming the collective psyche. In both cases national liberation (both literal and metaphorical) come to the fore, as cultural revolution is rethought in terms of national survival.

Chapter Four, “Radicals and Rockers in the Turkish Countryside: The Revolutionary Antinomies of Anadolu Rock,” centers on a genre fusing rock ‘n’ roll with Turkish folk music. The music of artists such as Tülay German, Cem Karaca, Erkin Koray, Moğollar, and Selda Bağcan reveals how the encounter of Turkish youth with international mass culture produced hybrid and creative re-inventions of tradition. Having enjoyed widespread support from public taste-shapers, it is generally accepted that Anadolu Rock began as an apolitical genre. This chapter argues instead that Anadolu Rock was politically radical from the outset—long before rockers like Karaca began composing explicitly agitational rock anthems in the 1970s. Drawing on Kemalist conceptions of the countryside and village-ism [*köycülük*], Anadolu Rock made cultural sense due to its proximity to official nationalism. Just as the Turkish Left articulated its political goals within the discourse

of Kemalism and Third Worldism, so Anadolu Rock provided a way for musicians and their youthful fans to be simultaneously revolutionary, countercultural, and nationally minded. Yet because the Turkish Left began increasingly to see rock music as a product of cultural imperialism, Left-leaning rockers found themselves in a strange situation: they were producing battle anthems for Turkish peasants performed in a musical genre associated both with the ‘apolitical’ counterculture of the U.S. and the latter’s global importation of its mass cultural products. Through an analysis of key songs of the genre, this chapter explores the antinomies that radical rockers attempted to work through with their music.

The fifth and final chapter, “Transforming Consciousness, Transforming Life: The Poetry of Diane di Prima and Sonia Sanchez,” centers on two U.S. poets from two separate and seemingly opposed movements who share an approach to cultural revolution. Di Prima is most often associated with the Beat writers in New York and then with the California counterculture; Sanchez was a prominent poet in the Black Arts movement (BAM) who wrote for and about other African Americans. Yet they pay similar attention to two central components of culture revolution: the transformation of consciousness and the transformation of everyday life. Di Prima’s *Revolutionary Letters*, first collected in 1968, describe the psychic transformations individuals must undergo in tandem with the more practical work of revolution. Sanchez’s 1970 collection *We a BaddDDD People* envisions a form of revolutionary subjectivity that she, like other BAM writers, calls Blackness. At the same time, both poets are deeply concerned with practical matters of everyday life: food, drugs,

clothing, romantic relationships, and family arrangements. In di Prima's *Revolutionary Letters*, this didactic streak takes the form of to-do lists describing how the community should organize their lives to be ready for the apocalyptic change to come. Similarly, Sanchez's poetry critiques habits and patterns among African Americans and lays out a program for empowering the Black 'nation within a nation' that will produce new generations of warriors ready for revolution. The comparison of these two poets reveals how this dual attention to matters of consciousness and everyday life was present across otherwise different segments of the sixties Left, revealing a wider cultural revolutionary structure of feeling.

The poets and musicians in this dissertation all, to various degrees, represent the bridging of aesthetics and politics. Women artist-activists play a central role in every case study but Chapter One. This emphasis is intended to counteract an overwhelming imbalance in representations of the sixties, especially in Turkey but in the U.S. as well, with male figures consistently receiving the bulk of attention in both scholarly and popular accounts—except in studies focused explicitly on gender, such as books on the women's liberation movement. Levertov, German, Bağcan, di Prima, and Sanchez are not explicitly feminist figures, though they all address (implicitly or explicitly) political questions specifically relevant to women from within a broader Left framework. Partly because of this liminality, they do not feature prominently in either mainstream accounts of the sixties or in feminist histories. This dissertation seeks to rectify this absence not just for the sake of representational accuracy but because it is often the women figures of the sixties who most clearly bridge the divide

between politics and culture and therefore exemplify the cultural revolutionary character of the era. Most accounts of a supposed hippie-politico split are centered on figures who are male (and, for that matter, white). Similarly, culture—both in the sense of cultural production and in terms of issues like everyday life, community health and social reproduction, sexuality, and the psyche—is often feminized. That is, compared to militancy, armed struggle, or larger scholarly frames like geopolitics or political-economy, culture is often seen as a ‘soft’ or less serious. Yet in their bold bridging of art and politics, culture and revolution, practical survival and spiritual health, the cultural revolutionary artists studied here are deeply representative of a historical period centered on the abolition of binaries in favor of a dialectical view of social transformation.

Chapter One

Aesthetics and Politics Between Cold War and Cultural Revolution

The cultural revolution and the political revolution blend; this is the result of activities transcending the dissociation of the cultural and political areas. (121)
- Henri Lefebvre, *The Explosion* (1968)

The central proposition of cultural revolution is that all those phenomena stuffed into the category ‘culture’—subjectivity, everyday life, as well as art—form a central terrain of revolutionary struggle. The trope of “liberating minds as well as bodies,” as Angela Davis famously expressed it, linked struggles across the world, from the psychedelic movement’s use of LSD as a “mind detergent” to clean away psychic colonization (Michals 49), the Cuban project to create a “new socialist person” (Gordon-Nesbitt 114), and the explosion of experimental Turkish poetry that read like missives from the newly liberated humanity that the revolution was sure to usher in.

Despite the very real differences between the movements in Turkey and the U.S. that this chapter will explore, they share the crucial influence of “Third World” struggles.⁹ For example, Robert Williams of the Philadelphia-based Maoist organization Revolutionary Action Movement argued that for Black Power to be victorious it was necessary to “destroy the conditioned white oppressive mores,

⁹ Throughout this dissertation ‘Third World’ is placed within quotation marks to mark the ideological or imaginary dimension of the term. For a critical history of the ‘Three Worlds’ concept see Pletsch’s “The Three Worlds, of the Division of Social Scientific Labor, Circa 1950-1975.” Economist and demography Alfred Sauvy developed the term “*tiers monde*” to describe underdeveloped or “backward” countries. This first, polemical use of the phrase was designed to resonate with the concept of the “third estate.” For a justification of the term’s continued use in discussions of the sixties see Christiansen and Scarlett’s “Introduction” to *The Third World in the Global 60s* (3).

attitudes, ways, customs, philosophies, habits, etc. which the oppressor has taught and trained us to have” (Sell 765). This focus on deprogramming, through violence if necessary, was inspired by Frantz Fanon’s discussion of the psychic wounds of colonization in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and his theories of “national culture” from *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Williams’ global itinerary (he moved to Cuba in 1961, visited Hanoi during the Vietnam War, and eventually settled in China) confirms the “Third World” provenance of these ideas.

Similarly, Turkish Leftists modeled themselves on the Vietnamese National Liberation Front in their resistance against the superior military might of the U.S.: “[E]verybody thought that soon Turkey would be a new Vietnam, and they nearly believed that Turkey would follow the example of liberated Vietnam” [*herkes kısa bir süre sonra Türkiye’de bir yeni Vietnam, kurtulan Vietnam örneğini kurabileceğine inanmış gibiydi*] activist Aydın Çubukçu recalls of those heady days (60).¹⁰ Çubukçu was a leader of the Marxist-Leninist national student organization Revolutionary Youth Federation of Turkey or DEV-GENÇ, which formed in 1965 out of a federation of clubs that debated socialist ideas and literature. Çubukçu’s trajectory mirrored many others of his generation when he began robbing banks in the early 1970s in preparation for a Cuban-style guerrilla war that never materialized. Çubukçu

¹⁰ It is unlikely that Turkish or other supporters of Vietnamese’s communist and liberation fighters knew much about the massive attention given to issues of art and cultural policy by the government of North Vietnam. Culture was no less central to the Vietnamese struggle than the better-known Cuban, Algerian, or Chinese examples. See Ninh’s *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1965*

stayed in jail from 1972 until 1991 before starting the publishing house Evrensel [Universal] and began writing about culture and politics.

Both U.S. and Turkish struggles were part of larger world movement that united the goals of national liberation—however metaphorically conceived—and cultural transformation. Despite its ubiquity in the sixties, however, cultural revolution was not an invention of that period. The first significant use of the term occurred in Lenin’s final writings. The essay “On Cooperation” (1923) explored how the revolution could be internally extended—both across different sectors of society and into the minds and habits of Soviet citizens—now that the literal revolution had been won. Lenin responded to critics who claimed that the Russian Revolution had occurred prematurely:

Our opponents told us repeatedly that we were rash in undertaking to implant socialism in an insufficiently cultured country. But they were misled by our having started from the opposite end to that prescribed by theory (the theory of pedants of all kinds), because in our country the political and social revolution preceded the cultural revolution, that very cultural revolution which nevertheless now confronts us. (Lenin)

Now that the political revolution was successful, Lenin argued, it was necessary to revolutionize the masses themselves. Scholars of the Soviet Union have described the literacy and hygiene campaigns of this period as a kind of internal civilizing mission to transform both the ‘backward’ peasantry and the ethnic minorities on the USSR’s far peripheries (David-Fox 182). Cultural revolution, as in later instances of this concept, was understood broadly to mean transforming both the intellectual level of Soviet citizens and their everyday lives, including their minds: “traditions, habits, ideas, customs, and prejudices” would now have to change (195). As Bukharin

expressed it, cultural revolution is the “kind of revolution that will make [the masses] into new people” (ibid).¹¹

Gramsci deepened the concept of cultural revolution. In his *Prison Writings* from the 1920s and 1930s, the question of culture was both pedagogical and strategic. Because the masses are ruled not only through brute force but by their own consent, any successful revolutionary process would also have to involve bringing them on board to a new hegemonic project. In Jameson’s gloss, this project would require the undoing of “feelings of mental inferiority and habits of subservience and obedience” (“Third” 76) that allow people to consent to their own domination. The revolutionary struggle will have to undo this ingrained position of subalternity—and what better way, Gramsci suggested, than through culture and the arts, which influence human beings precisely on the level of feelings and habits?

This dual emphasis on cultural production and mental life would go on to be developed by Brecht in his plays, by anti-colonial surrealists like Aimé Césaire who declared that the Caribbean revolution would have to be both about “bread” as well as “fresh air and poetry” (Rosemont and Kelley 74), by Wilhelm Reich through his anti-fascist sexology and other theorizers of Marxist-Freudianism, and in Fanon’s theories of national culture. Then in the sixties, cultural revolution became part of the revolutionary mainstream, appearing everywhere from the anti-oppressive

¹¹ See also Trotsky’s *Problems of Everyday Life* (1923), which discusses topics ranging from vodka-drinking to proper etiquette. For a different use of the concept see Sheila Fitzpatrick’s “Cultural Revolution in Russia 1928-32,” who describes a period when the Soviet leadership allowed “class war” against economic and cultural “rightists” in the Party. Fitzpatrick also uncovers important debates on culture in the early Soviet Union in *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*.

pedagogical practices of Paulo Freire to the aesthetic theories of Herbert Marcuse. Though the term is most often associated with the Great Proletarian Chinese Revolution (1966-1977), this represents only one of several manifestations of this project. The incredible violence and excesses notwithstanding, the Cultural Revolution did center on questions of consciousness and everyday life, especially with the program to destroy the “Four Olds”: old customs, culture, habits, and ideas. While some have described the mobilization of the Red Guards as a last-ditch effort to resist bureaucratization and extend the Chinese Revolution to every level of society, and others have characterized it as a manipulation of the masses for the sake of intra-party power struggles, for many across the world inspired by Maoism the *idea* of the Cultural Revolution was more influential than its reality.¹²

Though a complete history of the concept of cultural revolution has yet to be written, it is remarkable how often the concept appears in contemporary texts from the sixties. For Henri Lefebvre, the events of May ‘68 in France “tried consciously to unite cultural and political revolution, workers and students.” (123). This was not about replacing political questions with cultural ones as an escape from militancy, but rather about understanding that political power operates by way of separations:

Instead of avoiding a confrontation with the state, the cultural revolution threatened it. Ideologies and words, institutions with their assumptions and

¹² For one example of the Cultural Revolution’s global influence see Wolin’s *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s*. MacFarquhar and Schoenhals’ *Mao’s Last Revolution* describe the high political machinations within the party leadership that caused the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. Yiching Wu gives a history-from-below in *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis* and argues that the grassroots, even if manipulated by Mao, often acted on their own initiative. Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun emphasize the complexity of the period through an account of the Shanghai Commune in *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution*.

‘values’—the whole range of superstructures began to falter. It was as though many people suddenly realized that they no longer believed in their activities—this applies to artists, actors, newscasters, teachers, production workers. The newscasters were tired of being ordered to lie, the actors of entertaining and pleasing people condemned to boredom. (120)

Once the split between intellectual life and politics, art and life begin to unravel, the system stops functioning. People see through the fiction. In May, Lefebvre argues, the Sorbonne was shaken by an explosion: “the explosion of unfettered speech” (119). People who had never entered a university before, or who had never felt empowered to speak, now began to express themselves: “Speech manifested itself as a primary freedom, now re-conquered and re-appropriated.” He describes the ability to speak one’s mind as a form of healing from repression:

In this verbal delirium, there unfolded a vast psychodrama, or rather a vast social therapy, an ideological cure for intellectuals and non-intellectuals, who finally met. All this speech had to be expressed for the event to exist and leave traces.

Students and workers met each other as equals for the first time. In this way, the constraints of the previous “repressive and terrorist period” were undone.

In 1972 Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge made a similar observation using the term ‘cultural revolution.’ Sixties movements were focused above all on transforming people’s sensibilities. Just as human cognition had been shaped by capitalism, and most intensely by the “consciousness industry” of mass media, contemporary movements were challenging this “capitalist cultural revolution,” as they termed it, with a “proletarian cultural revolution”:

The enemy confronts the people not just as an external opponent, for instance, as an imperialist, but is also embodied in dead labor, in the people’s own

prehistory, as well as in human beings and their relationships to one another. (160-161)

One cannot seek to destroy capitalism but leave the mind untouched. For Negt and Kluge as for Lefebvre, an essential terrain of class struggle was challenging this prehistory as it inheres in constraining patterns of thoughts, forms of relating, and modes of thinking.

In a series of talks given at Princeton University in 1970, Herbert Marcuse, Frankfurt-School-theorist-turned-New Left-guru, also observed that a central feature of the new cycle of political radicalism was the call for deeper inclusion of culture into revolutionary struggle. Not unmoved by this proposition himself, Marcuse explored these new developments in 1972's *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. "Art," he wrote, "can indeed become a weapon in the class struggle by promoting changes in the prevailing consciousness" (125). The gamble of "Cultural Revolution," as he termed it, was that aspects of life previously left out of the revolutionary process would have to be incorporated. This was exactly what he saw going on around him the long sixties: "the radical opposition today involves [. . .] the entire realm beyond that of material needs—nay, it aims at a total transformation of the entire traditional culture" (79). With his long-standing interest in the aesthetic as a site of social transformation, Marcuse would become both a chronicler of these new cultural revolutionary struggles and one its major theorists.

It is important to distinguish these historical uses of the term "cultural revolution" from more recent scholarly appraisals. For example, Arthur Marwick's 800-page tome *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the*

United States c.1958-1974 describes the relationship of politics and culture in a way that significantly diverges from how activists and militants themselves understood it. Marwick critiques the “Great Marxist Fallacy,” a belief that revolution was imminent in the sixties and that it would destroy bourgeois society as everybody knew it:

My complaint about the Marxists will be that they [. . .] miss the fact that another kind of revolution did happen [. . .], a ‘revolution,’ or ‘transformation’ in material conditions, lifestyles, family relationships, and personal freedoms for the vast majority of ordinary people. (15)

Marwick is not discussing the fusion of two understandings of revolution that grew and spread in the sixties but suggesting that one revolution happened and the other did not. It is true, as he remarks, that in the ‘West’ (the focus of his book) “[t]here was no economic revolution, no political revolution, no advent of the proletariat to power, no classless society, no destruction of mainstream culture, no obliteration of language” (805). What happened instead of a political revolution, he insists, was a revolution in culture. New subcultures appeared. Understandings of individuality changed. New and influential technologies proliferated, especially in mass media. People traveled more and enjoyed new conceptions of leisure and self-expression. There were important shifts in race, class, and family dynamics (16-19). The result is that culture of European and North American societies transformed. There was no revolution, but “an important stage was passed in the passage to our contemporary world made up of multicultural societies” (804). While the status of multiculturalism at the end of second decade of the new millennium is a different question, on one level Marwick’s argument is unimpeachable. The thoroughgoing revolution so many

dreamed of and worked towards in the advanced capitalist countries did not occur. However, culture (more narrowly defined) was transformed, and in this respect we are still living in the world wrought by the sixties.

A more pessimistic diagnosis of the ‘merely’ cultural revolution of the sixties is made from the Left by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Their investigation of changes in French management discourse reveal that the “artistic critique” of the sixties—which in labor struggles of the period demanded not just better pay or less hours but a qualitative transformation in the alienated and deadening world of work—resulted in the new arrangements (178). Yet this new work life is not as liberated as it may seem. More flexible hours require one to be on-call at all times. The ‘synergistic’ work-team, which dispenses with tyrannical managers, transforms workers into self-policing teams. Workplaces have more domestic comforts (with bean-bag chairs or free snacks) yet one is increasingly expected to make work their home. Through this Hegelian “ruse of history,” the very attempt in the sixties to transform life in lasting ways was incorporated by capitalism, leading to a more thorough colonization of the psyche by work in ways that would not have been possible under the more stuffy and structured regime of Fordism. While in Marwick’s reading it is fortunate that the “Marxisant Fallacy” of revolution came to naught because more gradual transformations have smoothed out some of the system’s more illiberal tendencies on the bumpy but ever-rising road to a better society, Boltanski and Chiapello show that capitalism was more resilient than sixties

cultural revolutionaries could have predicted, and in fact revolutionaries were often the unwitting handmaidens of neoliberal counter-revolution.

The revolution did not occur in the manner sixties activists across the world envisioned. Some accounts celebrate this while others lament it. Yet what if the period is not seen as a failure but as a project suspended? The concept of cultural revolution flourished during the sixties, but just as it existed in earlier iterations it is possible to imagine cultural revolution going dormant sometime in the mid-1970s, while since then fleeting sightings are reported here and there. According to Mark Fisher, writing just before his death in 2017, the sixties continue to discomfit the present—precisely because the cultural revolution never fully died: “the potentials it materialised and begun to democratise—the prospect of life freed from drudgery—has to be continually suppressed” (np). In this reading, it is precisely because the threat was real that it had to be incorporated.

Fisher sees the cultural revolutionary challenge embodied in one of the aspects of the sixties most universally ridiculed: the counterculture. Images of hippies, acid freaks, ‘classic’ rockers, and flower children are “now inseparable from [their] own simulation,” he wrote. Films like *Across the Universe* and *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* have made the period a caricature of itself. Such “nostalgic reminiscences [have] neutralised the real promises that exploded then.” Yet Fisher was against the narrative of inevitable failure that characterizes so many approaches to the sixties. “If ‘the counterculture led to neoliberalism,’” he concedes, “better that the counterculture had not happened.” He finds something more in the sixties—and

precisely in those most debased clichés of the period. For him the problem with the sixties is not that the activists' qualitative demands were easily cooptable, or that it was silly to trade the working class as the revolutionary subject with students or the 'Third World,' or that cultural revolution was never more than a youthful pipe dream and hippies should have grown up. Fisher takes the opposite tack and asserts that "the failure of the left after the Sixties had as much to do with its repudiation of, or refusal to engage with, the dreamings that the counterculture unleashed." In other words, the problem is not that the sixties was immature or unrealistic, but it did not go far enough.

Fisher's name for this unrealized sixties ethos is "acid communism." He admits that this term is a "joke of sorts, but one with very serious purpose":

It points to something that, at one point, seemed inevitable, but which now appears impossible: the convergence of class consciousness, socialist-feminist consciousness-raising and psychedelic consciousness, the fusion of new social movements with a communist project, an unprecedented aestheticization of everyday life.

Fisher points to a merging of culture and politics that strained toward the voluntaristic transformation of psychic states, ingrained habits, patterns of interaction, and everyday life within and alongside the more traditional project of anti-capitalism. The project described here is exactly what we have been calling, to emphasize its diachronic and international character, "cultural revolution." At its best, the sixties imagined fusing the communist and anti-authoritarian sides of this project. The first, on its own, devolves into what Fisher calls the "Harsh Leninist Superego" demanding sacrifice and discipline now while promising joy or liberation from gender or LSD

trips only after the revolution. The second, in isolation, is nothing more than the typical stereotype of a hedonistic, structureless counterculture; it remains focused on individual liberation while ignoring the larger society. What the “acid communism” of the sixties promised, though unable finally to deliver, was a fusion of these objective and subjective sides of liberation. For Fisher, this a project worth holding out for.

The U.S. Left and the Dialectic of Liberation

“Free your mind... and your ass will follow”

- Funkadelic (1970)

Cultural revolution has its origin in the theory and practice represented by figures like Lenin, Gramsci, Mao, Fanon, Che Guevara, Kwame Nkrumah, and Freire. In an influential 1970 speech, Amílcar Cabral underscored the centrality of culture to the anti-colonial project in a way that built on the accumulated meanings of cultural revolution: “[I]f imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture” (43). While it makes sense for this Bissau-Guinean poet and revolutionary to assert that political and economic independence alone are insufficient if minds were still colonized, what is remarkable about the sixties is the way this cultural revolutionary spirit was manifested all over the world. In the U.S. figures as different as Malcolm X, the academic Charles Reich, and the feminist organizer and writer Morgan Robin saw the projects of cultural and political liberation as necessarily intertwined. What unites otherwise disparate factions of the sixties Left was this shared problematic of liberating both oneself and one’s community from the “mind forg’d manacles” of an

imposed culture. As George Katsiaficas notes, “The massive fusion of culture and politics defined the New Left’s uniqueness” (24).¹³ Far from being resolved during this period, however, the concept of cultural revolution was full of internal contradictions. The following discussion will describe some of the major areas of tension as they play out in the U.S.

This issue of which comes first, internal or external revolution, was actively debated by activists and artists themselves and was a major source of contention in the sixties. Should unlearning and deprogramming be undergone alongside more practical and immediate revolutionary acts? Or rather, is the transformation of consciousness a necessary step before one can even become a revolutionary and start trying to change the external world? Or, finally, is transforming consciousness itself the bloodless revolution, to be repeated by each until all are free? Connected to this question of priority (change oneself first or change the world?) is the issue of how exactly culture and politics are connected. Already in 1970 Marcuse noticed that the New Left had a dangerous propensity for collapsing the distinction between culture and politics, art and life, consciousness and revolution, individual and collective:

the entirely premature immediate identification of private and social freedom creates tranquilizing rather than radicalizing conditions, and leads to withdrawal from the political universe in which, alone, freedom can be attained. (49-50)

¹³ For studies of the sixties, the term ‘New Left’ describes movements across the globe that challenged the hegemony of the traditional communist and socialist parties, gained inspiration from tri-continental liberation struggles, critiqued the alienation of life under both western capitalism and state socialism, and moved beyond a strict analysis of social class to attend to issues of gender, sexuality, race and everyday life (Fink, et. al. 24-25).

In other words, the revolutionary movement must also be cultural, but the moment the Left thinks one half can be traded for the other it is in danger of lapsing into depoliticized irrelevance. Both sides of the processes needed to work in tandem: “To be sure, no revolution without individual liberation, but also no individual liberation without the liberation of society. Dialectic of liberation” (48). The New Left’s greatest strength—its impetuosity, its desire to “demand the impossible”—was also potentially its great weakness. In its most simplistic iterations, it suspended the dialectic of culture and politics, claiming them as identical rather than allow the contradictions between them to ratchet up to ever higher levels of complexity.

Perhaps in response to this tendency to collapse culture and politics, scholarship on the U.S. sixties often stresses the contention between ‘politicos’ and ‘hippies’ (Epstein 48). This refers to frequent conflicts between members of ‘the movement’ (activist and anti-war groups) and the counterculture (dropouts, rock fans, LSD users, back-to-the-landers, etc.). Politicos accused hippies of being escapist and self-indulgent while hippies charged politicians with reproducing, in their discipline, the very society they were trying to oppose. There were often real disagreements between the more political and the more cultural wings of the sixties Left. An example of this clash is the October 1965 antiwar march on the Oakland Army Depot. The protest organizers invited countercultural figure Ken Kesey of Merry Pranksters fame to address the crowd, but after listening to the other speakers on stage, he declared that if you ignored their words and just paid attention to their tone and posture, they were as demagogic as Hitler. Kesey advocated ignoring the war

altogether and focusing on transforming one's own self (Goffman and Joy 274-5). This was anathema to the people who had come from across the country, dodging police and Hell's Angels, to reach the Oakland induction center. The politicians believed it was self-indulgent to turn inward when so many grave injustices were being committed. Even rage was warranted because only someone insensitive to suffering would ignore grave injustices.

Yet the relationship between hippies and politicians was not always as antagonistic as it is described. That same evening in October 1965 both protesters and countercultural figures (including poet Allen Ginsberg) descended on the International Longshoremen's Union hall for a wildly successful rock dance that featured the band Jefferson Airplane (Echols 36). Robert Scheer (who edited the important radical magazine *Ramparts*) describes this period of Bay Area cross-pollination as a "cultural revolution" (37).

Even if participants themselves did not always recognize this fusion of 'the movement' and the counterculture, the Right certainly saw radical politics as deeply cultural. In this period, rock bands would frequently play benefit concerts for Left causes and antiwar organizations. Gubernatorial candidate Ronald Reagan titillated crowds of supporters with lurid details of these events. After another such "Rock and Roll Benefit" in 1966, again in the Bay Area, he spoke of activities "so contrary to our standards of human behavior that I couldn't possibly recite them to you," including, he went to elucidate, naked, pot-smoking crowds listening to several rock bands play at once while psychedelic films were projected on the walls (Kramer 15).

The Right saw this combination of political and cultural radicalism was seen as an existential threat, and popular anxiety and resentment of these movements helped propel Nixon to governor and, later, president.

Recent scholarship has complicated the notion of a vast divide between hippies and politicians. In San Francisco “freaks and politicians clearly felt some affinity with one another” (Echols 28). Similarly, research on locales like L.A., Austin, Detroit, and New York has also exposed contexts where revolutionary activism and countercultural styles and practices experienced greater intermingling.¹⁴ And when we move beyond the mostly white segments of the New Left and counterculture that dominate most studies, the boundary between political and cultural experimentation appears even more porous. For example, movements within the larger Black Power current were explicitly inspired by anti-colonial and liberation struggles in the “Third World” that actively theorized the relationship between culture and politics. Malcolm X was inspired by the theories of revolutionary leader Kwame Nkrumah.¹⁵ Describing the work of the Organization of Afro-American Unity in 1964 (just a year before his assassination and two years before the coup against Nkrumah) Malcolm X Nkrumah’s understanding of cultural revolution:

Our [. . .] cultural revolution will be the journey to the rediscovery of ourselves. History is a people’s memory [. . .]. Armed with the past, we can with confidence charter a course for our future. Culture is an indispensable

¹⁴ See McBride’s “Death City Radicals: The Counterculture in Los Angeles” and Rossinow’s “‘The Revolution is about Our Lives’: The New Left’s Counterculture.”

¹⁵ After successfully fighting for Ghana’s independence from the British, Nkrumah sought to develop cultural and political ties between African peoples across the world. Frantz Fanon, W.E.B. DuBois, Shirley Graham DuBois, and Louis Armstrong all spent time in Ghana. Malcolm X met Nkrumah at a 1960 rally in Harlem and was influenced by his understanding of culture.

weapon in the freedom struggle. We must take hold of it and forge the future with the past. (Marable 441)

Malcolm X spoke of opening cultural centers in Harlem and developing African American history, art, literature, and music as part of the "cultural revolution to unbrainwash an entire people." Inspired by Malcolm X, sixties organizations like the Black Arts Movement (see Chapter Four) and the Third World Newsreel also saw cultural production and activism as two fronts of an identical struggle. In fact, prominent artists were often activists and vice-versa (Smethurst 14). Even cultural producers (and especially musicians) who were not active as organizers, like Ornette Coleman or Pharaoh Sanders, were seen as part of the revolutionary vanguard. Most of these figures were not talking about LSD when they spoke of cultural revolution, yet they were equally focused on the question of consciousness and invested in the centrality of art.

Yet just as in the New Left, there were sometimes contradictions within the broader Black Power movement over which aspect of the struggle deserved priority: cultural production or political work. Rather than politicians and hippies, in this case the two sides were revolutionary nationalists and cultural nationalists. Maulana Karenga's Us organization was an example of the latter. They stressed Afrocentric clothes, food, names and the learning of Swahili. For cultural nationalists, "black liberation was impossible, by definition unthinkable, without breaking the white culture's domination of black minds" (Van Deburg 173). In contrast, revolutionary nationalist groups like the Black Panther Party considered cultural liberation

necessary but thought it meaningless if pursued as an end in itself. As Huey P.

Newton famously stated in his 1968 “Interview with the Movement”:

We have to realize our black heritage in order to give us strength to move on and progress. But as far as returning to the old African culture, it’s unnecessary and it’s not advantageous in many respects. We believe that culture itself will not liberate us. We’re going to need some stronger stuff. (Reed 49)

Yet for all the tensions between these wings of the movement (in 1969 members of BPP and Us engaged in a shoot-out on the UCLA campus that left two local Black Panthers dead), both sides agreed that culture did have a role to play in the movement for liberation.¹⁶

Similar complexities marked the sixties feminist movement. A key accelerator in the formation of second wave feminism was the invention of consciousness-raising groups. Inspired by the “speaking pains to recall pains” sessions of the Chinese Revolution, these groups brought women together to discuss seemingly private woes in order to realize the structural nature of the challenges they faced (Michals 44). Activist women who participated in these groups began to speak openly about their position within the male-dominated Left. Sick of being “relegated to making coffee and mimeographing leaflets” (Goffman and Joy 301), groups of women began to challenge sexism in the movement. By 1968 this led to a split that can be usefully compared to that between politicians and hippies or black revolutionary nationalists and cultural nationalists: radical feminists and socialist feminists. In this case, the first

¹⁶ Scholars later uncovered that the differences between cultural and revolutionary nationalists were provoked by the FBI as part of a COINTELPRO attempt to sow division within the African American struggle (Clever and Katsiaficas 93).

group wanted a radical critique of gender and the family. They advocated separatism, arguing that it was impossible to work alongside men until the culture had been radically transformed. They wanted no part of the “male-dominated cracked-glassed-mirror reflection of the Amerikan nightmare,” as Robin Morgan described the Left (Goffman and Joy 301). Significantly these radical feminists were heavily active in the realm of cultural production. Morgan’s 1970 anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful* helped solidify the feminist poetry movement (Voyce 164). In contrast, the socialist feminist faction also saw sexism as a fundamental societal problem but thought that feminism needed to be integrated with the anti-capitalist and anti-war struggles (Epstein 49). Despite their differences, both groups argued that women’s concerns were legitimate and could no longer be silenced. Whether transforming sexism should be a part of the struggle for socialism or rather should be the entire struggle, both groups advocated a transformation of culture and consciousness.

The New Left, the Black Power movement, and the feminist movement all provide useful foci for observing where cultural revolutionary activity either worked towards Marcuse’s “dialectic of liberation” or reduced it to a binary. While there could be acrimonious divisions between those more focused on culture or on politics, looking at the period as a whole what is remarkable is the intense effort across factions to theorize and practice cultural revolution as an integration of individual and collective, art and activism, consciousness-transformation and structural change. This fusion is particularly visible when looking at the coalitions that sometimes developed between movements. For example, while politicians were dismissing hippies and

segments of the Black Power movement were rejecting coalitions with white people, members of the Black Panther Party were claiming affinity with the counterculture.

As Eldridge Cleaver wrote in a jointly authored manifesto with Jerry Rubin:

A revolutionary generation is on the scene [. . .]. Disenchanted, alienated white youth, the hippies, the yippies and all the unnamed dropouts from the white man's burden, are our allies in this cause. (Goffman and Joy 297)

More significantly, in the same period black feminists like Toni Cade Bambara were working to unite the lessons of nationalism with the concerns raised by second wave feminism while realizing that they had to build new spaces to address their unique concerns as black women. To different degrees all these groups shared the same premise: because the problems were themselves cultural (in the broadest sense encompassing both art and everyday life) resistance itself would have to take place on the cultural terrain—enlisting poems, songs, and other cultural objects as weapons. Significantly, the groups most strongly committed to the concept of cultural revolution, like the Black Arts Movement or guerrilla theater groups like the Motherfuckers in New York or the Diggers in San Francisco, wanted to bring art to the community and to the streets. Cultural revolutionaries thought it was indeed possible to “free your ass” and your mind at the same time. The poets explored in this dissertation similarly bridge the boundary between the more activist and the more artistic sides of the U.S. Left and point toward a dialectic of liberation, even if they were unable to realize it.

Aestheticizing Politics or Politicizing Aesthetics: From the U.S. to Turkey

We're in nineteen-sixty-eight. We lived through the Forties and Fifties

We lived in the sixties, we committed crimes
Communiques [. . .]
May is beautiful, with its valiant stonecutters
Pushing the water through perforated stone
And the folk singers, the foul-mouthed fishmongers
Tombstone carvers, with their daughters gathering snails,
Chattering genial women, wool-spinners
Survivors of decimation, shrewd market-sellers
And above all its revolutionaries, with its revolutionaries above all
Revolutionaries who make mistake after mistake until they can be mistaken no longer
May is beautiful (119-120)¹⁷

- Gülten Akın, “Yaz” [Summer]

Adapting terms from Walter Benjamin, we can say that in the U.S. cultural revolution took two major forms: the “aestheticization of politics” and the “politicization of aesthetics.”¹⁸ The first and more dominant strategy seeks to expand the domain of politics to include more aspects of life. In their own ways, hippies, Black Power activists, and feminists all openly called for a “simultaneous transformation of politics, economy, and culture, of social structure and individual

¹⁷ All translations from the Turkish are mine unless otherwise noted.

Altmış sekizdeyiz. Kırkı ve elliyi gördük.

Altmışın içinde yaşadık, suç işledik

Bildiriler [...]

Mayıslar güzeldir. Yiğittir taş yontucular

Suları delikli taşlardan geçiren

Türküleriyle, küfürbaz balıkçılarıyla

Mezar kazıcılarıyla, salyangoz devşiren kızlarıyla

Geveze ve güleç kadınlarıyla, yün iğiricileriyle

Kıran görmüşleriyle, açığız pazaracılarıyla

Hele devrimcileriyle, hele devrimcileriyle

Yanıla yanıla yanılmaz olan devrimcileriyle

Mayıslar güzeldir.

¹⁸ In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” Benjamin writes that Fascism is the “introduction of aesthetics into political life” (241). He goes on to describe propagandistic newsreels, “big parades and monster rallies” as the first step of this aestheticization that can only be fulfilled by the mass spectacle of war (251). In contrast, “Communism responds by politicizing art” (242). The argument underlying this use of the terms in this dissertation, in contrast, is that by the sixties the massive expansion of mass culture, advertising, the advent of television, the growth of niche markets in fashion and music (the “youthquake”) had irrevocably aestheticized politics. Certain countercultural and oppositional movements sought to do this from Left, while committed artists sought to revive politicized forms of art, often inspired by the 1930s.

subject” (Katsiaficas 36). While the aestheticization of politics is most associated with the counterculture, it could range from Robert Williams’ call to “destroy the conditioned white oppressive mores [and] attitudes” of U.S. society to the 1967 attempt—coordinated by Allen Ginsberg, Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman, Dr. Benjamin Spock, and 35,000 other anti-war protestors—to levitate the Pentagon 300 feet in the air. Despite the serious differences between these two examples, they recognize “sentiments, affections and spontaneous bodily habits” as central issues for any project of revolutionary change (Eagleton *Ideology* 23). In this sense, they aestheticize politics insofar as they assert that culture, broadly conceived, is also fundamentally political.

The politicization of aesthetics shares an emphasis on subjectivity, but it often moves from art to life rather than treating life as something that can be sculpted and re-designed like a work of art. Those who politicize aesthetics aim to make art a weapon in the broader revolutionary struggle. An example would be the cultural institutions created by Black Arts figures like Amiri Baraka that sought to bring art to the African American community and develop a black aesthetic in poetry, music, painting, and so on in order to challenge the norms white-supremacist, Eurocentric society. As with the literature directly connected to anti-war, Chicano, Asian American, Native American, or women’s movements, statements of explicit political position are often included in the art itself. This does not mean, however, that politicizing aesthetics is reducible to ‘propaganda.’ Again, the example of the Black Arts Movement reveals that formal questions (such as the influence of blues and jazz

music on the prosody and line-breaks of poetry) often have a political valence even if the content is not unambiguously political.

There is no perfect dividing line separating aestheticizing politics from politicizing aesthetics. Both tendencies were present in the U.S. and sometimes the same figures attempted to realize cultural revolution by engaging in both tactics. (Similarly, groups like the Living Theatre or artists associated with avant-garde movements like Fluxus attempted to dissolve the boundary between art and life altogether). However, broadly speaking we can say that the most influential tendency in the U.S., associated as it is with the counterculture in its multiple iterations, was aestheticizing politics.

In Turkey cultural revolutionary activity more often took the shape of politicizing aesthetics. There, cultural revolutionary approaches did not so much take the shape of outré or trippy attempts to turn life and art into politics. Instead, they transformed politics into art. That is, movements in Turkey were energized through a massive explosion of aesthetic production seeking to intervene in political struggles.¹⁹

This should not be taken to mean aestheticizing tendencies such as we saw in the U.S. counterculture were completely absent in the Turkish scene. In both countries cultural revolutionary figures worked to unite culture and politics, often meeting in the middle even when starting off from different directions.

Before discussing how art was politicized in Turkey, it is necessary to uncover how politics were aestheticized, despite over simplifying arguments to the contrary. Many

¹⁹ Another difference is that here term “cultural revolution” itself was not used widely by artists or activists but only when referring to the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China (which was an important topic particularly for Turkish Maoists). Yet the concept as we have defined it was no less active. It was worked out implicitly in the sphere of poetry and music.

participants and observers of the Turkish sixties have asserted the absence of more experimental countercultural currents. Nadire Mater, both a veteran and a scholar of the sixties, contrasts Turkey to France:

We were a rather traditional ‘left;’ [. . .] in France, for instance, they [. . .] had [Herbert] Marcuse, the anarchists, Trotskyists... Soviet-style traditional communist parties were being protested and a new ‘left’ was emerging. (“Interview”)

In Turkey, she argues, there were no such developments. Communist novelist and journalist Oya Baydar draws connections between the Turkish and global sixties while also suggesting that the differences were substantial. Reflecting on the 40th anniversary of 1968, she writes:

Thinking about it all these years later, I see that the common aspect of our ‘68 and the ‘68 of young people across the world was a rebellion against the existing order of things. However, while the Western youth were rebelling to destroy the status quo of the left, right, and every other kind—and to shake up every structure based in the status quo all the way to the bourgeois political parties and institutions—we were doing something different (*Bir Dönem* 91)²⁰

Baydar suggests that a total rejection of authority was missing in Turkey. The Turkish Left, in other words, was not New but ‘Old.’ Many others echo these sentiments in their assessments of the Turkish sixties, with some scholars (as we will see in the next section) going so far as to classify the movement in Turkey as part of an altogether different ‘family’ of movements.

Though countercultural phenomena that aimed to aestheticize politics were less predominate, they did exist. Marcuse and other New Left thinkers were translated

²⁰ *Bunca yıl sonra düşününce, bizim 68’le dünya gençliğinin 68’inin ortak yanının mevcut düzene başkaldırı olduğunu görüyorum. Ancak Batı gençliği sağ veya sol her türlü statükoyu yıkmak için; burjuva partileri ve kurumları kadar, statükodan beslenen bütün yapıları sarsmak için ayaklanırken, bizler başka bir noktadaydık.*

into Turkish and discussed, but since even canonical Marxist texts were first openly published in the sixties (and even then translators and publishers often found themselves in jail for their activities) socialists in Turkey were only newly reading Marx and Lenin; there was not the same need for new approaches to the tradition. Though marijuana and even LSD were available in Turkey, drug-use was relatively rare on the Left, especially as the movement became more militant in 1968 and after. (Yet at one time a group of Turkish rockers had a plan to lace the water supply of the parliament building in Ankara with acid.²¹) European and North American hippies who stopped in Istanbul's Sultanahmet district on the way to or from India shared styles, instruments, and drugs with curious local youth; Turkish papers frequently shared sordid tales of the goings on among these foreign and homegrown hippies. As for other changes in lifestyle, though romantic relationships became more relaxed among young people in the movement, this was far from a sexual revolution.

Narratives of the Turkish sixties often replicate the idea of a hard split between a more experimental and loose early sixties and a more militant and harsh later sixties. For example, the poet Atıf Behramoğlu suggests that:

the translation of the Marxist classics on the one hand and, on the other, trends like existentialism and surrealism, which aim to transform the artistic and aesthetic perception of the reader, went hand in hand at the beginning of the period. (translation by Başgüneş 196).

Similarly, scholars of the period describe an early eclecticism where a “libertarian [. . .] outlook” united art, lifestyle, and politics as part of the same project (Alper 50). In

²¹ Personal interview with Taner Öngür, bassist of the band Moğollar (18 November 2019)

this narrative, the eclecticism began to fade as militancy increased after 1968. For example, while activists in the early period were often more liberal in terms of matters of sexuality, by the 1970s a common slogan among more militant factions of the Left was “the revolutionary has no lover” [*devrimcinin sevgilisi olmaz*]. In the name of not alienating the workers and peasants they sought to organize, male cadres had to eschew long hair for a more clean-cut look while women revolutionaries were expected to dress modestly (Houston 241). While this shift from the early to late period is not exactly depicted as a “good” and “bad” sixties, these changes are often lamented as conservative retrenchment or celebrated as a more mature and serious phase in the movement. As with the hippie-politico split in the U.S., it is not that these broad tendencies were not at play, but rather certain narratives become so powerful that it is hard to register phenomena that do not confirm to them. Chapter Four on Turkish psychedelic rock will show that even explicitly militant cultural production from the late 1970s kept the spirit of libertarian eclecticism alive.

Yet in Turkey it was in the politicization of aesthetics that cultural revolutionary theory and practice are most visible. Oya Baydar, who argues that Turkish movements did not seek to challenge the cultural/political status quo as much as the anti-authoritarian “Western” sixties, describes the period in quite different terms when reflecting on its artistic developments:

We’ve started reading Nazım [Hikmet]’s poems more easily and we’ve memorized them. Certain ideas can now be said and written about openly. The most innocent and harmless socialist texts are slowly being published and are circulating free. Those unforgettable songs by the youthful Tülay German with that wonderful voice, “Burçak Tarlası” [The Bitter-Vetch Field], “Kaleden İniyorum” [I Come Down from the Fortress], Leftist intellectuals

kept company with those songs, the underdevelopment of Anatolia, the oppression of the people... We are at the heights of populism. We discover the workers, the peasants, poverty, oppression and we are sharpened like knives. Even if [the folk singer] Ruhi Su is not still banned he's considered suspicious, but he performs at private events in the homes of friends in the evenings. A population is being discovered through songs that give voice to the oppression of the worker and peasant, that express the longing for a more beautiful world and for rebellion—all of this different than that sixth arrow representing populism [on the logo of] the CHP [Republican People's Party]... We, the youth, are caught up in a wave hurtling somewhere. (45'lik 82)²²

This is an evocative account of the feeling and everyday life experiences of the generation who came to radical politics through art. Baydar and her generation did not only read Nâzım Hikmet's poetry after the lifting of censorship, they internalized him through memorization. This republication of the great communist poet, who was banned in Turkey since the late 1930s and died in Soviet exile in 1963, empowered young artists to try their hand at more explicitly political art. In Baydar's account, neo-folk and Leftist intellectuals are mentioned in the same breath, as artists and activists began to meet in the same spaces. These aesthetic experiences mediated young people's connection to the poor and downtrodden in Turkey's cities and countryside. This knowledge transformed their sense of self and their understanding of the country. Intimate spaces, the homes of friends, became another site of this transformation of consciousness. Young people drew on elements of official

²² Nazım'ın şiirlerini daha rahat okumaya, ezberlemeye başladık. Bazı fikirler söylenir, açıkça yazılır çizilir hale geldi; sosyalist literatürün en masumü en zararsız sayılan metinleri usul usul havayı kollaya kollaya Türkçe yayınlanmaya başlandı. O sıralarda muhteşem sesi yeni yeni duyulan gencecik Tülay German'ın Burçak Tarlası, Kaleden İniyorum gibi unutulmaz şarkıları, o şarkılara eşlik eden sol aydınlar, Anadolu'nun geri kalmışlığı, halkın ezilmişliği... Popülizmin doruklarındayız. İşçiyi, köylüyü, yoksulluğu, ezilmişliği keşfediyoruz, bileniyoruz. Ruhi Su yasaklı değilse de sakıncalı ama arkadaş evlerindeki özel gecelerde söylüyor. CHP'nin altı okundaki halkçılıktan farklı; işçinin, köylünün ezilmişliğini, daha güzel bir dünya özlemini ya da başkalıdırıyı dile getiren türkülerle keşfedilen halk... Biz gençler, dalgalara kapılmış biryerlere doğru gidiyoruz.

nationalism, like Turkey's founding party's principle of "populism," but they interpreted it in revolutionary terms. The feeling of getting to know workers and peasants grew into a "longing for a more beautiful world." Young people were swept off their feet by all these developments, jumping headlong into waves of rebellion that led to an unknown future. Baydar's description of the thrill given by the flourishing of socialist literature and music echoes how the "explosion of unfettered speech" during May '68 in Paris (Lefebvre 119) provided a sense of a world on the cusp of imminent transformation. Though the historical contexts of these two moments, and the political-aesthetic expressions that emerged from them, were not and could have been identical, across the world these narratives of a liberation of speech and sensation share a certain logic.

Raymond Williams' famous term for the infectious spirit of a historical period is "structure of feeling." This describes the "particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period" (*Marxism* 131). This periodizing concept describes the style of an era, which is often only perceivable through objects of cultural production. The feeling is in the air, so to speak, but we can only track it in its various concrete expressions, often appearing in far-flung and unexpected places. A structure of feeling is

a structure in the sense that you could perceive it operating in one work after another which weren't otherwise connected—people weren't learning it from each other; yet it was one of feeling much more than thought—a pattern of impulses, restraints, tones. (*Interviews* 159).

Like cultural revolution, Williams' term is helpful for the way it links political developments with styles, aesthetic trends, affect, and psychic experience. For this reason, the concept is particularly useful for understanding the sixties, when the structure of feeling was itself an incredible linking of politics and culture across otherwise different contexts. Tanıl Bora uncovers this worldwide structure of feeling in his study of Left-wing thought in the Turkish sixties. While Left-wing currents there were most strongly influenced by anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles, a certain attitude was shared across movements:

The demand for radical freedom at the root of ['Third World' movements], the defiance of all authority, the hunger for breaking established norms: this was all a truly 'international' thing. In Turkey, too, this manifested as a voluntarist and anti-authoritarian wave that strengthened the self-confidence and resolve of the youth. (600)²³

This feeling of rebelliousness started in the "Third World" and spread across the world, linking the U.S., Turkey, France, West Germany, and beyond.

Where studies of the U.S. perhaps overemphasize the more ephemeral aspects of the counterculture, for Turkey, most accounts stress the movement's goals, theories, strategies, and politics but rarely discuss what it felt like for participants. It was exactly this "separation of the social from the personal" that Williams sought to challenge with his theory (*Marxism* 128). Aesthetic objects help us understand the cultural revolutionary quality of the Turkish sixties. In a context in which activists and militant themselves were hesitant to discuss seemingly 'trivial' or individualized

²³ *Ancak onun tortusu olan radikal özgürlük talebi, bütün otoritelere meydan okuma, kalıpları kırma istiyakı, gerçekten 'beynelmilel bir şey'di. Bu Türkiye'de de, her şeyden önce gençliğin özgüvenini ve azmini bileyen bir iradecilik ve anti-otoriterlik dalgasıyla kendini gösterdi.*

things like affect, psychological states, changes in everyday life, new habits and modes of being-together, it is even more essential to explore the record left by poetry, music and other creative artifacts.

Cultural production provides a clue to the shadow-life of the Turkish sixties, elements that did not come to fruition as movements but that were present within the structure of feeling. For example, while feminism in Turkey did not coalesce as a movement until the late 1970s, feminist tendencies were expressed through literature. The novels and short stories of writers Tomris Uyar, Leyla Erbil, Sevgi Soysal, and Adalet Ağaoğlu form a kind of “*pre-feminism*” [*ön-feminizm*] (Bora 778) that “interrogated established ‘positive’ images of women (as emotional, affectionate...) and opened the horizon for a *women’s perspective* thus introducing its readers to second wave feminism” (774).²⁴ Where cultural revolutionary concepts like feminism were not able to be translated into action, the literary/cultural record provides traces of them.

To grasp the often complex temporalities of the Turkish sixties we can make use of Williams’ theory of the “emergent” and “residual” tendencies that exist within a given cultural “dominant.” Emergent phenomena bring out “new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences” that are “part—and yet not a defined part—of effective contemporary practice” (*Culture* 41). Residual phenomena, on the other hand, are “experiences, meanings, and values which cannot

²⁴ 1960’larda itibaren gelişen kadın edebiyatı, yerleşik ‘olumlu’ (duygusal, müşfik...) kadınlık imgesini de sorgulayan eleştirel bir kadın bakış açısını genişletirken, bilfiil, feminizmin ikinci dalgasının gündemine de ısındırmaktaydı okurlarını.

be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture” (40). They are based on “the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social formation.” This terms help us make sense of why certain cultural phenomena that share the cultural revolutionary structure of feeling actually appear before the conventional start date of the long sixties circa 1957 (emergent) while others continue long after the period is generally thought to have ended circa 1973 or 1974 (residual). Both Turkish- and U.S.-focused chapters in Part I of this dissertation explore developments in the early 1950s, just as the two chapters in Part II explore developments stretching into the late 1970s. Yet this flexibility is especially crucial for studying the Turkish case, where unique historical factors cause the sixties to stretch the more canonical periodization of the sixties that tends to fit the U.S. (and other better-known countries) more comfortably. In the next section, we describe the political and cultural events of the Turkish sixties in some depth before returning to the vexed question of where the Turkish sixties fits in the world sixties and, particularly, its complex relationship to the U.S.

Sixties Politics and Cultural Production in Turkey

Today I made love, then I joined a march
I'm tired, spring has come, I need to learn how to shoot a gun this summer
The books pile up, my hair gets longer, everywhere you look there's a furious turmoil
I'm still young, I want to see the world, how beautiful it is to kiss,
how beautiful it is to think, one day we'll certainly win!
[. . .]
One day this cruelty will end, this marauders' feast
But I'm tired now, I smoke too many cigarettes, on my back a dirty coat
The steam from the heaters rises to the sky, a book of Vietnamese poetry in my pocket
I think of our friends on the other side of the world, the rivers over there (334)

- Ataol Behramoğlu, “Bir Gün Mutlaka” [One Day Certainly] (1967)²⁵

The Turkish sixties is often described as a twenty-year period punctuated by three military coups: 27 March 1960, 12 March 1971, and 12 September 1980.²⁶ It opened with the 1960 coup that overthrew the increasingly authoritarian government of the Demokrat Parti (DP), abruptly ending what had been the first experiment in multi-party democracy for the young Turkish state. The military, claiming to be acting in defense of the principles of secularism, quickly instituted elections and in 1961 ratified a new constitution that increased freedom of speech and labor rights, granting new space for movement to the Left. After the return to civilian rule, social movements gained strength as a legal socialist party, the Türkiye İşçi Partisi [Workers’ Party of Turkey, known as TİP], entered parliament in 1965. New labor laws made it possible for workers to assert their interests more aggressively. With increasing militancy on the shop floor, swelling numbers of students, and a general spirit of liberalization Turkey’s sixties moved roughly in parallel with dynamics elsewhere.

²⁵ *Bugün seviştım, yürüyüşe katıldım sonra
Yorgunum, bahar geldi, silah kullanmayı öğrenmeliyim bu yaz
Kitaplar birikiyor, saçlarım uzuyor, her yerde gümbür gümbür bir telâş
Gencim daha, dünyayı görmek istiyorum, öpüşmek ne güzel,
düşünmek ne güzel, bir gün mutlaka yeneceğiz!*

[. . .]

*Uzun uzun düşünüyör, sularla yıkıyorum yüzümü temiz bir gömlek giyiyörüm
Bitecek bir gün bu zulüm, bitecek bu hân-ı yağma
Ama yorgunum, şimdi, çok sigara içiyörüm, sırtımda kirlı bir pardesü
Kalorifer dumanları çıkıyor göğe, cebimde Vietnamca şiir kitapları
Dünyanın öbür ucundaki dostları düşünüyörüm öbür ucundaki ırmakları [. . .]*

²⁶ In treating this two-decade period as a whole I follow the following examples: Suavi and Taşkın, *1960’tan Günümüze Türkiye Tarihi*; Aydınoğlu, *Türkiye Solu (1960-1980)*; and Başgüney, *Literary Production, Currents and Politics in Turkey (1960-1980)*.

Though the discourse of post-1960 Left-wing movements in Turkey drew heavily on the official narrative of the 27 May coup and young activists gave themselves the mission of realizing what they saw as the unrealized anti-imperialist essence of Kemalism, in a certain sense the sixties was not (just) a rejection of the fifties but its fulfillment. When the DP came to power after the elections in 1950, they entered parliament as liberators. The party succeeded in capturing the cross-class resentment built up from years of war and single-party rule (1923-1946) by Turkey's founding Republican People's Party [Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, or CHP]. It is difficult to over-exaggerate the exhilaration felt by many upon this crushing victory. As Behice Boran (future chair of the Turkish Workers' Party and by no means a friend to the DP) remarked in 1968 on the historical significance of this election: "The falling of the CHP from power with the vote of the people [. . .] was the first real symptom of the coming to consciousness of the masses [and] it was the first struggle against the authoritarian, top-down style of state rule" (44).²⁷ In the sixties, this kind of anti-authoritarian struggle became a habit for Left-wing Turkish youth.

These developments of the long sixties reached a climax in 1968, when student protests moved beyond the mostly educational issues that had previously engaged them. Students began occupying their universities, denouncing imperialism, and holding marches and protests demanding Turkey's immediate withdrawal from NATO. One segment of the student movement abandoned legal action; deciding it

²⁷ *CHP'nin iktidardan halkın oyu ile düşmüş olması, [. . .] halk kitlelerinin politik bilinçlenmesinin ilk etkin belirtisi, otoriter, tepeden inme devlet şekline karşı ilk direnişiydi.*

was time for war, they began robbing banks and even held a group U.S. soldiers hostage in preparation for the guerrilla struggle. Peasants and workers were key participants in this cycle of escalation. Labor militancy crescendoed on 15-16 June 1970, when more than 150,000 workers in the Marmara region of Turkey took to the streets. The military, panicked by the liberatory process it had unwittingly initiated, issued a *pronunciamento* to the civilian government (characterized by the extreme unpredictability of a series of unstable coalition governments), intervening on 12 March 1971 in the name of order. The Left was brutally repressed, many activists were arrested and tortured, and parties like TİP were shut down. After the CHP, transformed into a “left-of-center” [*ortanın solu*] social democratic party under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit, entered parliament as a coalition leader in 1973 and declared a general amnesty in 1974 that freed many imprisoned activists, Turkey’s *long* sixties resumed. By 1975 Türkiye Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu [the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey, or DİSK], a breakaway organization from the Turkish state’s official union apparatus, had reached a membership of 600,000 representing sectors ranging from textiles, food production, mining, and journalism to petrochemicals. Besides increasing labor militancy, the period saw increasing organization among *gecekondu* [shantytown] dwellers in Turkey’s major cities and the creation of new Marxist-Leninist organizations, like Devrimci Yol [Revolutionary Path, or DEV-YOL). In 1979 a DEV-YOL member, Fikret Sönmez, won the mayoral seat of the town Fatsa on the Black Sea coast. When the popular mayor declared Fatsa an autonomous Soviet republic, the Turkish military

came into to crush the experiment (Zürcher 264). Throughout this period, the increasing militancy of the Left was matched and surpassed by that of the radical Right.²⁸ In 1978 alone Right-wing attacks by militarized ultra-nationalist, anti-communist organizations lead to 831 fatalities. In this period there were on average ten assassinations each day (Sayed). There were also mass acts of violence, such the May Day 1977 “Taksim Square Massacre” in which 42 people were killed after unknown gunmen began firing into the crowd from surrounding buildings. In 1978 more than one hundred Alevis (a religious minority) were killed in the Anatolian city of Kahramanmaraş and another fifty people were massacred in Çorum in 1980. Political violence reached such an extreme that the military again had the excuse it needed in order to intervene. The coup of 12 September 1980 set out to destroy the Left and succeeded spectacularly through arrests, exile and executions. The 12 September regime encouraged a “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” that would unite nationalism and Islam in state schools and public life as a bulwark against Leftism and also initiated on a neoliberal restructuring of Turkey’s economy (Karaveli 186). The “Turkish experiment in democracy” represented by the long sixties was brought to a conclusive end (Ahmad).

Yet there is more to the Turkish sixties than student activism, trade unionism, peasant organizing, street violence, and guerrilla movements. A no less significant

²⁸ There is a long history of militant and violent anti-communism in Turkey. For more on anti-communist student organizations, the radical right, and the Grey Wolf commando units associated with the Nationalist Movement Party of Colonel Alparslan Türkeş see Mehmet Ali Ağaoğulları’s essay on the “The Ultranationalist Right.” See also Daniele Ganser’s *NATO’s Secret Armies: Operation GLADIO and Terrorism in Western Europe* for an investigation of the links between rightist violence and the Turkish (deep) state.

dimension of the period was the flourishing cultural scene of major painters, novelists, poets, folk musicians, rockers, and directors committed to Left-wing politics. Culture and politics were mutually imbricated throughout the period: the sixties were “years of jubilant expectancy, giving rise to Turkey’s first mass socialist movement, contemporaneously with the emergence of an autonomous art and literature, the first of its kind” (Koçak, “Westernisation” 305). Accounts from the period reveal a giddy, breathless feeling of expectation. Innovative ideas were being discussed, artistic currents flourished, and the Left-wing youth began to organize themselves. Even at the height of the violence, cultural experimentation continued apace.

In the Turkish sixties, political and cultural dimensions were not simply contemporaneous: Leftist activists were interested in culture and many cultural producers were actively involved in the Left; in fact, many figures transcend the activist-artist divide altogether. Similarly, culture did not only reflect the cycle of politicization—it was often a central terrain of struggle. TİP, the Workers Party of Turkey, was central, as its leaders supported developments in arts and culture. Novelists Yaşar Kemal and Leyla Erbil and poets Can Yücel and Edip Cansever were among TİP’s prominent cultural supporters. Within the party, Behice Boran and Çetin Altan published literary criticism or fiction. Similarly, cultural producers in various media organized themselves as laborers through organizations like the Turkish Thespians Union (Tİ-SEN), the Democratic Folk Musicians Union (DEV-OZ), and the Union of Film Workers (Sine-İş). Members in these groups understood class

struggle and cultural struggle as intertwined. The incredible attention lavished on cultural production reveals the cultural revolutionary ethos of politicizing aesthetics that was dominant in Turkey.

The condition of possibility for the explosion in Left-aligned literature and thought was the post-1961 relaxation of censorship. The sixties was an “age of enlightenment” during which “Turkish intellectuals and youth read like never before” (Toprak 155).²⁹ Left-wing intellectuals founded important publishing houses, most notably Memet Fuat’s *De Yayınevi* [De Publishing House] (in 1960) and Muzaffer Erdost’s *Sol* [Left] (in 1965). Literary and political journals like Doğan Avcıoğlu’s *Yön* [Direction] (1961-1967) opened the path for open discussions of socialist ideas. The arts and culture section of the journal was edited by literary critics Fethi Naci and Konur Ertop; frequent contributors included the surly socialist novelist Attila İlhan and TİP politician Çetin Altan. *Yön* also re-exposed the public to the previously banned poems of Nâzım Hikmet.³⁰ Memet Fuat’s *Yeni Dergi* [New Journal] (1964-1975) printed translations of writers from Faulkner to Camus and printed special issues on themes like Herbert Marcuse and Prague Spring 1968. Experimental poet Cemal Süreya’s *Papirüs* [Papyrus] (1966-1970) focused on modernist literature but also included political commentary. Kemal Özer’s *Şiir Sanatı* [The Art of Poetry]

²⁹ *Diğer bir etmen 60’lı yılların bir tür ‘aydınlanma çağı’ işlevi görmesi. Türkiye tarihinde iki dönem aydınlanmayı getiriyor. Biri Jön Türk devrimi ertesi Kanun-ı Esasi yılları, diğeri 27 Mayıs devrimi ertesi 61 Anayasası yılları. Türk aydını ve gençliği, çağlar boyu bu dönemlerde olduğu kadar hiçbir zaman okumuyor.*

³⁰ On the influence of Nâzım Hikmet’s poetry during this period see my essay “Gerçekçilik ve Kavgacılık: Nâzım Hikmet’in 1960’lar Türkiye Sosyalist Şairleri İçin Önemi” in the volume *Şiir Dünyadan İbaret: Nazım Hikmet Üzerine Yeni Çalışmalar*.

(1966-1968) hosted explicitly activist poetry. *Ant* [Oath] (1967-1971) united Marxist analysis of world events with cultural criticism. Acclaimed village novelist Yaşar Kemal was responsible for the two-page arts and culture section. At the height of its popularity, *Ant* had a circulation of 20,000 to 25,000, suggesting how popular Left-wing publications could be. The short-lived *Halkın Dostları* [Friends of the People] (1970-1971) represented the more bellicose approach of a younger generation of Left-wing literati, with Marxist critics Murat Belge, Asım Bezirci, and Bedrettin Cömert as frequent contributors. Like many other publications, *Halkın Dostları* was shut down by decree in the wake of the 12 March 1971 military memorandum.

In the repressive context of the 1971 witch-hunt of Leftists, politicized culture gained fresh importance. After the trauma of the military intervention, Sevgi Soysal, Füzûzan, Melih Cevdet Anday, and others began exploring critical issues of violence, state repression, shame, and powerlessness in works retroactively known as “12 March novels.”³¹ Founded amidst the post-coup sense of defeat, the journal *Yeni a* [New a], started by short story writer Adnan Özyalçın and the poets Edip Cansever, Ülkü Tamer, Hilmi Yavuz in 1972, had an explicitly political goal: “to reckon with bourgeois culture, solidify solidarity with the popular struggle, help develop a culture and art with strong class foundations” [*burjuva kültürüyle hesaplaşmayı, halkın mücadelesine dayanışma sağlamayı, sınıfsal kökenleri sağlam bir kültürün ve sanatın*

³¹ These included Melih Cevdet Anday’s *İsa’nın Güncesi* [The Diary of Jesus] (1974), Erdal Öz’s *Yaralısın* [You Are Wounded] (1974), and Sevgi Soysal’s *Şafak* [Dawn] (1975). See Günay-Erkol, *Broken Masculinities: Solitude, Alienation, and Frustration in Turkish Literature after 1970*.

oluşmasına katkıda bulunmayı . . .] (Türkeş 1061). Özyalçiner reflects on the new importance of culture post-1971:

Given that it was forbidden to discuss politics, in that case we tried to express our thoughts through literature. We could explain recent events [. . .] through short stories, poetry, criticism, book reviews, artistic-cultural events, and interviews with artists.³²

While many of *Yeni a*'s contributors were in prison, literature provided an important method for resisting the military regime while avoiding censorship. The strategy was only partially successful: the magazine was shut down in 1974 for including a quotation from guerrilla fighter Deniz Gezmiş. Between 1975 and 1978, the Nationalist Front government led by Right-wing politician Süleyman Demirel targeted even seemingly benign art and literature; in this same period, liberal journalist Abdi İpekçi and Italian-trained Marxist literary critic Bedrettin Cömert were assassinated. As with Nixon's lurid description of naked rock 'n' roll communists, the state's targeting of cultural figures perversely reveals the degree to which the Right saw art as a threat. Yet despite all the external pressures, the interchange between radical politics and culture continued until the 1980 coup.³³

Despite the richness of this cultural legacy, the relationship between culture and politics remains a vexed issue in Turkey. This affects scholarly approaches to the period both within the country and outside. The first objection to considering the cultural and political sides of the sixties together has been a historiographical one. In

³²[M]adem politikadan söz etmek yasaktı, o zaman biz de edebiyet yoluyla düşüncelerimizi dile getirebilirdik. Yaşananları ve yaşadıklarımızı öykü, şiir, eleştiri, kitap tanıtımı, sanat kültür etkinlikleri ve sanatçılarla konuşmalarla kamuoyuna duyurabilirdik.

³³ For an influential analysis on post-1980 cultural developments in Turkey see Gürbilek's *The New Cultural Climate in Turkey: Living in a Shop Window*.

a post-coup stock-taking of the period published in the *New Left Review* in 1980, Murat Belge (writing under the pseudonym Ahmet Samim) admits that “In Turkish intellectual life, the Left enjoyed a scarcely rivaled supremacy: the greatest majority of thinkers, writers and artists were leftists, and a considerable number of them claimed to be Marxists” (186). However, cultural production and revolutionary politics remained specialized activities: “This was as much a product of the unwillingness of the intelligentsia to become more active, as of the militants' common attitude of rejecting anything that seems so 'soft' as theory or art.” The absence of “such organic links” between these two aspects of the Turkish sixties, resulted in the “theoretical and cultural shallowness of the political cadres.” For this reason, he asserts, in Turkey there was never the merging of culture and politics that is associated with “First World” movements.

According to another view, the Turkish sixties began more experimentally, but gradually closed down as movements retrenched and armored themselves in the more violent 1970s. Already in 1968, many young people split from TİP—deeply invested in issues of culture—to join more militaristic Left-wing currents. Cultural producers also began to segregate themselves into factions, and many young militants became dismissive of intellectual pursuits. In this vein, former activist Gün Zileli echoes Belge in mourning the increasingly anti-intellectual attitudes that took root in the 1970s, causing “cultural sterility and the marginalization of art and literature” [*kültürel kısırlaşma, işte sanat ve edebiyatın dışlanması*]. He gives the example of

novelist Oğuz Atay, who was a Left-wing intellectual who isolated himself from the organized Left: “the organic links were finished” [*organik bağ bitmiş*].

Yet the boundaries between politics and culture was often more fluid. Both former revolutionary cadres themselves, Belge and Zileli risk overemphasizing the split between activists and artists. In fact, Belge’s own trajectory complicates his own diagnosis of the sixties, as he was simultaneously a literary critic and intellectual writing for prominent Left-wing journals as well as an occasional underground militant who did a stint in jail after the 1971 coup. In retrospect, what is most striking about the period is the remarkable output of Left-wing art, novels, poems, stories, plays, and songs and how seriously debates about them were taken. That both cultural producers and militants saw fit to engage with aesthetic questions in the midst of protests, strikes, occupations, political violence, and state repression demonstrates that culture, sensibility, and everyday life were central to conceptions of the political in this period.

In more candid moments even the most hardened revolutionaries discussed their thoughts on ‘soft’ subjects like art. For example, in an interview from jail in 1971 Deniz Gezmiş, founder of the People's Liberation Army of Turkey (THKO), was asked how he became involved with politics. This famous student activist-turned-guerrilla-fighter responded: “We came [onto this path] from literature” [*Biz edebiyattan geldik*] (Öz 15). Though Gezmiş had particular aesthetic preferences—many of them characteristic of the Turkish Left’s preference for an engagé form of

realism—he answers questions about various writers with thoughtful seriousness.³⁴

Gezmiş defines poetry and music as central to his conception of revolutionary

politics:

Believe me that a regular old bourgeois cannot understand or even approach Beethoven's Seventh Symphony the way a revolutionary can. Or, I don't know: nobody can reach the flavor of the poetry of a Lorca or a Neruda like a revolutionary. (27)³⁵

For Gezmiş, political struggle is intimately linked to cultural production, and vice versa. In his neo-Romantic formulation, revolution represents the struggle to create a society worthy of art; and what the best art offers, for those who know how to read between the lines, is intimations of another kind of society. These statements from a central figure of the 1968 generation reveal that even the most militant segments of the Turkish Left were keenly invested in cultural production. In prison, Gezmiş was still discussing art and literature. Less than a year later he would be dead—executed by hanging. Short story writer and critic Erdal Öz, who conducted these interviews with Gezmiş while also incarcerated in Ankara's Mamak Military Prison, made it out of prison to tell the tale and continue his literary career. Throughout the sixties novelists, translators, poets, and publishers shared not only the same magazines pages but the same prison cells with activists and militants.

³⁴ Gezmiş described communist poets Nâzım Hikmet and Ahmed Arif as his favorites. He also followed the novels of village novelists Yaşar Kemal and Bekir Yıldız. Öz spots a tattered copy of Orhan Kemal's *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde* [Upon Fertile Earth] (1954) on Gezmiş's bunk, suggesting that he prefers works that portray rural conditions. Gezmiş follows but does not enjoy experimental writers like Bilge Karasu and Füzün. He sees both interesting and limiting sides to the modernist poetry of Ece Ayhan and Turgut Uyar (see Chapter One).

³⁵ *Sıradan bir burjuva, inan ki, Beethoven'in Yedinci Senfonisini bir devrimci k ad ar anlayamaz bence, bir devrimci gibi yaklaşamaz ona. Ne bileyim, bir Lorca'nın, bir Neruda'nın şiirinin tadına bir devrimci gibi varamaz. İspanya ıcsavaşını yaşayan biri, Rodrigo'yu nasıl bizlerden daha iyi anlarsa, bu da oyledir.*

Nevertheless, many who write on the period, particularly veterans of Turkey's 1968, critique excessive attention to art or music as a strategy for watering down the revolutionary politics of the period. Aydın Çubukçu argues that focusing on the less directly political dimensions of the movement is one way for "dominant ideology" to bury the legacy of the sixties:

Presenting things that were fashionable at the time like artistic and philosophical trends, musical groups, and the Hippie movement as characteristic of '68 and then either forgetting or defaming the worldwide revolutionary resistance, the struggle of people against imperialism, and the struggle of the youth against the established system is one way of acting as if [the sixties] never happened. (51)³⁶

For Çubukçu, who sees the sixties as a continuation of earlier twentieth-century waves of global anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist resistance, the Turkish sixties has more to do with 1917 than May '68. Emphasis on the political stakes of the period is best understood as an attempt to resist recuperation; throughout the world, presenting the sixties as purely 'cultural' has indeed been one strategy for the containment of its energies (Ross *Afterlives* 8). The solution is not to study culture instead of politics (or vice versa), but rather to see how their intertwined quality made the sixties distinctive as a world period—not just in France or the U.S. but in Turkey and many other places as well.

In fact, Çubukçu's conflation of art and music with the "Hippie movement" reveals that some accounts of the Turkish sixties are anxious to distinguish it from the

³⁶ *O dönemde moda olan sanat, felsefe akımları, müzik grupları, Hippilik akımı vs. '68'in karakteristikleri gibi sunulurken, dünyadaki devrimci kalkışma, halkların emperyalizme karşı mücadelesi, gençliğin kurulu sisteme karşı mücadelesi, ya unutturularak ya da karalanarak olmamış gibi göstermek isteniyor.*

more canonical sides of the U.S. sixties. Some scholars concur with the idea of a radical difference between Turkish and ‘Western’ sixties based on the status of culture in both contexts. Emin Alper’s influential account suggests that the Turkish sixties should be considered alongside ‘Third World’ movements in countries like India, Indonesia, and Ethiopia, as well as parts of Latin America based on common attitudes towards nationalism, modernization, the counterculture, and political strategies:

Despite all the problems of such broad categories and over-generalizations, it is plausible to think that there were some obvious characteristics in the student movements of these countries [. . .]. Third World student movements shared three aspects. First, a strongly nationalist (albeit, a leftist version of it) stance and support of modernization, development and industrialization, unlike the anti-nationalist, anti-modernizationist characteristics of cultural movements of the Western student movements. Second, the insignificance of counter-cultural aspects in these movements (however, insignificance does not mean inexistence [sic]), which aimed to transform life-styles, existing culture, to experiment with new ways of communal life combined with an overall rejection of established way of living and making politics. Third, the continuity of traditional politics, which targeted the seizure of political power with a strong, organized political institution. (92)

There are significant differences between France, West Germany, Britain, or the U.S. and Turkey in the sixties that must not be glossed over—though even the movements of Western European countries are far from uniform in how they understood the role of culture.³⁷ Yet it is not the case that art and cultural experimentation had an “insignificant” role in the Turkish movements of the period. Even in the late 1970s countercultural styles and aesthetics in Turkey (ranging from experimental art to long

³⁷ See Schildt Axel and Siegfried’s *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960-1980*.

hair to psychedelic imagery) did not disappear, even though segments of the Left become more vocal in their rejection of them. These remained a part of the Left's repertoire, often merging with more folk-based styles.³⁸

As for the arts, cultural revolution continued to be explored through the works of the many writers, artists, actors, and musicians on the Left. This often entailed complex negotiations with local factors and conditions. The period was filled with productive tensions. Countercultural trends were fiercely contested but they were sometimes embraced, adapted, or hybridized. On the Left there was a resurgence of interest in the social conditions and literary traditions of Anatolia at the same time that other Left-leaning writers were developing an urbane, modernist aesthetic poetry that clashed with socialist realist prescriptions. In addition, new and hybrid genres emerged, such as Anadolu Rock—a genre, as we shall see in Chapter Four—that combined the emerging genre of psychedelic rock with Turkish folk music traditions. Given this complexity, the solution is not to trade attention to culture for militant politics, or foreign imposition with national 'essence,' but to register that the different negotiations worked out on the ground were themselves characteristic of the cultural politics of the Turkey sixties in its liminal position. Though Third Worldism was the main source of inspiration, the cultural trends (Existentialism, Marxist humanism, experimental cinema, rock 'n' roll) and repertoire of protest actions (university

³⁸ Braunstein and Doyle make a similar argument about the periodization of the U.S. 60s, with a split around 1967-8 from the earlier Flower Power mode of the 60s to increased militancy and a suspicion of counter-cultural commodification (11).

occupations, sit-ins) emerging out Western Europe and North America were also strongly influential.

The tendency among some Turkish activists and scholars to downplay the cultural terrain of struggle corresponds to a tendency outside of the country to discount the humanistic developments in less developed countries.³⁹ Area Studies often emphasize social scientific approaches and political or economic developments at the expense of culture. This division of labor affects studies of the sixties too. For example, in *The Third World in the Global 1960s* Christiansen and Scarlett echo a common perception that the “Third World [. . .] lacked any significant or united countercultural movement” (8). It is true, as they remark, that “turning on, tuning in, and dropping out” (in Timothy Leary’s famous phrase) made less sense where activists “had nothing to drop out from” and were instead trying to gain meaningful inclusion into their societies (9). Similarly, the degree of social conservatism could be higher in places like Turkey than in much of Europe or the U.S.⁴⁰ There were indeed

³⁹ Victoria Holbrook, a scholar of Ottoman poetry, writes that: “The Middle East is widely perceived as an exclusively sociological area where humanities never happen (except, perhaps, in an ideal country called Persia). It has the strange reputation of being a place where only war occurs” (1).

⁴⁰ The conservative nature of the “Third World” and the libertarian quality of the “First” is often greatly overexaggerated. Barbara Epstein’s description of late-sixties militants in the U.S. could apply just as well to cadres in Turkey: “Marxist-Leninist organizations that ordered their members to cut their hair and get married in order to make themselves acceptable to the working class” (43). Similarly, in Italy there was a strong “disjuncture between communist culture and youth culture” that late in the long sixties caused the youth to reject “the puritan Stalinism of PCI high culture” (Horn 139). Socialists in West Germany also tended to be conservative, particularly on matters of mass culture (jazz, rock, etc.) (138-9). It is not true that the ‘Western’ sixties was liberatory while the ‘Third World’ was uniformly conservative: in each context it depends on which factions are being discussed in which period. Sexism and homophobia were also almost universally rampant. While feminism and the gay and lesbian liberation movements brought changes to movements in the U.S., before Robin Morgan’s famous 1970 essay “Goodbye to All That” the situation of women in the Turkish Left and the U.S. New Left—relegated to secondary or menial roles, like mimeographing, typing, or making coffee—was more similar than not. For a critique of sexism in the Turkish Left see Berktaş’s scathing account “Has Anything Changed in the Outlook of the Turkish Left on Women?”

sixties movements across the world that *tended* to be more invested in making the nation live up to its promises rather than abolishing all authority, more focused on industrial development rather than critiquing the alienation caused by technocratic rule, and more invested in things like industrial production than preserving the planet from ecological devastation. Certainly, the Turkish sixties more closely resembles the first in each of these pairs of examples. Yet this does not mean that the anti-authoritarian tendencies in Turkey that critiques alienation and expanded the sense of the political were “insignificant,” as Christiansen and Scarlett (and Alper too) expressed it. These phenomena necessarily looked different outside of the Euro-American context and entailed a complex negotiation with local factors and conditions. Yet dismissing them altogether prevents us from gaining a more nuanced and complete picture of the world sixties.

The category “Third World” is ill-suited to registering this specificity of Turkey, and indeed other countries in a roughly similar position in the world-system. If there is a category able to encompass and explain this liminality, it is not “Third World” but, to use the vocabulary of Immanuel Wallerstein’s World-Systems Theory, “semi-periphery.” The liminal, partially industrialized countries of the semi-periphery combine social, economic, and cultural components of a high-income, high-technological core (countries like the U.S.) and a dependent, poor, and/or colonized periphery (countries like Afghanistan or Bolivia) (“Semi-Peripheral” 462). This explains why the Turkish sixties most resembles certain Latin American or

Mediterranean⁴¹ nations rather than countries like Senegal or Malaysia,⁴² let alone the U.S. or the France.

There are meaningful differences in how the sixties played out in different parts of the world and the terminology of core, periphery, and semi-periphery (however imperfect) allow us to begin registering these variances. However, the sixties still stands or falls as a global moment. The following section will trace the specific relationship between the U.S. and Turkey in the period and show how the comparison across core and semi-periphery can shed new light on what makes the world sixties distinctive. Ironically, however, this distinctiveness can be partly explained by how movements across the world were invested in the idea of the “Third World”—even across opposing factions of the Cold War. The term should be retired as a descriptor of world sixties struggles, or as a category for taxonomizing the world. Yet it cannot be dispensed with altogether. What is at stake is not the “Third World” as a real thing or place but a rallying cry.

Turkey, the U.S., and the Global Cold War

Ho Ho Ho Şi Min / İki üç daha fazla Vietnam / Ernesto'ya bin selam

[Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh / Two, Three, even more Vietnams / A thousand greetings to Ernesto (Che Guevara)]

- Turkish protest slogan

⁴¹ For a further development of the concept of a Mediterranean sixties on the semi-periphery of Europe, see my chapter comparing the Greek and Turkish sixties in the *Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties* (2018).

⁴² On the 60s in Senegal and Malaysia see the chapters by Gueye and Derichs in the *Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties*.

The Turkish sixties cannot be thought apart from the U.S. Cold War policy that formed its major antagonist. The Cold War began in the Mediterranean. Immediately after World War II, U.S. involvement in Turkey and Greece (as well as in Iranian Azerbaijan) represent the first shots fired in the slow-simmering conflict. The U.S. came out of the war with a renewed sense of the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean, with its abundant oil supplies and strategic location relative to the Soviet Union (Khalidi 111). If the Mediterranean fell to the Soviets, so the reasoning went, that would be the end for the American Middle East policy. The Truman Doctrine was declared in March of 1947 when President Truman requested funds from Congress to “help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity” he was referring to a plan to keep communism out of Greece, Turkey, and Iran at whatever cost—including democracy (Panourgía 117). As then-Secretary of State Dean Acheson famously remarked, “Like apples in a barrel infected by one rotten one, the corruption of Greece would affect Iran and all the East” (Gallant 179). Like Greece, Turkey was considered one of the first in a long line of Cold War dominoes.

Because Turkey had joined the Allied side of World War II at the eleventh hour (February 1945) eligible for Marshall Plan funds. Truman and his advisors offered Turkey \$100,000,000 in economic aid. Throughout the 1950s American political and cultural influence was so strong in Turkey that it was difficult to publicly critique the U.S. (Örnek and Cangül 7). Turkish politicians dreamed of making Turkey a “little America” complete with refrigerators and well-kept suburbs (6). The

Demokrat Parti government of Adnan Menderes tried to prove “allegiance with [ever] greater panache, first by dispatching Turkish troops to the Korean War, then by insisting on joining [NATO in 1952], and finally by granting the US army a number of military bases” (133). By 1968 nearly 30,000 US citizens were working on twenty-one military bases on Turkish soil. Turkey had become “a willing and loyal outpost of the West” (Keyder 133).

In the sixties, despite the intensity of U.S. involvement and local anti-communist repression, the Cold War consensus in Turkey and the wider Mediterranean began to shatter. With the rise of Gaddafi in Libya, the loss of U.S. military bases in Malta, the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the Cyprus conflict, and the continued presence of Soviet submarines, “[t]he Mediterranean had become a hot spot” (Gallant 201). Turkish Leftists began to organize against what they saw as U.S. neo-imperialism in the form of “espionage, ideological propaganda, [and] the armament process” (Mater 2). Deep resentment was also produced by the U.S. handling of the Cyprus issue (1963-4) and the Cuban Missile Crisis (1965). In order to protect its interests, the U.S. became increasingly set on preserving its ‘special relationship’ with Turkey, responding to military takeovers there and in Greece with only feigned and temporary displays of dismay.⁴³ This only exacerbated the

⁴³ The Greek junta’s 1967 coup was undertaken with the help of the notoriously violent Hellenic Raiding Force, also known as the Greek Gladio, which after helping the right win the Greek Civil War continued to be active in extra-legal repression of the left. Ganser writes: “Only in one other country, namely in Turkey, were the secret anti-Communist armies equally involved in coup d’états (221). In Turkey a similar dynamic was forged through the counter-guerilla activities of the *Özel Harp Dairesi* or Special Warfare Department (Ganser 226). This organization had links to the ultra-Right, pan-Turkist Grey Wolves organization responsible for violent attacks on the Left during the Turkish 60s. It

frustration brewing at this time over Turkey's position in the Cold War. A major issue for activists in Istanbul was keeping the U.S. navy's Sixth Fleet, and the Cold War interventionism it symbolized, out of Turkish harbors. On 17 July 1968 protesters in Istanbul marched down to the Bosphorus to protest the landing of the fleet and threw American sailors into the water (Ulus 109). Their watchcry was "Down with imperialism! Long live a fully independent Turkey!" [*Kahrolsun emperyalizm! Yaşasın tam bağımsız Türkiye!*]. The contrast between this militant protest and the jubilant welcome that the U.S.S. Missouri enjoyed when it first came to Istanbul in the 1946 shows how much sixties politics had cracked U.S. hegemony in the country.

Ironically, the sixties Left in the U.S. was organizing against the same enemy. Just as activists there were challenging the escalation of the Cold War by attempting to "bring the war home" and exorcise the "Vietnam in our factories," Turkish revolutionaries were escalating their tactics. One pivotal moment in the Turkish Left's rejection of the Cold War order was the burning of U.S. Ambassador Robert Komer's car in 1968. After heading the pacification and counter-insurgency effort against the NLF, Komer was appointed ambassador to Turkey. He arrived on 28 November 1968 and was immediately met by protests at the airport. Youth organizations sent a telegram to Turkish President Cevdet Sunay which read, "For a person who works for the CIA to be stationed in Turkey, a person who, furthermore, served in Vietnam, is an expression that Turkey and Vietnam are seen as one and the

was only after 1990 when the Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti made information about NATO's "stay at home" forces in Italy public that the full extent of these NATO projects in Greece and Turkey came to light.

same” (Çubukçu 88). On 6 January Komer came to Middle Eastern Technical University (ODTÜ) in Ankara at the invitation of the rector. After Komer was escorted inside the administration building the thousands of students who had gathered outside to protest him began to surround his car. At first they just shouted slogans. Then rocks were thrown. Soon the car was flipped on its side and set aflame. A number of prominent student activists were arrested for this arson. The burning of Komer's car was seen as a victory against the U.S. and the incident took its permanent place in the memory of the Left (90).

Though Turkish and U.S. activists opposed many of the same things, the relationship between their two countries was fundamentally lopsided: while Turkish Leftists were hyper-aware of what the U.S. was doing in Turkey, in the Mediterranean, and in southeast Asia and beyond, their counterparts in the U.S. knew almost nothing about the activities of their country's cold warriors there.⁴⁴ Despite the unidirectionality of this relationship, Turkish and U.S. revolutionaries shared a common source of inspiration: the struggles of the so-called 'Third World.' While this concept is not very helpful for understanding Turkey's geopolitical position or the character of its sixties movements, as a metaphor it is essential to grasping how activists in Turkey (and, remarkably, in the U.S.) understood themselves.

⁴⁴ Two recent studies focus on the relationship between Turkey and the U.S. during the Cold War. Begüm Adalet's *Hotels and Highways: The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey* shows how the U.S. used Turkey as a "laboratory in which to experiment" Cold War theories and was then touted as a model of modernization for other developing countries (3). Pelin Gürel's *The Limits of Westernization: A Cultural History of America in Turkey* show the U.S. was centered in Turkish discourse about both the threat and the promise of modernity.

Building on Althusser, Cynthia A. Young asserts that for activists of color in the U.S. “Third World” was ideological, in the sense of representing “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Young 14; Althusser 109). Because the sixties began in the decolonizing countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and countries like Cuba, Algeria, and Vietnam were crucial influences in the U.S.—particularly among activists of color who saw themselves as a colonized ‘nation within a nation’—Young describes U.S. sixties movements as part of a “Third World Left” based not necessarily on shared conditions but a common orientation. This “ability to imagine and claim common cause with a radical Third World subject involve multiple translations and substitutions; it required the production of an imagined terrain able to close the multiple gaps between First and Third World subjects” (4). John Sinclair, manager of the band MC5 and co-founder of the anti-racist White Panther Party, argued (less convincingly than the Black Panthers) that the “the long-haired dope-smoking rock and roll street-fucking culture” of counter-cultural youth also represented a “revolutionary culture” and an “internal colony” (Dale 145). Sixties politics in the U.S. was replete with these sorts of analogical equations.

We can extend the concept of a “Third World Left” even further and use it describe movements in the semi-periphery. For Turkish activists, as for minoritized groups within the U.S., “Third World” functioned as a heuristic to help them comprehend their precarious place in the world balance of power. Despite the very real effects of U.S. imperialism—the presence of U.S. soldiers and military bases,

active intervention in Turkey's foreign policy decisions, and tacit support for military coups—Turkish Leftists were not fighting a literal war of liberation. Turkey remained an ostensibly sovereign country. Yet young people cutting their teeth in campaigns against NATO or U.S. involvement in the Cyprus conflict felt an affinity for Cuban guerrillas and Algerian liberation fighters. They understood their struggles as fundamentally analogous to that of the decolonizing world and they dreamed of seeing their country become one of the “two, three, many Vietnams” famously called for by Che Guevara.⁴⁵ This does not mean that Turkey was the same as Cuba, Algeria, or Vietnam. Both in the U.S. and in Turkey legitimate grievances were expressed through metaphorical language. “Third World” does not literally describe the ghettos of Newark nor the countryside of Anatolia, but it was essential to the self-understanding of revolutionaries in both in the “belly of the beast” and among the Mediterranean “dominoes” of the Cold War.

This allegorical reading of the national situation as ‘Third World,’ and a ‘nation within a nation’ allowed for the discovery (or rhetorical invention) of links between the local and global situations. The struggle of individual communities or countries for national liberation was made possible by the internationalism of the period. Transnational Leftist networks, emigration from colonies to metropolises,

⁴⁵ As one former activist explains, this constellation of influences was dominant not only within the protest movements of Istanbul and Ankara but also in the east of the country. “The wind of '68 was blowing at Erzurum's Atatürk University as well” (Çubukçu 73). Like their peers elsewhere, young revolutionaries in Erzurum kept abreast of global developments: “We would debate really heavily. We would even read the books that were coming out by Régis Debray and Che and hold debates on them. We thought that until American imperialism was defeated in Turkey we would not be able to create an equal and modern society” (75).

conferences in Bandung and Havana, new print/media technologies, and the circulation of radical texts all served to shrink “the distance between national contexts and the people in them” (Young 9), so that Black Panthers could be selling copies of Mao’s aphorisms at UC Berkeley while Turkish revolutionaries were studying Régis Debray. Despite the very real differences between such disparate movements, all were speaking the language of national liberation.

The term “Third World” provided revolutionaries in the periphery, the semi-periphery, and in the core capitalist countries with a cognitive map of the global terrain. The concept allowed them to name a common enemy and seek out analogies between otherwise disparate struggles. This shared enemy was ‘the man’: a many-headed hydra that alternately took the shape of the U.S. military, the Warsaw Pact, the Name-of-the-Father, Lyndon B. Johnson, the cultural industry, Moloch, Liu Shaoqi, the church, Jim Crow, NATO, General Suharto, the Sixth Fleet, the police, Mayor Daley. The goal too was analogous: personal, political, psychic, economic, and national liberation. And the weapon was art.

Aesthetics and Politics

Whether they were mainly aestheticizing politics or politicizing aesthetics, or acting from within the core or semi-periphery of the World-System, for cultural revolutionaries in both Turkey and the U.S. art had an essential role to play in the struggle. Yet there were major fault lines between the two countries—as well as within them—on specific questions of aesthetics. These sixties debates drew liberally from the twentieth-century legacy of artistic ferment. Earlier movements ranging

from Expressionism, Cubism, and Dada to Constructivism to Surrealism employed widely divergent aesthetic strategies in pursuit of no less divergent ends. Whether it was the role of art to abolish itself and become praxis (as in the avant-garde), or imagining that the only path that remained open to art was formal auto-critique (as in certain forms of modernism), painters, sculptors, poets, architects and cultural producers of all kinds on the political Left had faith in the aesthetic as a potentially world-transforming practice. Sixties movements inherited this variety of tactics and techniques.

An important reference point mobilized during the sixties was the “Expressionism debate” of the 1930s and 1940s that took place among German-speaking Marxist critics and artists.⁴⁶ It began as a disagreement between György Lukács and Ernst Bloch over the legacy of German Expressionism, and eventually drew in the likes of Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, and Theodor Adorno. Because Expressionism was one of the earliest modern art movements in Germany, this debate was “essentially a contest over the historical meaning of modernism in general” (Jameson 12). Its central questions were the role of art in revolution, the merits and limitations of expressing explicitly tendency in art versus an aesthetic of anti-representationalism, and the connected question of the autonomy of art. While Lukács critiqued Expressionist experiments for their decadent “campaign against reality” (58), Bloch challenged Lukács’ fundamental assumption: the existence “a closed and integrated reality” that literature can faithfully reflect (22). Even a formally

⁴⁶ For translations of the major texts in this debate see Adorno, Theodor, et al. *Aesthetics and Politics*.

fragmented art can be realist when it is engaging with the fundamentally fragmented reality of life under capitalism. Adorno in turn argued the question of revolutionary content was deluded from the start. The social content of the artwork inheres in its form: modernism, he argued, “voices an immanent negative critique (whether from the left or the right) of the intensification of social misery in capitalist society” (58). Opaque work “challenges signification and by its very distance from meaning revolts in advance against positivist subordination of meaning” (179). In this sense, even seemingly apolitical art can be deeply political. Finally Brecht and Benjamin sought a path beyond either the ‘classic’ realists (Tolstoy, Thomas Mann) loved by Lukács and the hermetic modernists (Beckett) preferred by Adorno in the name of an art that could be popular in the true sense of the word: accessible, pleasurable, and instructive to wide swathes of the population.

While the turbulent 1930s and 1940s is seen as the high point of aesthetic debate over the political valences of different aesthetic forms, the four chapters that follow work to expand the study of aesthetics and politics in several ways. First, by recognizing that these debates did not end in the 1940s but reappeared in new ways when the social movements of the sixties brought the question of political art to the fore once again. Second, by moving the discussion beyond the German critics’ almost exclusive attention to the novel and (secondarily) drama. Though “the marked neglect shown by Marxist critics for poetry” has abated since Kristin Ross spoke of it in the 1980s, the argument here is that in the sixties poetry and popular music were two central sites of debate (*Emergence* 11).

Finally, this dissertation extends the conversation beyond Western Europe and North America. The comparison of Turkey and the U.S. reveals an unexplored dimensions of sixties aesthetic thinking. The classic Marxist scholarship often assumes the historical experience of Western Europe to be universal, or otherwise does not concern itself with how the aesthetic developed elsewhere. German aesthetics was based on the autonomy of art, its disinterestedness and functionlessness. Changes in the division of labor and the increasing “differentiation of spheres” (Habermas quoted in Huyssen 17) isolated art from other realms of social life. In the twentieth-century European avant-garde movements challenged the separation and tried to reclaim art’s pedagogical or revolutionary fiction. In belatedly modernized states like Turkey, however, culture remained an explicit tool for education, propaganda, and popular mobilization well into the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁷ In these places the “institution art” (Bürger) either did yet not exist or did not have the same function. The common sense in Turkey was not that art was autonomous from politics but that it had a political duty to civilize the populace. Even though such explicitly pedantic uses of art had begun to wane in Turkey by the early sixties, Left-wing artists had only to bring new, socialist content to the tradition of engagé art developed to transform Ottoman subjects into modern, westernized Turkish citizens during the Kemalist cultural revolution. Thus, the goals of the European avant-garde made little sense in a context where art and literature were

⁴⁷ See Jusdanis’ *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature* (especially 104-5) for a description of this process in Greece.

already hopelessly loaded with social duties to fill, having no place to retreat. Similarly, it was not until the fifties, when the Turkish state's expectations of culture began to relax, that an art that refused functionality and flaunted its own opacity was thinkable. For this reason, Modernism-versus-Realism continued to be the essential separating line of aesthetic-political debate in Turkey. Conversely, discussions of the period in the "West" describe modernism as defanged in the sixties because Beckett, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound had been canonized in universities. Yet comparing Turkish debates to contemporaneous ones in the U.S. it becomes clear that issues there were not so settled either. The pro-Modernist New Critical prohibition on political art broke down in the sixties, leading to much rancorous debate over art's descent into 'propaganda.'

The cultural revolutionary movements of the sixties mobilized a variety of aesthetic tactics and techniques in the service of transforming life. The case studies of Turkey and the U.S. seek to uncover register both the points of overlap and divergence in the spirit of offering a more comparative, worlded account of a period that was itself marked by an incredible sense of international simultaneity.

Chapter Two

Make It (Second) New: Turkish Modernist Poetry

In the mid-1950s, something happened to Turkish poetry. A smattering of poems composed in an unaccustomed style began appearing in the popular literary magazines of the period. Sharing a certain bizarre quality in their use of language and deployment of imagery, the poems were published by a handful of young writers in Istanbul and Ankara. These poets issued no common manifesto explaining this sudden aesthetic shift. Most of them did not know each other. And yet these poems, flaring up in this journal or that, gave the appearance of a coordinated assault against not only the dominant trends in Turkish letters but the very rules of grammar and syntax. Like fires set simultaneously at various points across a large urban space by a team of autonomous saboteurs, these poems caused immediate panic among Turkey's cultural intelligentsia.

One of those grappling with this transformation was literary critic Muzaffer İlhan Erdost. In a 1956 article for the magazine *Son Havadis* [Latest Tidings] he described an “otherness” [*başkalık*] that had begun to make itself felt in Turkish poetry—an “abstract” [*soyut*] and “meaningless” [*anlamsız*] poetic style that he dubbed *İkinci Yeni*, or the “Second New” (Messo 10) Though not chosen by poets themselves, today the work of Ece Ayhan (1931-2002), Edip Cansever (1928-1986), Cemal Süreya (1931-1990), Turgut Uyar (1927-1985), and others is still known under

this name.⁴⁸ This chapter explores the forces in modern Turkish history that created the conditions of possibility for the emergence of the Second New in the fifties, anticipating the cultural revolutionary politics that would come to characterize the world sixties.

As the “second” in “Second New” suggests, this was not the first time that Turkish poetry underwent a process of renewal. From 1937 to 1945, the *Garip* [literally “Strange”] movement, retroactively known as *Birinci Yeni*, the “First New,” associated with the poets Orhan Veli, Melih Cevdet Anday, and Oktay Rifat, represented the apotheosis of longstanding efforts to modernize Turkish poetry. First New poets rejected both Ottoman and early Republican poetic conventions in favor of unrhymed, free verse that utilized the language and narrated the experiences of the 1940s urban every-man, as in Veli’s “Poem with Bells”:

We civil servants,
At nine o’clock, at twelve, at five
Have the streets to ourselves
That’s how God fated it
We wait either for the end-of-day bell
Or for the first of the month. (110)⁴⁹

⁴⁸ . Most of the poets actually rejected the label of “Second New” and blamed it for effacing the real differences between their work. For example, Süreya writes “I mean we never got together and made an effort to say ‘let’s do it like this, let’s form a team.’ If a team was formed it happened of its own accord. It happened with the poetry that was published [yani hiçbir zaman ortaya çıkıp, şöyle yapalım, bir takım kuralım diye çabalamadık. Takım kurulduysa kendiliğinden oldu. Ortaya çıkan şiirle oldu] (Güvercin 90).

⁴⁹ Zilli Şiir
Biz memurlar,
Saat dokuzda, saat on ikide, saat beşte,
Biz bizyizdir caddelerede,
Böyle yazmış yazımızı Ulu Tanrı;
Ya paydos zilini bekleriz,
Ya ay başını

Quotidian lines like these was the result of a nearly century-long effort to simplify the Turkish language—the “catastrophic success” of the modernizing reforms that changed the Turkish script from Arabic to Latin and profoundly transformed the language by ‘purifying’ it of centuries of Arabic and Persian influence—and re-engineer the literary tradition.⁵⁰ In the 1910s and 1920s, groups like the Beş Hececiler [Five Syllabists] replaced urbane Ottoman poetry written in quantitative meters inspired by Arabic poetry with syllabic folk meters and village themes about war, love, and loneliness.⁶⁸ The First New went even further. Anday, Rifat, and Veli’s 1941 joint manifesto *Garip* not only announced the uselessness of meter and rhyme but lamented that it was not “possible to dump even language itself,” for it was still sedimented with a dead tradition that “forc[es] its vocabulary on us when we write poetry” (Halman 177). By the early fifties, however, the popularity of the once iconoclastic First New style had resulted in a slew of imitators, each trying to cash in on the successful formula of mid-level civil servants describing the simple pleasures of the charming but down-at-the-heel neighborhoods of Istanbul, employing the same radically colloquial idiom with its lightly satirical but good-natured humor.

The Second New put an end to all of this. Opaque metaphors, unpoetic objects (atoms, telephones, neon, minibuses, nylon), and a melancholic, incendiary, desire-driven lyric voice began to appear in poetry. One of the first poems in this new style

⁵⁰ For what is still the most authoritative account of the state engineering of the Turkish language see *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* by Geoffrey Lewis.

⁶⁸ On the Beş Hececiler see Laurent Mignon’s chapter “Love in the Poetry of the Five Syllabists” in *Neither Shiraz nor Paris: Papers on Modern Turkish Literature*.

was Cemal Süreya's "Gül" [Rose], published in 1954 in the magazine *Yeditepe*. It begins:

I am crying right in the middle of the rose
As I die each night in the open road
Knowing nothing ahead or behind (Messo 119)⁵¹

These phantasmagorical images, describing one man's deranged psychic state as he wanders through a disorienting urban landscape, ends with a notorious closing line: "And on the end of the pipe a newly born gypsy" [*Ve zurnanın ucunda yepyeni bir çingene*]. With its use of dense, decontextualized imagery, sudden and striking reversals (the pipe is playing the gypsy, rather than the other way around), Second New poetry was a scandal and a revelation.

This aesthetic radicalism of Ayhan, Cansever, Süreya, and Uyar⁵² had a complex relationship to what would become sixties political radicalism. To various

⁵¹*Gülün tam ortasında ağlıyorum
Her akşam sokak ortasında öldükçe
Önümü arkamı bilmiyorum (Sevda 12)*

In Turkish the complete poems and collected prose writings of Ayhan, Cansever, Süreya, and Uyar remain in print with convenient editions from Yapı Kredi Yayınları. Despite the outsized importance the Second New has had in shaping Turkish poetry, very little of these poets' vast output has been translated into English. While individual poems appear scattered in English-language anthologies of Turkish literature, the only substantial collection dedicated to the Second New is George Messo's *İkinci Yeni - The Turkish Avant-Garde*. Messo has also published several slim collections by İlhan Berk: *New Selected Poems 1947-2008*, *Madrigals*, *A Leaf About to Fall: Selected Poems*, and *Letters & Sounds*. A small selection of unevenly translated poems from Edip Cansever has been published as *Dirty August* (translated by Julia Clare Tillinghast and Richard Tillinghast), but most of his voluminous works, including his dramatic poems, remain untranslated. Cemal Süreya's 1958 book *Üvercinka* has been published as *Pigeonwoman* by the translators Abbas Karakaya and Donny Smith. Two works of Ece Ayhan's have been translated as a single volume, *A Blind Cat Black and The Orthodoxies*, by Murat Nemet-Nejat. There are no book-length translations of Turgut Uyar's work.

⁵² Because the Second New was not started as an intentional literary movement, its borders are sometimes unclear. İlhan Berk (1918-2008) is often considered a Second New poet. He was the only one among these groups of poets who espoused the title. His many critical texts describing the "Second New style" are mostly justifications of his own technique, which took much from French surrealism. For these reasons, Berk remains an outlier from the 'core' Second New style which this chapter locates in the work of Berk, Cansever, Uyar and—partly—Ayhan. Sezai Karakoç (born 1933) wrote a similar

degrees, each of them aligned himself with Turkey's burgeoning socialist movement. Yet from the mid-fifties, when the Second New style first appeared, to around 1968, when these poets reached the height of their influence, the Second New shocked not only the bourgeoisie but also the Left. In countless essays and articles Marxist literati like Asim Bezirci argued that İkinci Yeni poetry was filled with meaningless imagery, nonsensical language, and a petit bourgeois emphasis on individual mental states. In his words: "This poetry generally remains aloof from social issues, class realities, and political events" (25). Similarly, critic Memet Fuat (stepson of communist poet Nâzım Hikmet) asserted that even for those members of privileged classes who followed contemporary poetry, the work of Second New poets read like an unsolvable riddle (114-15). Supporting a more socialist realist understanding of literature that dovetailed in many ways with the formal qualities of First New poetry (an emphasis on clarity of statement and colloquial language, adapting the Turkish state's principle of a didactic literature that could serve the nation-building project) these Leftist critics condemned İkinci Yeni for its supposed distance from the realities of social life and its meaninglessness.

After the eventful year of 1968, this debate over the Second New was escalated by a group of young, explicitly Left-wing poets of the "Sixties Generation," including Ataul Behramoğlu, İsmet Özel, Kemal Özer, Özkan Mert, among others. A

style of poetry and was close friends with Süreya, but his Sufi-inspired aesthetics and Islamic politics make him a complex and rare figure deserving of his own full-length study. While the poetry of Gülten Akin (1933-1955) is sometimes described as Second New-inspired, there are no women in the first generation of Second New poets. Tomris Uyar, a prominent contemporary and also wife of Turgut Uyar, wrote short stories and journalistic pieces but not poetry.

December 1969 issue of the socialist magazine *Ant* [Oath] contained the article “Young Socialist Poets Declare War” [*Toplumcu Genç Şairler Savaş Açıyor*], a joint statement in which poets of this group declared themselves to be the “representatives of an unambiguous, socialist understanding of art” [*açık, seçik, toplumcu bir sanat anlayışının temsilcileri olarak*] (14). For this reason, they had to embark upon a “merciless struggle” [*kıyasıya bir kavga*] against the Second New, which they saw—in terms echoing György Lukács’ denunciation of modernism—as a “formalist” [*biçimci*] and “reactionary literature” [*gerici edebiyat*].⁵³ For these poets, the experimental language and imagery of the Second New was an imperialist ploy to corrupt “the values of our people” [*halkımızın değerleri*]. Mert argued that these now established poets were simply carrying on with the same old fifties aesthetic even after the 1960 coup had supposedly ushered in an entirely new historical conjuncture. The Sixties Generation poets denounced the Second New for ignoring the revolutionary struggles of the sixties.

The irony of the young socialist poets’ denunciations of the Second New is that, as this chapter will show, these poets had always responded to political events, even if in a veiled and often obscure way. Yet in the sixties their poems began to include more explicit political content. Whether it was because of the critiques they received or the pressures of historical events themselves, after the brutal 1971 coup

⁵³ The use of “formalist” as a pejorative was made more widespread by Lukács. It is no coincidence that the arguments used against the Second New resemble his. The critic’s work, and particularly his articulation of ‘critical realism,’ was translated relatively early into Turkish, having a dominant influence on Leftist literary criticism from the end of the sixties until the 1980s. For more on the reception of Lukács in Turkey see Okay’s “Türkçede Lukacs ve Düşüncesinin Etkisi.”

the Second New poets produced some of the most memorable political poetry of the era. Poems like “Mendilimde Kan Sesleri” [Sounds of Blood in My Handkerchief] by Cansever, “Meçhul Öğrenci Anıtı” [Monument to the Unknown Student] by Ayhan, and “Kan Var Bütün Kelimelerin Altında” [There Is Blood Beneath All of the Words] by Süreya were elegies for the Left. Other of their poems, like Uyar’s “Bağlı Kalmanın Yer” [The Place of Commitment] had a surprisingly strident tone of militancy. After the coup Cansever and Uyar even began clandestinely supporting the illegal Marxist-Leninist organization Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi [People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey]—Cansever sending cash donations every month and Uyar (a retired Turkish military officer) offering to use his old pistol to help the underground militants rob a bank (*Sanat Belge* 321). These details go to prove that the acrimonious debate over this poetic current was more about aesthetics than politics, or more precisely it centered on divergent understandings of the relationship between them. This was an intra-Left debate on the role of art in revolutionary struggle.

The debate over the Second New was a major discursive event of Turkey’s long sixties. Like the Lukács-Adorno “German Expressionism” debate of the 1930s and 1940s, the seriousness of these denunciations and counter-denunciations over the Second New suggest that, far from being an airy realm removed from real life, culture was considered a key site of political struggle. This debate between realism (the Sixties Generation) and modernism (the Second New) stood for two competing and seemingly irreconcilable

The Sixties Generation wanted literature that offered unambiguous statements of political tendency; their books had titles like *Evet, İsyân* [Yes, Rebellion] (İsmet Özel, 1969), *Giün Ola* [The Day Will Come] (Süreyya Berfe, 1969), and *Kuracağız Herşeyi Yeniden* [We Will Build Everything Anew] (Özkan Mert, 1970). In his 1975 *Sen De Katılmalısın Yaşamı Savunmaya* [You Too Must Join the Fight to Defend Life], Kemal Özer summed up the group's aesthetic: poetry should be clear and unequivocal in supporting political struggles: "the folk song must be a weapon in your mouth" [*türkü silah olmalı ağızda*] (15). These Leftist poets shared with the First New an emphasis on clear, colloquial language and the experiences of the "little guy," but they trespassed beyond the realm of acceptability by addressing the concrete grievances of workers, peasants, and students.

The Second New poets, in contrast, did not want to create poetry that directly portrayed reality or could be put to use, whether by the state or anyone. The radically anti-instrumental aesthetic of these poets is apparent from the absurdist titles of their key works: *Üvercinka* [Pigeon-woman] (Cemal Süreya, 1958), *Dünyanın En Güzel Arabistanı* [The World's Most Beautiful Arabia] (Turgut Uyar, 1959), *Mısırkalyoniğne* [Egyptgalleonneedle] (İlhan Berk, 1962), *Bakışsız Bir Kedi Kara* [A Blind Cat Black] (Ece Ayhan, 1965). Their work combined hallucinatory images, inverted syntax, invented words, and portmanteaus. Yet the Second New's rejection of conventional language did not produce a meaningless or apolitical poetry. Their work suggested that the system that creates the suffering of workers, peasants, and students could not be addressed by means of realism alone. Capitalism and

imperialism had cast their shadows on psychic life, the everyday object-world, human relationships, sexuality, and the structure of the family. Art, like more practical forms of political struggle, would have to descend into these shadowy realms if it had any hope of intervening in the totality.

Against this Leftist critique, this chapter reads Second New poetry against the grain, challenging a view within Turkish criticism that because Second New poets rarely take up political matters directly, their work has nothing meaningful to say about political movements, putting it outside of the dominant cultural logic of the sixties. Instead, I argue that Second New poetry not only participated in, but actually anticipated the sixties structure of feeling in Turkey and beyond. In Raymond Williams's terms, the Second New was an "emergent" cultural movement. As opposed to "dominant" or "residual" ones, emergent phenomena bring out "new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences" that are "part—and yet not a defined part—of effective contemporary practice" (*Culture* 41). By the late fifties the Second New was producing new meanings and values that contained all the lineaments of the cultural revolutionary politics that would characterize the sixties at its height: an emphasis on psychic liberation, new forms of subjectivity, everyday life, love and sex, and even the importance of the 'Third World.' Similarly, even before the Left in Turkey began vocally criticizing these things, the poetry of Ayhan, Cansever, Süreya, and Uyar expressed deep suspicion of Cold War geopolitics, U.S. intervention, consumerism, and urban alienation.

Furthermore, just as the early poetry of the Second New cannot be fully grasped without understanding it in relationship to the movements that came after, the long Turkish sixties cannot be understood without reference to the fifties. In conventional historiography, the 27 May 1960 coup and the new constitution of 1961 are described as launching the movements of the long sixties. Yet there is a danger of emphasizing this event as the sole source of the ensuing cycle of radicalization. Making a case for the sixties' origins in the social and political dynamics of the fifties, Mete Kaan Kaynar writes:

Reducing the social and political liveliness of the 1960s to the liberalness of the 1961 Constitution causes one to ignore the political consequences of the socio-economic transformations that Turkey went through during the 1950s.⁵⁴

The fifties is all too often reduced to the political repressiveness of the last years of Turkey's first freely elected government, the Demokrat Parti of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes. Though the last three years of the DP's decade in power (1950-1960) saw economic crisis, social polarization, and intensified witch-hunts against the opposition, this was also a period that gave rise to increased political participation on the part of the masses, massive migration from the countryside to the city, the growth of consumer culture, and artistic experimentation. The generation of 1968, Kaynar writes, "would be built upon these transformations" [*bu dönüşümün üzerine bina olunacaktır*] (668). Exploring the Second New as an emergent phenomenon of the turbulent sixties makes it possible to see how these two periods fit together in a long

⁵⁴ 1960'ların sosyal ve siyasal hatındaki canlılığı, 1961 Anayasası'nın özgürlükçülüğüne indirgemek, 1950'ler boyunca Türkiye'nin geçirdiği sosyo-ekonomik dönüşümün, siyasal sonuçlarını göz ardı etmeye neden olacaktır [. . .].

sixties that, as in the standard periodizations of the world sixties, has its origins in the late fifties.

In this chapter I analyze poems where Second New poets explicitly or implicitly thematize political issues and where they develop linguistic and tropological techniques for depicting a cultural revolutionary subjectivity able to militate against the conventional social mores and nationalist shibboleths that shaped more politically orthodox and aesthetically realist sections of the Left. A key point of mediation between the discussion of periodization and the argument about cultural revolutionary subjectivity is my description of this poetry as a late example of poetic modernism. The combined and uneven manifestations of modernity and the changing position of the institution of literature in belatedly modernized countries like Turkey made it possible for modernism to blossom as late as the mid-twentieth century. The case for the Second New as a form of late modernism draws on Perry Anderson's notion of the "openness of horizon" that existed in parts of the world's periphery and semi-periphery in the sixties (109), Jameson's description of modernism as "incomplete modernization" (141), and Yalçın Armağan's claim that what made Second New poets so controversial in the political, institutional, and cultural context of Turkey was "their demand for autonomy both as subjects and for the autonomy of the work" [*hem özne olarak kendinin hem de yapıt olarak şiirinin özerkliğini talep ediyor*] (137). In the context of a hegemonic conception of literature (first sponsored by the modernizing Turkish state and then inherited by the Left) that demanded from literary works the clear and unambiguous expression of political commitment, the

very refusal of Second New poetry to be political in these explicit and unequivocal terms was a major locus of its critique. The Second New's radical demand for subjective and literary autonomy would have powerful ramifications for the political movements of the sixties—and for later movements as well. This recuperative reading of the Second New will end with a brief discussion of the Gezi Park protests of 2013 that illuminated the long-hidden political valence of Second New poetry nearly six decades after its first poems were published.

Such an interpretation of the Second New is not self-evident. Any poetry that is allusive, abstract, non-referential and resistant to interpretation is, by virtue of these qualities, open to a wide variety of interpretive wills. Essential to my argument is the understanding that no form or aesthetic technique can be *inherently* radical or reactionary. The dense allusiveness of certain forms of modernism has not always had Left-wing implications. A work's possibilities and limitations are only visible in relation to its historical/cultural context and in light of the specific rhetorical use to which that form is put. As Konuk Blasing puts it, “open forms are not automatically ‘free’ and closed forms are not automatically ‘reactionary’” (17). Rather, “the work of criticism [. . .] is to judge how forms are troped and what rhetorical and political functions they perform in a given instance at a particular time.” This chapter attempts to analyze the Second New's defense of modernist autonomy and open forms within Turkey's specific literary and political context.

Making the poetry of the Second New part of the narrative of the Turkish sixties can shed new light on that period. Even if cultural production is considered

somehow less ‘real’ than direct political activism, the poetry’s expanded sense of the political reveals that a cultural revolutionary aesthetic and even a countercultural ethos (in the bohemian or hippie sense associated with the U.S. New Left) existed during the Turkish sixties—even if only in shadow form. The wager of this chapter is that looking at the sixties in the light of Second New poetry offers a unique opportunity for understanding what the period was, what it could have been, and what its legacy in Turkey might be in the grim present.

Periodizing the Second New: The Fifties

Edip Cansever began his poetic career in 1947 with *İkindi Üstü* [Mid-Afternoon].⁵⁵ Like Turgut Uyar, Cansever’s first poems had the short lines, colloquial language, and light-hearted lamentations that were clear markers of the First New’s influence. Published in 1957, Cansever’s *Yerçekimli Karanfil* [Gravitational Carnation], was his first full-length chapbook published in a recognizably Second New style.⁵⁶ The

⁵⁵ Cansever was born in 1928. He grew up in old Istanbul in the neighborhoods around Beyazıt, Haseki, and Kumpakı. He discovered books at a period when the Turkish Ministry of Education had a policy of developing “humanist culture,” which mostly meant a massive effort to translate and publish the classics of world literature—Greek and Latin texts, the nineteenth-century Russians, and so on—in the cheap, paperback editions which the young Cansever ate up (“Yaşam Öyküsü” 19). He remained fascinated by foreign literature his entire life, but never learned another language well enough to read the originals of the Chekhov, Kafka, or Dostoevsky he so loved. After finishing school in 1946, he took over his father’s business as a seller of antiques at the historic Grand Bazaar. Despite having no real sense for business, he worked at the small shop in the bazaar for most of his life. Thanks to a highly competent, and indulgent, business partner, Cansever spent most of his time reading and composing poetry at his little desk on the second-floor office of the shop (Belge 455).

⁵⁶ After the first individual Second New-style poems published in magazines like *Pazar Postası* and *Yeditepe*, the main book-length works after Cansever’s were Süreya’s *Üvercinka* [Pigeon-woman] (1958), Berk’s *Galile Denizi* [Sea of Galilee] (1958), Ayhan’s *Kınar Hanımın Denizleri* [Miss Kınar’s Seas] (1959), and Uyar’s *Dünyanın En Güzel Arabistanı* [The World’s Most Beautiful Arabia] (1959).

opening poem in the collection, “Ey” [Hey], demonstrates what made this poetry so radically new:

Whose having-gone is this right here? you stop hey!
Maybe our hands too? a little thin, a little multi-worded too!
As if this is a why-did-we-stop? while zones of making love remain open
Moon, window, eye! you goes [*siz git*] hey! (*Sonrası* 93)⁵⁷

From the very beginning, there is a sense that freedom from the burden of a collective project to which literature must be subordinated also means liberation from the common language. The breakdown of conventional meaning and grammar is more intense here than in any Second New poet except Ece Ayhan. In the first line, the verb “go” is treated with a possessive suffix, as if it were some everyday object that you point to or pick up in your hands (Belge 457). In the fourth line, the second-person singular “you” addressed is combined with the second-person plural conjugation of the imperative “go!”⁵⁸ The poem continues for another sixteen lines in the same ungrammatical, erratic, and obscure manner. Throughout *Gravitational Carnation* there is the ecstatic feeling of a great responsibility being lifted. In a rare moment of self-reflexive clarity the speaker of one poem even asks: “Have we changed epoch first thing in the morning or what?” [*Bir çağ mı değiştik sabah sabah ne?*] (“Aaaa,” 96). Something new was in the air.

⁵⁷ *Bu böyle kimin gittiği? sen dur ey!
Belki de ellerimiz mi? biraz ince, biraz da çok kelimeli
Bu sanki niye durduğumuz mu? açıkken sevişme bölgeleri
Ay, pencere, göz! siz git ey!*

⁵⁸ *Siz* is formal and/or plural in the Turkish. “You go” or “You [polite] go” can be expressed as *sen git* or *siz gidin*, respectively, but never as *siz git*.

Names can be deceiving. As we have seen, the Second New was a cohesive literary movement. Despite certain common features, each poet had an idiosyncratic aesthetic. Yet even if their efforts were not consciously combined, it is undeniable that, from roughly 1954 to the mid-1970s, the coming together of these individual yet parallel poetic projects transformed the literary scene. As Cansever himself remarked 1977: “I don’t consider the Second New a movement, but I can say that a number of poets appeared in more or less the same years who brought a newness and depth to [Turkish] poetry” [*İkinci Yeni’yi akım saymıyorum ama, şiirimize yenilik ve derinlik kazandıran ozanların aşağı yukarı aynı yıllarda ortaya çıktığını söyleyebilirim*] (232). The name “Second New” is just a placeholder for the aggregate effect of this appearance. Cansever himself preferred the term “permanent revolution” [*sürekli devrim*] for the type of poetry with which he was associated (233).

Why did poets start writing like this? That unconnected poets with varying backgrounds and literary proclivities spontaneously lighted on a similar “newness” raises questions of periodization and history more generally. The poetry must be understood in relation both to the fifties, when it appeared, and to the sixties, when it was acrimoniously debated. If the Second New represented emergent tendencies that would become dominant in the sixties, the phenomenon helps us better understand how the fifties lead to the sixties in Turkey. Just as the world sixties have been seen in relation to the decolonization movements of the fifties, so too the roots of the social movements of the Turkish sixties must be discovered in developments, both restrictive and liberating, that precede 1960.

This periodizing approach must be distinguished from another common way the Second New is understood. It is commonplace to link the difficulty of the Second New's poetic language to the political repression of the fifties. For example, Nermin Menemencioglu argues that the censorship of the Demokrat Parti era "may have some bearing on the deliberate obscurity of the 'Second New' poetry" (55). George Messo describes the fifties as a "decade marked by the brutal realpolitik of Adnan Menderes' first freely elected government" (12). In this context, the "openness [and] democratic rhetoric" of Garip (the First New) "seemed dangerously exposed in an increasingly closed society" (11-12). Thus, the context of political repression helps explain the experimental qualities of the Second New. Messo reads the poetry as "an implosive resistance to the naïve, delusional 'open' language of a closed state" (12).

Such arguments generally center only on certain aspects of the fifties: increasing closeness with the U.S. and anti-communist repression. Upon entering office in 1950, PM Menderes' first goal was further integrate Turkey into the Western Bloc. During this period Turkey became more strongly tied than ever into circuits of global capitalism (Zürcher 237). Thanks to a final total of \$349.02 million in Marshall Plan aid, the DP managed to improve agricultural productivity and mechanization, import new technology like tractors, and train new experts and management. At first the DP's strategy of "private enterprise, agricultural modernization in the countryside, and rapid urbanization" showed positive results (Örnek and Üngör 6). Massive investments combined with good weather and bountiful harvests meant that in the first three years of their rule the economy soared.

However, U.S. support came at a cost. Not only would Turkey have to be a loyal ally, it would have to open its doors to foreign troops and bases; allow all manner of educators, managers, and aid workers to take up residence in the country's cities and villages; work directly with organizations such as the Joint United States Military Mission for Aid to Turkey (JUMMAT) and the CIA; and allow the country to become a guinea pig in the project of the Modernization Theory. The DP also brought new zeal to the long-standing tradition of persecuting (real or imagined) communists. The fifties was a particularly bad time to be Leftist in Turkey.⁵⁹

There is truth to the description of the fifties as a time of international interference and homegrown repression. In 1957 the DP was elected to power for a third time, but the party hemorrhaged votes as Turkey slid towards an economic crisis made worse by a 1958 devaluation of the Turkish Lira. Inflation hurt salary-earners and city-dwellers the worst, hence the growingly vocal opposition to the DP coming from civil servants, educators in universities and schools, and military officers (Zürcher 232). In order to maintain his rural base of support, Menderes became increasingly conciliatory to his conservative constituency. His attempts to hold onto the peasantry through recourse to Muslim values—returning the call to prayer to Arabic or opening more schools to train religious personnel—further alienated the secular establishment (including the military) just as his increasingly authoritarian attempts to censor the press angered academics and journalists. Accounts from this

⁵⁹ On anti-communism in Turkey see Meşe's *Komünizmle Mücadele Dernekleri* [Associations of the Struggle Against Communism].

period often recall the blank columns that appeared in newspapers due to the last-minute banning of news items deemed critical of the government (Duruel and Perinçek 143). The government set up a commission to investigate the activities of the legal opposition (Karaca 82). Many Leftist and liberal professors were fired from their jobs. After the DP announced the formation of the Homeland Front [*Vatan Cephesi*] in the late 1950s, each day the state radio channels would read through the endless list of names of people who had joined the DP's mobilization of its constituency.

In 1959 and 1960 discontent grew to a fever pitch in Turkey's large cities, especially as students became growingly vocal in their opposition to the DP. This unrest prompted the military to declare martial law in Istanbul and Ankara to keep the anti-Menderes protests under control. On 21 May a group of cadets from the War Academy marched silently through the streets of Ankara to protest the repression of protests (Zücher 243). As the economic situation continued to worsen and Menderes continued on his autocratic path, it seemed inevitable that the military would intervene.

The coup, or "revolution" [*ihtilal*] as it was called at the time, came on 27 May 1960. A tribunal was set up to try the DP government for undermining of the constitution and other forms of corruption and malfeasance. At the end of a long series of public trials, thirty-one people faced life imprisonment and three were sentenced to death: Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, Finance Minister Hasan Polatkan, and Foreign Minister Fatin Rüştü Zorlu. These three were hanged on 16 and 17 September 1961. In 1961 general elections signaled the return to democracy. The

relatively liberal constitution ratified that same year helped unleash historical, political, and cultural dynamics. In the official narrative, the fifties were now the bad old days.

The dominant critical judgment of the Second New was set by socialist poet and novelist Attilâ İlhan (1925-2005): “*Birinci Yeni (Garip) İnönü Diktası’nın şiiridir, İkinci Yeni ise Menderes Diktası’nın!*” [The First New (Garip) was the poetry of the İnönü Dictatorship. As for the Second Now, it is [the poetry of] the Menderes Dictatorship!] (7).⁶⁰ If Garip was the poetry of the “hot” war of the 1940s, the Second New was the poetry of the U.S.-dominated Cold War order. Having lived through the anti-communist repression of the DP years, İlhan accused the Second New of complicity with the pro-capitalist orientation and demagogic use of religion, even suggesting that the Second New was secretly funded by Turkey’s NATO allies to sabotage the work of socialist poets like himself and undercut the ability of literature to intervene in social life (Armağan 120).

However much İlhan’s accusations might reek of conspiracy theory today,⁶¹ they were based in one simple fact: while socialist poets were facing harassment, censorship and even torture, the Second New poets remained safe from harm

⁶⁰ General İsmet İnönü, a hero of the Turkish War of Independence and the right-hand man of Mustafa Kemal, succeeded the latter as President of the Turkish Republic in 1938. İnönü’s government closely controlled economic life (through state intervention into the economy, price controls, and even forced labor) and political life (no political opposition was allowed until 1946, with the exception of a short democratic experiment in 1930). In a move consonant with the authoritarian European governments of the day, upon assuming power İnönü declared himself *Millî Şef*, or “National Leader.”

⁶¹ The extensive role that the CIA played in art and literature during the Cold War is now well-documented. For the specific case of Turkey see Sezi Duran and Çimen Günay-Erol’s contributions to *Turkey and the Cold War: Ideology and Culture*. For a general account, see Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: CIA and the Cultural Cold War* and Spahr, *Du Bois’s Telegram*.

(Armağan 122). And not only were they not arrested—as almost everyone with a publicly critical stance against the government was likely to be at some point—their poetry was being widely circulated and discussed. For many socialist poets and critics, this state of affairs was irrefutable evidence of the Second New’s guilt. The longer these poets remained unscathed the more they proved their collusion within the government. Only those who were complicit could have avoided repression, or so went the reasoning.

Though it is a misreading to see the Second New as a beneficiary of the directly repressive policies of the Menderes era, the loosening of cultural policy in this period and the open field it created were among the conditions of possibility for this poetry’s emergence (“1920’ler” Koçak 121). It is not that the DP supported the Second New as much as they were indifferent to it. Second New poets were not censored simply because their poetry “remained beyond the horizon of the ruling powers” [*bu şiirin iktidarın ufku dışında kalmasıdır*] (Armağan 122). As long as cultural producers did not cross that red line and pronounce the S-word (socialism), they were left alone to experiment in isolation.

The irrelevance of cultural workers was a new thing. Before the fifties, the Turkish state had been engaged in the “Enlightenment project of culture-building” common to many belatedly modernizing states (Jusdanis 122).⁶² The intellectual was the state’s prodigal son. During the single-party period (1923-1946) the poet had been

⁶² The cultural experiments of Mussolini and Stalin were instructive to the Republican elites in their task to create a national culture. Duygu Köksal explains that the rulers of the new country “cared about culture and the arts to the extent that they could be used, first for general political purposes and second for compensating for the ideological gaps and ambiguities concerning national culture and art” (93).

accorded respect—even when punished with jail-time, like Nâzım Hikmet (Oktay 236). Intellectuals had a clear social role within the larger collective project of creating a new society. By virtue of being a worker with language, the writer in general and the poet in specific was mobilized to participate in this social project. Searching for a way to create a homogenous, unified nation out of the ashes of a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional empire, Turkey’s rulers (like previous proponents of linguistic nationalisms) looked to language for this unifying force.

After 1950, however, the situation began to change. Ahmet Oktay writes that the image of the poet” fell into disrepute during the fifties (236). Whereas intellectuals were part of the ruling coalition in the single-party era, the DP “appeared to be lacking any intelligentsia of its own and became ‘ruralized’” [*kendine özgü, bir entelijansiyadan mahrummuş gibi gözükiyordu ve taşrılaşmış bulunuyordu*]. Without a strong social engineering project, the state no longer had an urgent need for writers and thinkers. In fact, because these intellectuals often took oppositional stances, especially after Turkey’s economic and political situation worsened after 1954, the state harbored suspicion against them. Poets responded to this marginalization by retreating to alcoholism and café life. And yet this just made the matter worse since, as Oktay remarks,

bohemian [habits] were condemned and cursed by all classes and layers of society. And [so] the poets took their place in opposition to the politics and taste of the dominant classes that excluded them, that [trapped them] in low-circulation magazines, made them irrelevant, and put them in the position of

being both the producers and consumers of an isolated literary environment. (237)⁶³

Banished from the halls of parliament, the bohemian poet took refuge in the tavern.⁶⁴

One result of these changes in the position of the writer was that strong currents of autonomous art could appear for the first time in Turkey. There was no longer any defined sense of what kind of aesthetic would be favored. As big capital made its first forays into the realm of the arts, filling the space vacated by the state, mass cultural forms like comic strips, glossy magazines like *Resimli Hayat* (Life Illustrated), *Ses* (Voice) and even tabloids, tracking the goings-on of celebrities in the newly minted star system, all began to populate the urban landscape (“Kimsenin” Oktay 11). This created a relatively open field for art and culture in the fifties. New artistic scenes took shape. The latest jazz began to gain traction in Turkey. Atonal music and abstract art made their appearance in concert halls and galleries. Works like Cansever’s *Gravitational Carnation* celebrated this new epoch of experimentation. The poet was now free: in the double-edged sense of both being able to freely choose how to expend their poetic labor, but also having nothing to fall back on but to freely sell that labor on the market.⁶⁵ This vexed independence of cultural

⁶³ [B]ohem tüm sınıf ve katmanlarca zaten kınanmış ve lanetlenmiş bulunuyordu. Şair de, az satışlı dergilerde, kendisini dışlayan, işlevsizleştiren ve kapalı bir yazın çevresinin hem üreticisi hem tüketicisi durumuna getiren egemen sınıfların siyasetinin ve zevkinin tam karşısında yer aldı.

⁶⁴ For an overview of the successive cultural policies taken up by the Turkish state and the changed that occurred in the 1950s and beyond, see Koçak, “1920’lerden 1970’lere Kültür Politikaları” [Cultural Policies from the 1920s to the 1970s].

⁶⁵ On Marx’s sense of “double-freedom” see *Capital*, Chapter Six: “The Buying and Selling of Labour-Power.”

producers made the massive alignment of intellectuals and the Left that characterized the sixties possible. The Second New was the first sign of this new conjuncture.

In all these ways, the fifties was as liberalizing as it was repressive. Yet even critics who evaluate Second New poetry favorably still concur with the ‘repression thesis’ pioneered by İlhan. This direct link made between political repression and the poetry’s opaque style only has explanatory value as long as we concur that this poetry was fundamentally apolitical and unengaged with the concerns that animated the work of the explicitly socialist poets of the same period. By centering the arguments on repression, both the defense and the prosecution of the Second New concur on the verdict of apoliticism: the latter celebrates the crafty way this poetry avoids detection while the former sees it as cowardly collaboration. Contemporary critics merely flip İlhan’s judgment of the Second New from negative to positive, but otherwise keep the taxonomy in place.

Just after the coup against the DP, Second New poets challenged this “repression” thesis. In 1961, Turgut Uyar wrote:

Thinking that the Second New was intimidated by repression and cowering from a now-deposed administration, and for this reason had gravitated towards opacity and abstraction, they [now] say “Here’s freedom for you. Go ahead and write now.” It could naturally be thought that this political, social, and economic repression influenced poets’ lives, and from that perspective repression passes into poetry and has an influence on it. But to us, the idea that this directly affected poetry, pushing it to obscurity [*kapalılık*] and the abstract [*soyut*] was an incorrect one. For one, poetry changes or develops according to its own rules, its own biological rules” (Karaca 160).¹³¹

¹³¹ *İkinci Yeni’nin düşürülen idarenin baskısından sinmiş, bu baskıdan yılıp kapalılığa, soyuta yönelmiş şiir olduğunu düşünerek, ‘İşte Özgürlük’ dediler. ‘Yazın bakalım şimdi.’ Bu siyasal, toplumsal, tutumbilimsel baskının, ozanın yaşamasını etkilemesi bakımından şiire de geçmesi, şiirinde etkilenmesi düşünülebilirdi elbet. Ama bunların şiiri doğrudan doğruya etkilediği, kapalılığa, soyuta*

While these internal rules of art develop in a position of only semi-autonomy from other realms of social life, they are not fully separate. The repression could not but have an influence on the poetry, but it affected not *whether* politics was manifested in the work but *how*. This poetry must be judged on its own merits, for even a cursory glance at the poetry written by Cansever, Uyar, Süreya and others before 1960 reveals that they were far from indifferent to the transformations going on around them. At times their critiques of political repression, U.S. influence, and the changing commodity landscape were made explicitly through the content of poems. At other times, they inhere in the formal experimentation of the poem. This was not cowardly evasion but rather represented an attempt to reject not only the politics of the DP but reject political realism as such. Their critique extended to everyday life, alienation, the family, sexual relationships, and so on. Yet they also celebrate certain aspects of the fifties. To understand the Second New it is necessary see the period all its ambiguity and complexity. The movements of the sixties were not a simple rejection of this period but grew out of its soil.

The Fifties in Turkey: A Nylon World

Many early Second New poems combine feelings of liberation with constraint, exhilaration with anxiety. In their prescient manner, they engage with both the promise and danger of the period. Cansever's "Güzel Atomların Yaptığı Ayak" [The Foot Made by Beautiful Atoms] from *Gravitational Carnation* (1957), for

götürdüğü yanlış bir düşünceydi bize. Şiir bir yerde kendi kurallarına, kendi biyolojik kurallarına uygun olarak değişiyor yahut geliyordu.

example, revels in scientific and technological developments while also betraying

some deeper doubts about the present:

I feel a violet without my hands
It's so beautiful that even America is beautiful
You're even beautiful, lacking me
Even the atoms are beautiful
The molecules even
They gather and become a foot on me
They become a mouth a little bit
They became teeth all sharp
Two eyes all shiny
Ten nails all pointed

I feel a violet with my hands
I feel a molecule
An atom
Horrrifying.
They gather and don't become a foot on me
Mouth, tooth, nail
They don't become an eye
All together
All together we become something, you see;

Its mouth, nose, hands, arms
Up against that horrific beauty. ⁶⁶

Racing up and down the scale from micro to macro, from atoms and molecules to body parts, and from individual to collective, Cansever's poem attempts to catch a glimpse of the unconscious reality of how the physical world is composed. Cansever

⁶⁶ *Bir menekşe duyuyorum ellerimsiz
O kadar güzel ki, Amerika bile güzel
Sen bile güzelsin bensizce
Atomlar bile güzel
Moleküller bile
Toplanıp ayak oluyorlar bende
Ağız oluyorlar biraz
Diş oluyorlar keskince
İki göz parlakça
On tırnak sivrice*

takes palpable pleasure in peeling away of the surface of things to reveal the inner workings of matter. This is almost a techno-futuristic sublime. But this “heroiz[ation] of the present” (as Foucault described Baudelaire’s modernism) risks tipping over into terror, which is where the poem ends (40). What if these atoms and molecules do not gather into a foot or tooth? There is a fear of misfiring, of the process going haywire through excessive attention to what should occur automatically. The perspective provided by modern science is as horrific and disconcerting as its beautiful.

These fearful musings about scientific reason make sense in fifties context of technological developments and fear of nuclear war, but what is “America” doing in this poem? And why does it take submerging ourselves in the atomic level of existence to discover something worthy of redemption? With the line “It’s so beautiful that even America is beautiful” the thematically alien worlds of geopolitics, commerce, and military power intrude on the microscopic universe of this poem. These poems do not surrender their meaning easily. They are best read off each other. Other poems in *Gravitational Carnation* similarly challenge logic, conventional language, and established verse forms but contain narratives that, however odd, are simpler to track.

“Aşkın Radyoaktivitesi” [Love’s Radioactivity], first published in 1955, sheds light on the intrusion of “America” in Cansever’s poetic universe. Like “The Foot Made by Beautiful Atoms” the poem moves from the speaker’s relationship to his own body to larger social/political issues:

When I hear “love,” I remain all alone
I rub my groin all nicely
You know those littlest of my toes
I see them first of all.

A vein the color of steel is right there on my chin
Often I can spot it outside in the sun
It pulses thump-thump on the edge of my face
Thick as can be my hair comes into my hand.

This business happens during the daytime, right in the daytime
When my filthiness, my dirty smells are most unmistakable
While stopping to inhale, while thinking about something
I lean over and stay right at the foot of the window.

I think about upstairs, given that I’m one floor below
Four walls, a refrigerator, a sky like nylon
I understand that the almost poisonousness of cold objects
Is wandering all across me like a current of love.

Without pause I’m loveifying [*aşklanıyorum*] but always like this
My shoulders are as fresh as carnations, my knees, my feet
Meanwhile it aggregates and disappears, that crazy explosive thing
My nails sparkle like the sun. (97)⁶⁷

⁶⁷ *Aşkı duydum mu bir başıma kalıyorum
Kasıklarımı ovuyorum bir güzel
En küçükleri var ya ayak parmaklarımın
İlk peşin onları görüyorum.*

*Bir çelik mavisi damar tam da çenemin üstünde
Çoğu zaman gün ışığında seçtiğim
Tıp tıp atıyor yüzümün kenarcığında
Saçlarım kapkalın geliyor elime.*

*Gündüzün, ama tam gündüzün oluyor bu iş
Kırlerim, pis kokularım bellyken iyice
Soluyup dururken, birşeyler geçirirken aklımdan
Uzanıp kalıyorum ta pencerenin dibinde.*

*Yukarıyı düşünüyorum, bir aşağı katta oluşumdan
Dört duvar, bir buz dolabı, naylona benzer bir gök
Bütün o zehir gibiliği soğumus seylerin
Anlıyorum bir aşk akımıdır dolanıyor üstümde.*

*Durmadan aşklanıyorum ama hep böyle
Karanfiller gibi taze omzum, dizlerim, ayaklarım*

In this series of unrhymed quatrains only superficially resembling a conventional love poem, the speaker examines his body piece by piece, with an attitude ranging from the masturbatory to the clinical. Even when enjoying his own corporeal existence, the speaker preserves a kind of distance, as if observing something alien. Then the almost nauseating emphasis on the organic quality of the body, its sweating, smelling physicality, gives way to attention to hair and toenails—both intimate yet detachable aspects of the human body. Lacking nerves yet serving necessary functions, they are uncanny: both attached to, yet not quite part, the body. This hardness connects with the “vein the color of *steel*” and the “poisonousness of *cold* objects” (emphasis added). There is an uncanny blurring of lines between the animate and the inanimate because even these created objects possess a kind of life. Even what is cold can have a warming effect, just as an unstable atomic nucleus can emit energy in the form of radiation: what Cansever calls “a current of love.”

The appearance of “nylon” is significant in “Love’s Radioactivity”: “Four walls, a refrigerator, a sky like nylon”: these images evoke claustrophobia. The poem is filled with internal spaces: the sky is glimpsed from inside “four walls” and at “the foot of the window.” Nylon also appears in Turgut Uyar’s “Geyikli Gece” [Deer Night] (1959) begins with the famous lines: “Whereas there was nothing out there to be afraid of / Everything was made of nylon that’s all” [*Halbuki korkulacak hiçbir şey yoktu ortalıkta / Her şey naylondandı o kadar*] (*Büyük Saat* 113). This cryptic *in*

*Toplanıp gidiyor derken o deli fişek şey
Gün gibi parlıyor tırnaklarım.*

media res opening (“whereas”) describes speaker’s discovery of a utopian space called the deer night (literally “night with deer” or “deer-filled night”). Nylon is something trifling and laughable for Uyar.

Nylon is the hinge that links Cansever’s “even America is beautiful” and with his “radioactivity of love” and explains the subterranean politics of these poems. The DuPont company began its research into nylon in 1930. Nylon stockings were first displayed in 1939 at the New York World’s Fair within the futuristic “The World of Tomorrow” exhibit (Wolfe). After entering the commercial market to much fanfare in 1940, nylon production was diverted from stockings to the war effort. During WWII nylon became crucial in the production of “aircraft fuel tanks, flak jackets, shoelaces, mosquito netting, and hammocks.” Nylon’s sudden disappearance from the commercial market transformed into a highly lucrative black-market good. In September 1945 nylon stockings re-appeared in shops in the U.S. Demand was so great that “nylon riots” even broke out in New York. Digging into the deeper causes of this intense demand for nylon, one academic study of the history of the DuPont company argues that

Nylon is one of the great symbols of the American century, on par no doubt with Coca-Cola in the consumer dreams of 20th century men and women. [...] It is not only a technologically advanced product, it [. . .] also captured the public’s imagination. (182-3)

In Turkey, too, “nylon [was] an object of desire.” In the fifties, nylon stockings, marketed at a price available to all income groups, became immensely popular among Turkish men (Alkan 600). In the sixties, fashionable men wore nylon dress-shirts. With its association with the U.S., nylon serves a periodizing function in Second New

poetry, for it illustrates not only the transformation of the object-world in fifties Turkey, but also other dimensions in the cultural and political life of the period.

After World War II Turkey took its position within the Pax Americana. In 1957 at a rally in Istanbul, President Celal Bayar declared: “In our country we have worked to follow the course of the Americans’ progress. We are hopeful that after thirty years this auspicious country of ours will become a little America” [*Biz memleketimizde Amerikalıların ilerleyişleri seyrini takibe çalışmaktayız. Öyle ümit ediyoruz ki, 30 sene sonra bu mübarek memleket . . . küçük bir Amerika olacaktır*] (Alkan 595). The unfamiliar goods that began flooding Turkey’s streets (like the nylon clothes and refrigerators to which Cansever refers) were a symbol of these aspirations. As protectionist economic policies of the single-party period were loosened by the DP, U.S. military base exchange stores became the conduit for new consumer goods: “Colorful nylon dress shirts, electric appliances, even underwear leaked out of the American Bazaar—that is, the PX stores—and into the local market” [*Amerikan Pazarı’ndan, yani PX’lerden iç pazara sızan renkli naylon gömlekler, elektrikli aletler, hatta iç çamaşırları vitrinleri şenlendirmişti*] (Oktay “Kimsenin” 11). A makeshift resale market or “bazaar” was set up in the Tophane neighborhood of Istanbul, where clothing, chewing gum, flashlights, transistor radios, ironing machines, records, canned foods, and other goods would first make their way into the hands of local consumers (Alkan 596). They trickled from there into the homes of intrepid middle-class consumers and eventually to the wider public, becoming symbols of an improved standard of living.

These goods wasted no time in penetrating the imaginations of Second New poets. In 1970 Cansever published a poem describing himself as “the historian of some incidents in which nobody is interested” [*kimsenin ilgilenmediği bazı olayların tarihçisi*] (*Sonrası* 466). Already in the fifties, by dwelling with trivial commodities, forgettable incidents, and extreme close-ups of already minuscule objects the poet leads his readers through the other side to massive, world-historical forces at their most fateful. He understood the double-meaning of these new commodities, representing foreign intervention as well as altogether new cultural and political possibilities. These objects were met with hatred, horror, love, and fascination all at once.

As we have seen, much as the fifties ended in crisis and repression, the early rule of the DP created a new sense of mobility and possibility settled in for many sections of Turkish society. This was a period of “explosive growth” for the economy (Zürcher 218). With improved access to consumer goods and a higher standard of living (especially for the middle class), for the first time in a long time it felt like life was improving. This economic growth engendered altogether new social dynamics. With extra money in their pockets and new networks of roads linking the countryside to the cities, in the early fifties a steady stream of internal migrants began moving to urban centers. As an indication of this rapid growth, in 1950 the population of Ankara was only 289,000. By 1960 it would reach 650,000 (Evin 135). With the overall population of the country increasing and the cities rapidly expanding, Turkey moved up a gear in its transformation from an agricultural to an industrial society (Karaca

80). Besides rapid urbanization and rural-to-urban migration, the decade was characterized by the growth of mass culture, the loosening of traditional social bonds, a burgeoning private sector, the passing of reforms encouraging economic liberalization, and an end to autarky and isolationism (Koçak “Melih” 5-6).

Ironically, this period of “intensified incorporation of Turkey into the world capitalist system” helped create the social explosions of the sixties. Without this new mobility and internationalism conditioned by capitalism and the U.S. Cold War involvement, the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movements of the next period could not have evolved in the same manner. Yet this does not mean that the Second New uncritically celebrated these developments. Returning to Cansever, his dramatic poem *Park of the Hopeless* (1959) subtly critiqued the DP. Under conditions of economic crisis in the late fifties, Menderes’ discourse of creating “a millionaire in every neighborhood” [*her mahallede bir milyoner*] transformed into a threat, a noose tightening around the neck of a bewildered humanity. Cansever used the image of the “penguin” to denounce the nouveaux riches in Turkey that enjoyed themselves while others suffered:

They had penguin mouths
At night penguin suits
[. . .]
Their loving [*sevmeleri*]
In every undressing where do the clouds go like this
In every restaurant it shivers like an iceberg
It waits like an iceberg
[. . .]
The tables are ice
Mirrors ice
A master musician with his virtuoso violin
At every strike

Ice
The lights don't melt they are suspended as ice
While flowers give off and take odor to noses
It remains as ice
Ice, ice
Ten millionaires emerge from the cogs
[. . .]
On their shoulders nothing but rebellion against comfort
Not against the abiding purple of flowers (147).¹³⁵

The physical coldness of the penguin's Antarctic habitat is transformed, in a somewhat heavy-handed metaphor, into the frigidity of an entire social type. This poem is anti-bourgeois, positioning itself against new decadent consumption patterns. For these "millionaires" even their romance, their undressing, their music, and their restaurants are cold. Through the almost incantatory repetition of "buz" [ice] Cansever reveals the monotony lying at the heart of growing variety of leisure

¹³⁵ *Penguen ağızları vardı
Geceleri penguen elbiseleri
Bir aşk boyunca - nedir ki demiyorum aşkları
Çünkü her sevgide biraz da cinayet bulunur
Sevmeleri.
Her soyunmada bulutlar böyle nereye gidiyor
Her lokantada bir buz dağı olarak titreşir
Bir buz dağı olarak bekler
Kimiyse kimi
Masalar buz
Aynalar buz
Bir usta virtüöz kemanyıyla
Her kasılıştta
Buz
Işıklar erimez buzlar olarak sallandırılır
Çiçek kokular verip alırken burunlara
Buz olarak
Buz, Buz
On adet çarktan çıkma milyoner
Yanlarından kadından gezintilerle
Omuzlarında sadece rahata isyan
Çiçeğin mor kalmasına değil*

pursuits. The poem contrasts the cold and empty gesture of “rebellion against comfort” with the vivacious purpleness of a flower.

Yet as much as Second New poets leveled veiled critiques, their poetry sought above all to understand the present and for that reason they often catch hints of tomorrow within the detritus of today. These writers were well aware of the historical nature of their project. Already in 1958, for example, Uyar wrote that

[t]he foundational quality that separates a poet [*ozan*], or more generally one poem from another poem, is first of all the environment created under unceasingly changing social conditions, and the particular "view of life" that this environment brings to poetry."³⁸

Poetry changes because poets are seeking out forms adequate to an always changing historical present. They may consciously transform their poetry, or to distinguish their work from that of previous generations (Uyar gives the example of Orhan Veli of First New-fame rejecting the poetry of his own predecessors), but the impulse to engage in such experiments is determined by the period’s changing “view of life,” or what we can call, drawing on another vocabulary, the “structure of feeling.”

This Raymond Williams-inspired reading is supported by an additional quotation from Uyar. He stresses the agency of poets in such historically precipitated literary transformations: “Yes, poetry is renewed in every age. But prior to society and societal changes it is the poet who renews poetry” [*Evet, şiir her çağda yenilenir. Ama şiiri, toplumdun, toplumsal deęişmelerden önce bir ozan yeniler*]

³⁸ “*Bir ozanı, daha genel olarak bir şiir başka bir şiirden ayıran temel nitelik, ilkin durmaksızın deęişen toplum şartlarının hazırladığı ortam, bu ortamın şiire getirdiğı özel ‘yaşama görüşü’dür.*” Uyar published this essay *Yenide Aranması Gereken* [What Should Be Sought in the New] in the magazine *Pazar Postası* (Issue 10, 9 March 1958). It has been collected in *Korkulu Uсталık* (113-4).

(Menemenciöglu 51). Uyar is laying out a theory of the *emergent*. Out of the ill-defined haziness of history, containing new tendencies that are not yet fully dominant but remain inchoate, the poet is able to pick out what will matter. Examples of such a belief in the prophetic abilities of creative artists can be multiplied *ad nauseum*, from Ezra Pound's well-known line about poets being the antennae of humankind to Freud's quip that it was the poets who first discovered the unconscious. The essential point, one requiring no metaphysics of art, is that the best poetry surprises us.

Whether or not *emergent* poetry always effectively foreshadows a new *dominant*, "poetry," in a memorable phrase of Cansever's, "mostly brings the unexpected" [*Şiir, çođu zaman beklenmeyi getiriyor*] (*Şiir Şiirle* 40). This means both that poetry brings the new, but also that what is most *new* about the new, so to speak, cannot be determined in advance. The historical process needs to be borne out. Cansever wrote this line in April of 1960, not knowing that in May of that same year Turkey's ruling government would be overthrown in a military coup. While that more dramatic event is considered the start-date of the sixties, poems and events in the preceding years and months were already pointing ahead to the massive rupture in Turkish society that would eventually give rise to the movements of 1968 and beyond.

Cemal Süreya: The Song of Freedom

The relationship of Second New poets to political developments becomes clearer in the final period of DP rule. Major student protests broke out on 27-28 April 1960, during which a student, Turan Emeksiz, was killed by a police bullet just

outside Istanbul University. The military begin to send signals that it was not content with the Menderes' increasingly desperate measures to stifle discontent and rout the opposition. Poet Cemal Süreya had reported to the military for his mandatory service in July 1959.⁶⁸ As a third lieutenant he witnessed the anti-DP stirrings of his fellow officers. After being discharged he went home to Ankara. He describes the atmosphere of the capital in early 1960:

Those were utterly different days... If two people who didn't know each other come across one another in the street, they would stop and engage in an analysis of the situation together right then and there; generals would pour their hearts out to assistant lieutenants. And there was no separate [segment] of the youth conducting counter-demonstrations. Especially in Ankara, it was as if everyone was united in a single whole. I saw in those days how a small event, if it has roots in the social make-up, can grow. (Duruel 141).¹⁵⁵

Süreya is referring to an event known among participants by the codename '555 K,' a signal for protestors to meet on the fifth day of the fifth month at 5:00 pm in Kızılay (the central district of Ankara). This was the first mass organized act of civil disobedience in modern Turkey's history. Süreya recalls that a group of youths confronted Menderes in Kızılay square: "I was close by. It was an unbelievable thing. Two young people grabbed the Prime Minister by the collar" [*Çok yakındaydım.*

⁶⁸ Cemal Süreya was born Cemalettin Seber in the eastern Anatolian province of Erzincan in 1931. His mother was Kurdish and Alevi. After Kurdish uprisings in that region of Turkey his family was among 500,000 families displaced by state decree. They eventually settled in Bilecik in the Marmara region. After Süreya was accepted to the prestigious Political Sciences Faculty of Ankara University he did not tell anyone about his origins. Unlike Cansever and Uyar, Süreya did not write under the influence of the First New. His first published poems from 1954 were already in the style that would come to characterize the Second New.

¹⁵⁵ *Bir başka günlerdi... Birbirini tanımayan iki kişi sokakta karşılaşırsa, oracıkta durum değerlendirmesi yapıyor; general, yedek teğmene içini döküyordu. Karşı gösteriler yapan ayrı bir gençlik de yoktu. Özellikle Ankara'da, herkes bir bütün halinde birleşmiş gibiydi. Küçük bir olayın toplumsal planda kökü varsa, birden nasıl büyüyebileceğini gördüm o gün.*

İnanılmaz bir şeydi. İki genç başbakanın yakasına yapışmıştı] (Duruel 140). The world was beginning to turn upside-down.

A few days after these historic protests, Süreya wrote a poem titled “555 K” and published it in his journal *Papirüs* in August 1960, three months after the eventual coup. The rousing poem is concerned less with the events of the 5 May protests themselves than with the wider atmosphere in the country in this period. The poem begins with an invocation of workers, such as “girls spinning silk in Bursa” [*Bursada ipek çeken kızlar*] who are singing a melancholy song of love in response to the repression of “carnation mustachioed young lieutenants / white-haired professors, students” [*Karanfil bıyıklı genç teğmenleri / Ak saçlı profesörleri, öğrencileri*] (*Sevda* 288). This is followed by a verse about farmers in a northeastern Turkish province:

Right now those working their plows in Erzurum
Between you-shall-not-pass eyebrows
Have eyes that are deep, desolate, and fearsome
As the iron of morning enters the earth
They’re burying their rancor in the ground.
Because the people’s traitors in Ankara and beyond
Because in Izmir and Istanbul and beyond
Because in the other places of this country
They’ve deceived the innocent youth, entering their blood
And that is why their eyes are darkened
Those right now working their plows in Erzurum.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ *Şimdi Erzurumda çift sürenlerin
Geçit vermez kaşlarının altında
Derindir, ıssızdır, korkunçtur gözleri
Sabanın demiri girdikçe toprağa
Hınçlarını gömmektedir içine yerin.
Çünkü millet hayınları ankaralarda
Çünkü izmirlerde, çünkü İstanbullarda
Çünkü başka yerlerinde memleketin
Kanına girdiler masum gençlerin
İşte onun için karanlıktır gözleri
Şimdi Erzurumda çift sürenlerin.*

Through the mention of Bursa and Erzurum the entire geography of the country from west to east is evoked. Süreya's repetition of the first and last line in every stanza gives the piece the timeless feeling. The political ploys of the "traitors in Ankara" are as nefarious as the villain in a folk poem.

The next stanza reveals the source of the anger that unites the people in anger across Turkey: "Now our evenings start at eight o'clock / They've shortened the days and lengthened the nights" [*Şimdi saat sekizdir başlar gecemiz / Gündüzü kısalttılar geceyi uzattılar*]. A response to this grim, lightless situation (curfews were issued in some regions of the country) comes from revolutionaries: "Those who set the darkness alight from one corner / And transform the night into day" [*Karanlığı tutuşturup bir köşesinden / Geceyi gündüze çevirenlerin*] (289). Then comes the poem's final and most famous stanza. The rousing rhetoric of the earlier sections of the poem is toned down, in its place comes stillness:

You know how we're speaking in low voices?
You know how we're uniting and separating without a sound?
Our mother is steeping tea in honor of good days
As for our sweetheart, she places flowers on the glass
You know how we go silently to our jobs in the mornings?
None of it means this business will continue in this way
We come side by side and we multiply
But on the day we sing the song of freedom with a single mouth
Well on that day not even the Gods will be able to save you (*Sevda* 289).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ *Biz şimdi alçak sesle konuşuyoruz ya
Sessizce birleşip sessizce ayrılıyorz ya
Anamız çay demliyor ya güzel günlere
Sevgilimizse çiçekler koyuyor ya bardağa
Sabahları işimize gidiyoruz ya sessiz sedasız
Bu, böyle gidecek demek değil bu işler
Biz şimdi yan yana geliyoruz ve çoğalıyoruz
Ama bir ağızdan tutturduğumuz gün hürlüğün havasını
İşte o gün sizi Tanrılar bile kurtaramaz.*

On the surface, this is a strange ending to a poem that begins with the bombastic rhetorical power of a political speech. Here the scene is at first maternal, subdued, peaceful. Twice this stanza emphasizes silence. This domesticity is then contrasted with the sudden bursting onto the scene of a crowd; the two lovers initially described transform into a mass that sings freedom songs in unison in the open air. The political in this poem it is subtle, not emerging until the final two lines. Perhaps because of this very contrast, this section of the poem has been mobilized in various political protests in the more than five and a half decades since it was composed.

And yet Cemal Süreya had a more ambiguous relationship to his own poem. He succeeded at what he set out to do—the poem “describes the opposition by a unified people to the heavy atmosphere directly proceeding [the coup of] 27 May” [27 Mayıs’ın hemen öncesindeki ağır havaya karşı bütün bir halkça karşı çıkış anlatılır] (Duruel 140). When that long-expected coup finally arrived, Süreya may have felt relief that the arrests and censorship were coming to an end. However, like his fellow poets he did not go about singing the 27 May regime’s praises, even after the return to democracy and the new constitution. He writes: “The fierceness of 1960 and that May of 1960 worried us” [1960’ın katıkları, 1960 Mayıs’ı bizi kuşkulandırıyor] (143). As if sensing this darker side of the 27 May “Revolution,” Süreya never took “555 K” into his collected poems and spent seven months unable to write poetry after the coup occurred (143).

However, a column “Şiir Anayasaya Aykırıdır” [Poetry Is Against the Constitution] in *Papirüs* two months before Turkey’s new constitution was ratified

in a popular referendum in 1961 Süreya argues that nature and art are in a permanent war with morality and the law: “[they] rebel against the established order” [*kurulu düzene karşı başkaldırıyorlar*] (*Şapkam* 275). He describes how, with Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal* and Lautréamont’s *Chants de Maldoror*, modernity’s aesthetic norms shifted from the beautiful and the good to the ugly and evil. Art and politics both become oppositional: “The plan to transform the world followed Karl Marx and the plan transform life followed Arthur Rimbaud” [*Dünyanın değiştirilmesi planında Karl Marx’i, hayatın değiştirilmesi planında Arthur Rimbaud’yu izliyordu*] (276). This artistic-political iconoclasm continues in new forms in the sixties: “Today contemporary pots are developing in a particular direction in order to create new spaces and new perspectives: revolt” (277). “555 K” should be understood in terms of this expanded meaning of revolution. The poem contains a rebellious crowd, a multitude: “We come side by side and we multiply / [. . .] we sing the song of freedom from a single mouth” (289). This collectivity cannot be reduced to the coup that came after the poem was written, but instead points both backward to the growing seeds of rebellion in Turkish society in the fifties and forward to the revolutionary collectivities still to come at the height of the sixties. Poetry, like revolution, Süreya’s work suggests, is against the constitution—any constitution.

Even before the anti-DP opposition grew into a significant force, Süreya’s poetry was full of anti-authoritarian sentiments. “Üvercinka” [a portmanteau of the words “pigeon” (*güvercin*) and “woman” (*kadın*)], written four years before “555 K” in 1956, brought together cultural revolutionary concepts linking subjectivity and

politics while moving beyond local developments to include even a premature Third

Worldism:

Thus once again we are with your neck, one of you distinguished places
This is your longest neck, for standing firm or for not losing hope
We are on a streetcar that goes from Lâleli to the world
Suddenly how is it that as soon as you touch my heart
To make love once again goes into effect
In all the continents

Including Africa

[. . .]

You have an air, this is what really wraps around me
This adds one more value to taking a breath
She is right to be hungry in the mornings
She is pretty for she strives and saves the day
Pretty like many flower names
Blossoming with the best-known reds
In all the continents

Including Africa

Together we drop verses good or bad
Your neck I say your neck no one can put it to the use that I can
As if everything would improve if we recited one more line
We don't take two steps more before they hold us back
Thus once again they take and line us up to be shot
Each day from morning to night they line us up anyhow to be shot
In all the continents

Including Africa

This is just the right moment to mention your courage
Courage on the crowded streets when you joined the songs of freedom
It was sultanic courage that not every comely woman has
The way you hold a glass comes to mind
In the Çiçek Pasajı in the afternoons
The real destitution begins after that
In all the continents

Not excepting Africa (Karakaya and

Smith 75)⁶⁹

⁶⁹ *Böylece bir kere daha boynunlayız sayılı yerlerinden
En uzun boynun bu senin dayanmaya ya da umudu kesmemeye*

The poem slowly expands outward, zooming out from a description of the beloved's neck to Lâleli, a neighborhood in old Istanbul, and from there to all the world's continents. The "streetcar that goes from Lâleli to the world" has become something of a motto for Second New poetry. It reveals how close engagement with the specificity of local conditions can be a bridge to the wider world: "all the continents." Yet the repetition of Africa at the end of each stanza suggests that this continent has particular importance for Süreya's vision of internationalism. Second New poets

*Laleli'den dünyaya doğru giden bir tramvaydayız
Birden nasıl oluyor sen yüreğimi elliyorsun
Ama nasıl oluyor sen yüreğimi eller ellemez
Sevişmek bir kere daha yürürlüğe giriyor
Bütün kara parçalarında
Afrika dahil*

[. . .]
*Senin bir havan var beni asıl saran o
Onunla daha bir değere biniyor soluk almak
Sabahları acıktığı için haklı
Gününi kazanıp kurtardı diye güzel
Birçok çiçek adları gibi güzel
En tanınmış kırmızılarla açan
Bütün kara parçalarında
Afrika dahil*

*Birlikte mısralar düşünüyoruz ama iyi ama kötü
Boynun diyorum boynunu benim kadar kimse değerlendiremez
Bir mısra daha söylesek sanki her şey düzelecek
İki adım daha atmıyoruz bizi tutuyorlar
Böylece bizi bir kere daha tutup kurşuna diziyorlar
Zaten bizi her gün sabahtan akşama kadar kurşuna diziyorlar
Bütün kara parçalarında
Afrika dahil*

*Burda senin cesaretinden laf açmanın tam da sırası
Kalabalık caddelerde hürlüğüne şarkısına katılırkenki
Padişah gibi cesaretti o, alımlı değme kadında yok
Aklıma kadeh tutuşların geliyor
Çiçek Pasajında akşamüstleri
Asıl yoksulluk ondan sonra başlıyor
Bütün kara parçalarında
Afrika hariç değil*

make frequent reference to the Third World. Besides the title of Uyar's 1959 *The World's Most Beautiful Arabia*, there are several references to Africa scattered throughout Süreya's work. Sezai Karakoç, Süreya's friend and fellow poet, remembers discussing incorporating Africa into their poetry: "We must have talked about how the Westerners drew the lines of Africa's borders. And next thing you know Cemal has already written his poem "What you call Africa is a strange continent" (Dururel 74). This pithy poem written by Süreya in 1954 was called simply "Africa":

It's strange this thing you call Africa
Everyone knows it
To keep the Mediterranean from being deformed
It's still drawn like it was in olden times
On the maps (adapted from Karakaya and Smith 67)⁷⁰

Though written before the wave of decolonization intensified with the independence of Ghana in 1957, both poems must be understood in relation to a long history of exploitation of the African continent, from the Romans to the French. The impulse in "Pigeon-woman" to "include[e] Africa" represents an anti-colonial awareness. In this way, the poem anticipates the anti-imperialist concerns that were later to be articulated by sixties activists in Turkey.

At the same time, "Pigeon-woman" is a love poem. Characteristically, however, this line between romance and politics is repeatedly blurred. In the final two

⁷⁰ *Afrika dediğin bir garip kıta
El bilir âlem bilir
Ki şekli bozulmasın diye Akdeniz'in
Hâlâ eskisi gibi çizilir
Haritalarda*

stanzas the pair of lovers transform into revolutionaries. Where the begins in the voice of the individuated speaker, addressing the beloved and describing her body, it ends with a “we” that is “held back” and “line[d] up to be shot” by an anonymous “they.” In the following line, however, the identity of the first-person plural moves beyond the pair of lovers to a larger collectivity. This execution by firing recurs “each day from morning to night [. . .] / in all the continents,” suggesting that this “we” represents groups across the world united by a shared struggle.

The poem also provides reflections on the writing of poetry. The penultimate stanza begins, “Together we drop versus good or bad [. . .] / As if everything would improve if we recited one more line.” These lines reflect ambivalence about the role of poetry in the world. It is not that poetry will make everything improve, but that it seems “as if” this is the case. The presence of the subjunctive [*Bir mısra daha söylesek sanki her şey düzelecek*] suggests the improbability of this claim for poetry. This tentativeness is reflected in what critic Ahmet Oktay describes as a certain “shyness” that is characteristic of Süreya’s poetry. Süreya deals with social and political issues in his work, but the treatment of them is often subtle. Presciently reviewing *Pigeon-woman* in 1958 Oktay wrote: “There is a shy socialism hiding in the shade of individualistic modes of behavior. They haven’t become a part of [Süreya]’s life yet. He is interested in more general concerns” (quoted in Kacıroğlu 184). We can complicate this evaluation by suggesting that the slightly veiled and indirect way that social and political issues appear in Second New poetry is motivated less by embarrassment over the presence of things supposedly external to art than by

a particular aesthetic and political orientation. Political themes are given the same tonal and linguistic treatment as any other subject, suggesting that no clear distinction is drawn between sexuality and revolution, art and life, or between a subjective experience and a geopolitical event.

Modernity and the Many: Combustatory Subjectivity in Second New Poetry

The argument thus far has been that the social movements that strengthened in 1960 and come to characterize the long sixties as a whole—with a hitherto unseen quantity of marches, strikes and occupations—was already foreshadowed in Second New poetry from the mid- and late fifties. This emergent quality of the poetry can be traced through certain words and tropes kaleidoscopically recur across the oeuvres of Cansever, Uyar, and Süreya. These poetic techniques point to a revolutionary transformation of subjectivity that must accompany the more practical work of social revolution. This section argues that this central focus on transforming subjectivity in the Second New is a fundamentally (late) modernist impulse.

Second New poetry links individual and collective subjectivity. This tendency manifests in the unusual frequency of the verb *çoğalmak*—meaning, among other things, to “multiply,” “proliferate,” “reproduce,” “increase,” and “escalate.” This word, which is related to the word *çok*, “a lot/many” and *çoğul*, “plural,” appears in Süreya’s “Lion Statues” [*Aslan Heykelleri*] (1956) through poem’s refrain of “how many people” [*kaç kişi*]: “I love your proliferating hands how many people / as they touch as they touch the lions” [*Çoğaltan ellerini seviyorum kaç kişi / Dokundukça dokundukça aslanlara*] (*Sevda* 31). The hands of the speaker’s beloved are *çoğaltan*:

that is, they cause proliferation, multiplication, increase, or plurality to occur. Out of this force a certain newness comes into the world:

Since last I saw you I've discovered new words a whole bunch
To allow poetry to inhale under a wider air
Come on let all of these be invited too alongside the lion statues
The lion statues of bringing into being destroying making anew
I love your hands that bring into being purify make anew how many people
And then there are your eyes actually no they're no more
Or your neck as you get up and walk away
Modigliani-son-of-Modigliani¹⁵⁹

Following the Italian painter suddenly named at the end of the stanza, it would not be far off to call this a modernist poem. There is at least an undeniable anti-realism at play. But rather than private torment or intensity of Modigliani the dominant affect here is giddiness. The euphoria and needle-point humor expressed in Süreya's poem stems both from the romantic relationship described and the speaker's evermore elastic linguistic resources. The poem is having fun with itself but is also trying to inaugurate or annunciate something inchoate. The final stanza begins with the line "On the most unexpected day you came and freshened the world around" [*En olmayacak günde geldin tazeledin ortalığı*] but ends with a joke, describing an erotic scene as "Just an example of broken bourgeois morality" [*Bozulmuş burjuva ahlakına örnek*] (31). As for the identity of the Süreya's lions, with the rapid-fire alternation

¹⁵⁹ *Yeni sözler buldum bir nice seni görmeyeli
Daha geniş bir gökyüzünde soluk alıracak şiire
Hadi bir de bunlarla çağır gelsin aslan heykelleri
Oldurmanın yıkanın yeniden yapmanın aslan heykelleri
Olduran yıkan yeniden yapan gözlerini seviyorum kaç kişi
Bir senin gözlerin var zaten daha yok
Ya bu başını alıp gidiş boynundaki
Modigliani oğlu modigliani*

between images and the increasing mass of the crowd with every repetition of “how many people,” it would not be amiss to associate them with those lion statues moving from slumbering to waking in the famous montage sequence of the Odessa Steps in Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein’s 1925 film *Battleship Potemkin*.

A similar multiplying and destroying tendency that foreshadows a mass or a crowd can be observed in Cansever. *Park of the Hopeless* has a long section containing the refrain “how many times” [*kaç kere*]. The introductory poem to *Gravitational Carnation* reads “Am I now where, I many hey!” [*Ben miyim şimdi nerede, ben çok ey!*]. Here the individual becomes a collective. Another poem contains flowers that reproduce just as the “I” of the poem does: “A carnation a little bit / A carnation proliferating and proliferating” [*Bir karanfil az / Bir karanfil çoğala çoğala*]. Elsewhere Cansever uses the more martial image of “an army of living that enters the light when you look” [*Bakinca bir yaşama ordusu çıkıyor aydınlığa*]. Cansever’s contemporaries noticed his tendency toward proliferation. Sezai Karakoç wrote that Cansever’s theory of humanity was “plural-ist” [*çokçu*] and that his poetry “could be summarized as praise to the many” [*Çoğa övgü diye de özetlenebilir*] (*Gül* 129-130). In her 1966 study of Cansever’s poetry, Tomris Uyar (partner of Turgut Uyar) similarly noted that *Gravitational Carnation*’s

most important characteristic is the flavor emerging from these multiplications [*çoğullamalar*]: “meanwhile the carnation passes hand to hand,” “the leaf touching the leaf again,” “all at once we become something else.” As they go

on, these multiplications transform into an optimistic, secure invitation.
(160)⁷¹

This growth and expansion is a source of joy for Cansever. In *Park of the Hopeless* it pushes the alienated speakers of the poem to abandon their domestic roles: “We don’t fit in our houses, that’s how much our bodies have grown” [*Evlere sığamıyoruz, öylesine büyüdü ki vücutlarımız*] (167).

For all these poets, expansion and multiplication is associated with the subjectivity of the lover. In Süreya’s 1957 poem “San” [Repute] he writes “I take you into my embrace / Your legs grow indescribably long” [*Seni kucağıma alıyorum / Tarifsiz uzuyor bacakların*] (11). Uyar’s poetry abounds with urban crowds that are linked to eroticism: “I don’t know what’s in your hands there let’s look at the sky / As I touch them I become stronger I become crowded” [*Senin bu ellerinde ne var bilmiyorum göğe bakalım / Tuttukça güçleniyorum kalabalık oluyorum*] (135). The linking of plurality with love, and both with politics, is clarified by a much later poem from Second New-associated İlhan Berk’s *Beautiful River* [*Güzel Irmak*] (1992): “Plural is beautiful. Let your face stay like this / (Your face, the façade of a people’s history” [*Çoğul güzeldir. Yüzün dursun / (Yüzün ki bir halkın tarihine alınlık*] (translated by Otçu 10). The critiques of the Second New as apolitical or fearful of repression have been unable to contend with this almost obsessive theme of teeming

⁷¹ Tomris Uyar, “Bir Doğa Vatandaşı Edip Cansever,” *Papirüs*, July 1966. ‘Kitabın en önemli özelliği çoğullamalardan çıkan tad: ‘derken karanfil elden ele.’ ‘yaprığın daha bir yaprağa dediği’, ‘hep birden bir şey oluyoruz işte’ *Giderek iyimser, güvenli bir çağrıya dönüşüyor bu çoğullamalar*’ (Gül Dönüyor 163)

multiplication and joyous expansion which evokes both the loosening of restrictions in the fifties and the growth of mass politics of the sixties.

There are other early manifestations of revolutionary enthusiasm in Second New poems. In 1955 Süreya published the poem “Sigarayı Attım Denize” [I Threw a Cigarette into the Sea]/ It begins, “Now we are sharing the flight of a pigeon / In that famous blueness of the sky” [*Şimdi bir güvercinin uçuşunu bölüşüyoruz / Gökyüzünün o meşhur maviliğinde*] (Karakaya and Smith’s translation 41). How can one divide a pigeon’s flight as if it were a concrete object to be split in two? Just as this poem pushes the limits of language, it describes a world straining free from the accepted laws of logic and physics. It also combines erotic and political subjectivity: The beloved holds in her “hand miles of freedom / For working people till the evenings / in dust and smoke” [*...elinde de kilometrelerce hürlük / Çalışan insanlar için akşamlara kadar / Toz duman içinde*]. Then poem ends in a crescendo of flame:

We were at least like this in the past you and I
If a cloud passed by, we saw it
If a minaret was in a good mood, it too
If a man made a habit of neediness, him too
Whenever for the sake of freedom and peace and love
We threw a cigarette into the see
It continued to burn till morning¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ *Biz eskiden de en aşağı böyleydik senlen
Bir bulut geçiyorsa onu görürdük
Bir minarenin keyfine diyecek yoksa onu
Bir adam boyuna yoksulluk ediyorsa onu
Ne zaman hürlüğün barışın sevginin aşkına
Bir cigara atmışsak denize
Sabaha kadar yandı durdu (Sevda 21)*

Does a minaret have moods? How can a stray cigarette set the entire sea aflame?

Süreya's poem describes a world on the brink of a thoroughgoing transformation. The poetic subject of these poems is inebriated with desire, possibility, and expansion.

The mode of subjectivity expressed in these poems unlocks both their literary affiliation as well as the lingering issue of periodization. Critics often describe aesthetic modernism as closely related to the psychic effects of modernity itself. For Jameson one of the central qualities of modernist literature is the presentation of both the external world and the poetic subject itself as on the cusp of imminent transformation: "It is because the object world, in the throes of industrialization and modernization, seems to tremble at the brink of an equally momentous and even Utopian transformation that the 'self' can also be felt to be on the point of change" (*Postmodernism* 312). The unstable, explosive, and almost combustatory subjectivity characteristic of "I Throw a Cigarette into the Sea" and Second New poetry more generally vindicates this observation.

Any description of the Second New as modernism, however, must contend with the fact that in most accounts, canonical modernism from Baudelaire to Eliot both begins and ends long before the fifties, let alone the social movements of the sixties. In his 1984 essay "Modernity and Revolution" Perry Anderson provides a reframing of modernism relevant to the Turkish context.⁷² He discusses modernism's

⁷² Since Anderson, scholars associated with the New Modernist Studies have continued challenging the Eurocentric biases of earlier definitions of modernism. Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz have argued for a three-fold expansion in the study of modernism, transforming conventional understandings of when modernism happened (temporal) and where it was located (spatial), as well as challenging ossified canon formations that have excluded mass cultural forms and marginalized social

“after-glow” during the long sixties in certain contexts outside of Western Europe and North America (109). For Anderson, aesthetic modernism was initially made possible by the experience of capitalist modernization itself. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, all that was solid melted into air—previous social formations broke apart and new technologies like the radio, telephone, automobile and airplane radically transformed how people experienced time and space. This period was also marked, Anderson argues, by a sense of ambiguity, of a future yet to be determined, and thus modernism was, in essence, an artistic expression of “the imaginative proximity of social revolution” (104). In Western Europe and North America this sense of possibly—will the future be communist, capitalist, something else entirely?—was partially shut down after WWII. With “an oppressively stable, monolithically industrial, capitalist civilization was now in place,” high modernism itself became canonized and domesticated in universities.

However, this was not the case everywhere, or at least not for long. Deep into the sixties this same “openness of horizon” (Anderson 109) still existed in certain places. Anderson’s description of modernism’s blossoming in places outside the capitalist core countries echoes our description of the fifties and sixties in Turkey:

Pre-capitalist oligarchies of various kinds, mostly of a landowning character abound; capitalist development is typically far more rapid and dynamic, where it does occur, in these regions than in the metropolitan zones, but on the other hand is infinitely less stabilized or consolidated; socialist revolution haunts these countries as a permanent possibility, or indeed one already realized in countries close to home—Cuba or Nicaragua, Angola or Vietnam” (Ibid.)

groups (vertical). Work in this field has revealed new sites, periods, and circuits of exchange. See Douglas and Walkowitz, “The New Modernist Studies” in *PMLA* (2008).

Certainly, Turkey was no Cuba, but one need only recall the proximity of the Soviet Union and decolonizing or non-aligned countries such as Algeria and Egypt to see how proximate revolution was felt to be in Turkey at the mid-century. From the perspective of the U.S., Turkey was the first in a long line of Cold War dominoes. Hence the Marshall Plan showered Turkey with aid money that resulted in breakneck construction of highways, the introduction of new consumer goods, the speed of urbanization, the rapid transformation of rural life. Ironically, this encounter with new goods and technologies, as reflected in Second New poetry, only increased the sense of imminent transformation.

It is in the context of modernization and modernity that the many parallels of Second New poetry to the modernism of Baudelaire, Modigliani, Eliot, Chagall, and others gains meaning. However, to invoke modernism is not to reduce the matter to a mere instance of influence (though Second New poets were aware of these figures). Modernism is not the exclusive patrimony of Europe. The key factor is the convergence of local conditions and global forces. Jameson writes that “what we call artistic or aesthetic ‘modernism’ essentially corresponds to a situation of incomplete modernization” (*Singular* 141). In this sense, Turgut Uyar’s *The World’s Most Beautiful Arabia*, is no less modernist than *The Waste Land*—the modern, wherever it appears, gives rise to disjointedness and contradiction. Both works melancholically contrast a corrupted urban modernity to an idealized and sometimes exoticized *outside* of the city. As the Warwick Research Collective argues, it makes sense to

think of disparate texts like these together not because they have an “abstract connectivity linking them across time and space,” but rather because

they all bear testimony—in their own distinct ways, and in both their form and content—to the ‘shock of the new,’ the massive rupture effected at the levels of space-time continuum, lifeworld, experience and human sensorium by capitalist modernization. (50)

The periodization of this “shock,” however, varies from place to place. In a 1959 interview Cansever was asked if *The Park of the Hopeless* was directly connected to conditions in Turkey:

Of course it does. For example, the crisis [*bunalım*] we have here could be thought alongside economic conditions. Within the civilization they have created, Western humanity looks for a medium that can situate their emotional state. For them to be freed from becoming a kind of biological machine is their most natural right. But when it comes to our society are things like this? First, we’re experiencing the throes of mechanization. This [pain] makes itself most clear in the intellectual set. I mean, our distress [*sıkıntımız*] is doubled.¹⁶²

Cansever is deeply aware of the unevenness of this process. While the “throes of mechanization are underway,” intellectuals have a certain kind of pained insight, an intuition of what is to come. It is only once modernization is near-complete that these modernist possibilities begin to disappear.

The experience of incomplete modernity created what Anderson called an “openness of horizon, where the shapes of the future could alternatively assume the shifting forms of either a new type of capitalism, or of the eruption of socialism” (109). The project of U.S. cold warriors was to shut down this openness and bring

¹⁶² *Elbette var. Örneğin bizdeki bunalım ekonomik koşullarla birlikte düşünülebilir. Batılı insan kendi yarattığı uygarlık içinde, duyarlılığını yerleştirecek bir ortam arayabilir. Biyolojik bir makine olmaktan kurtulmak onun en doğal hakkıdır. Ama bizim toplumumuza gelince öyle mi? Önce makineleşmenin sancısını çekiyoruz. Bu, aydınlar katında daha da belli ediyor kendini . Yani sıkıntımız iki katlı bizim.*

Turkey firmly into capitalist modernity and the Western bloc. According to the newly developing orthodoxy of Modernization Theory, for which Turkey was a key laboratory, investment in consumer goods and infrastructure should stimulate capitalist forms of subjectivity in Turkey's citizens. As Begüm Adalet writes:

Recipients of roads, hotels, and surveys were to calculate mobility in physical and imaginary terms: if they could not literally undertake travel, they should be able to physically accommodate the vision of self-chosen, voluntary movement. The modern self was expected to travel *well*, wait in line for public transportation, and to lodge in aesthetically appealing, hygienic, and comfortable facilities. (10)

Instead, as the sixties heated up, a different kind of empathetic imagination and psychic travel occurred. Young students who went up to the Nurhak Mountains of Central Anatolia to start the guerrilla rebellion against the U.S. Their quixotic attempt to repeat what Che and Fidel achieved in Cuba's Sierra Maestra shows that "the imaginative proximity of social revolution" was at a fever pitch during the Turkish sixties (Anderson 104). Similarly, the U.S.-led effort to create highways linking the Turkish countryside to the cities had the unintended effect both of rapid internal migration and the growth of the Kurdish movement. The development of Kurdish communities in Istanbul and Ankara "paved the way for the eastern meetings of 1967, in which Kurdish contenders clamored on roads and factories rather than police stations and gendarmes in rallies across major eastern cities" (Adalet 156-7). Increased knowledge of the U.S. and the wider world, too, led to some surprising outcomes, such as the burning of American ambassador Robert Komer's (the "Butcher of Vietnam") car in Ankara. This famous fire in 1969 became the symbol of a generation.

Making these imaginative leaps by linking Algeria to Cuba to Vietnam to Turkey required a certain psychic flexibility, which appeared early on in Second New poetry. Süreya was aware that his poetry had a certain effect on the mind. Of his first book in 1958 “I summarize *Üverincka* with a single word: shock. In many of the poems in that book I searched for a shock effect” [*Üverincka*’yı bir kelimeyle özetliyorum: şok. O kitaptaki çok siirimde şok etkisi aradım] (Duruel 127). This goal was not far off from that of the classic modernists: *Épater la bourgeoisie*. This “shock effect” cleared the way for more political forms of enthusiasm. Describing Süreya’s poetry in relation to the First New, critic Mehmet Doğan wrote in 1969 that the poet’s goal was to:

The mess up the comfortable style of expression in the old poetry, to dynamite it from somewhere within, to not leave the poet to drift off into numbness in the clockwork-like regularity of the affected manner, to shake the reader. (Duruel 118)¹⁶³

This poetry aimed to transform the subjectivity of both the writer and the reader. The most frequent trope for this transformation is fire.

In 1959 Cansever published the book *Petrol*, whose short poems also exhibit a certain combustibility. This tendency is most clear in the poem “Phoenix”: “Let them say what they want I’m burning down this day / To be born again from the fire I light” (207). Just as Süreya set the sea aflame with a cigarette butt, Cansever sets the world on fire. “İnfilâk” [The Explosion] ends in flames: “Our hands meet from afar /

¹⁶³ *Eski şiirdeki söyleyiş rahatlığını bozmak, bir yerinden dinamitleyip onu, okuyucuyu edanın tıkr tıkr rahatlığı içinde uyuşmaya bırakmamak, sarsmak... Eski şiirin imgesiz, derinliksiz, basit konuşma dilinden uzaklaşıp bir şiir diline varma çabası...*

And just as we come eye to eye out of nowhere an explosion” [*Buluşur çok uzaktan ellerimiz / Ve nasıl göz gözeyiz ansızın bir infilâk*] (214). Cansever’s own comments from the sixties show the relationship for him between images of fire and revolution. Referring back to the image of the phoenix from the vantage point of 1964, Cansever wrote: “If you ask me, the example of the phoenix that creates itself again and again out of its ashes must be a terror-filled real of dreams where humanity and prepare for its own rebirth, resilience, and passion for living” [*Bana kalırsa o, kendini küllerinden bir daha bir daha yaratan Phoenix örneği, insanlığın da yeniden doğuşunu, direncini, yaşama tutkusunu hazırlayan korkulu bir düş alanı olmalı*] (Şiiri 129). He then connects the image of fire to the “Buddhist priests setting themselves on fire with American petrol [distributed as] aid.” After this image of Vietnamese resistance he describes the Chorus of his dramatic-poetic work *Tragedyalar* [Tragedies] (1964) as a voice of protest: “a common voice stretching out from cinemas and radio bulletins and dinner tables and protest venues coming from those squeezed between fear of the atom bomb and a humane life” [*atom korkusuyla insanca yaşamanın arasında yerleştirilmiş, sinemalardan radyo haberlerine, yemek sofralarından miting alanlarına dek uzanan ortaklaşa bir sestir*]. A section of this poem “takes place in Algeria, and countries where Black people struggle to end the separation of white and black [*Episode Cezayir’de geçer, zencilerin siyah-beyaz ayırımına son verilmesi için başkaldırdığı ülkelerde geçer*]. Though Cansever seems to confuse U.S. civil rights struggles with Algerian anti-colonialism, fire is an image for a world and a people undergoing transformation. The incredible plasticity of both

the object world and the psyche of the self in Second New shows that both are products of historical developments and as such are subject to transformation.

These arresting images are signals that the Second New was in step with—or even in advance of—the revolutionary energies of its era. Turgut Uyar’s one-line opening to his 1962 volume, “on the shore of all possibilities” [*bütün mümkünlerin kıyısında*], foreshadows the utopian dreamings of 1968. This poetry’s modernist irreality was actually a realist reflection on the stakes and possibility of change at this particular historical juncture. We will now turn to a final set in the important subjective/social transformations envisioned early on by Second New poets: sexuality and the nation.

Resisting Possession, Resisting Assimilation

Second New poetry set itself apart from other currents in modern Turkish poetry in its candid treatment of sex. In a famous 1967 essay on “Sevgilinin Halleri” [The States of the Beloved], Süreya describes how the metaphysical or allegorical beloved of Ottoman poetry was increasingly described as a living, breathing human being. Süreya and his contemporaries played a pivotal role in this process. Second New poetry is bold in its treatment of sex refusal of sexuality morality. As Armağan notes, “in Second New poetry sexuality becomes a form of opposition” [*İkinci Yeni şiirinde ise cinsellik bir muhalefet biçimi olarak belirir*] (143). For example, in the poem “Üvercinka” Süreya verges on blasphemy, “If it were up to our Esteemed God sleeping with you is a sin give me a break” [*Sayın Tanrıya kalırsa seninle yatmak günah daha neler*] (adapted from Karakaya and Smith, 75). The adjective “sayın”

[respected, esteemed] is put before proper names in formal contexts in Turkey, almost like Mr. or Ms. This humorous description of “Mr. God” suggests that the latter is no more than bourgeois bully commanding obedience to rules of chastity.

Süreya is famous for his love and erotic poems, many of which continue to be read and anthologized in Turkey today. Many of these include descriptions of women’s bodies marked by the male gaze, yet they often interestingly problematize their own misogyny. All of this is present in the 1957 poem “TK”:

Hey you’re a woman you take it all off
It’s your gift to take off and throw everything that can be thrown, easily
Just as you kiss in the meantime all the men in the world, including me
You reach out and kiss horses stark naked
Whatever happens happens at that moment (translated by Karakaya and Smith
71)⁷³

The speaker describes the life of this woman as a perpetual strip-show. She sheds commitments with the same levity as items of clothing. The jealous speaker of the poem imagines the woman with other men. While many Turkish poems contain expressions of pained male jealousy, at this point in the poem something unexpected happens. The woman moves from kissing men to kissing horses and from there the tone shifts radically:

When you add your mouth to the horses
It happens suddenly we’re surprised
The people have an air of terrible beauty
Suddenly we pass beyond where we wanted to go

⁷³ *Sen kadınsın ya büsbütün soyunuyorsun
Sana vergi, atılacak her şeyi kolayca çıkarıp atmak
Öptüğün gibi dünyanın bütün adamlarını bu arada beni
Uzanıp öpüyorsun ya atları çırılçıplak
Ne oluyorsa işte o zaman oluyor.*

Separate if you can, which of us is a woman and which of us a man⁷⁴

After the absurdist image of the woman kissing horses, the poem enters an entirely different discourse from the male lover's jealousy. An unnamed "it" occurs that transforms not only the two lovers but all the world's peoples [*halklar*] and even suspends the separations between human and non-human animals. The poem's couple reach a world beyond conventional limits, where not even gender distinctions remain. Starting with a rather conventional standpoint of sexism and jealousy, the poem ends with the subject grappling with the possibility of his own self-abolition as a man.

These surreal or utopian moments in Second New poetry reveal that this poetry was not only frank about sexuality in a way that pushed the envelope for the Turkish context, they actually grapple toward a new understanding of sexuality that shares a logic with the 'sexual revolution' of the world sixties. In the U.S. context, for example, liberalizing sexual mores and increased access to birth control transformed sexual relationships. However, for most women this sexual revolution was a "mixed blessing." Echols writes: "Women were having more sex (and with less guilt), but they were also sexually vulnerable" (34). Sexism remained rampant on the U.S. Left while the counterculture idealized a traditional gendered division of labor where women traded cooking, cleaning, and childrearing in a suburban home with doing the same activities on a rural commune. By all accounts, Turkey did not experience a

⁷⁴ *Sen ağzını ilave edince atlara
Birdenbire oluyor bu, şaşırıyoruz
Korkunç bir güzellik halkların havasında
Birden ötesine geçiyoruz varmak istediğimizin
Ayr ayırabilersen hangimiz kadın, hangimiz erkek*

sexual revolution, though there was a liberalization in romantic relationships between men and women in urban, middle-class and activist milieus, at least in the early sixties (Mater 27; 55). The hardest thing to challenge in both the U.S., Turkey, and beyond was what Alice Echols calls the “deeply rooted sexual double standard” that required chastity from women. While Süreya and Turgut Uyar in particular often utilize a womanizing persona in their poems, there are moments, especially in the latter’s poetry, that not only prefigure the logic of the sexual revolution but even challenge some of its internal contradictions. Süreya evokes, at fleeting moments, a world without gender. However, Uyar imagines something perhaps even more radical due its practical, everyday application: sexual relationships beyond shame, double standards, jealousy, and possessiveness.

Uyar’s *The World’s Most Beautiful Arabia* includes several long, narrative poems from the perspective of the persona Akçaburgazlı Yekta [Yekta from Akçaburgaz].⁷⁵ This native of a nonexistent town with an Anatolian-sounding name

⁷⁵ Uyar was born on 4 August 1927 in the capital of Ankara. The family moved to Istanbul, living for some years in the lower middle-class neighborhood of Edirnekapı. In 1941, due to economic problems, Turgut was enrolled in military schools in Anatolia. Newly graduated and married, in 1948 Uyar and his family moved from Turkey’s west to the far northeast of Anatolia where Uyar began his work as a professional officer. He spent four years in Posof, an isolated and remote sub-province near the Georgian border. Before *The World’s Most Beautiful Arabia* broke the mold in 1959, Uyar published two earlier books of verse. *Arz-ı Hal* [The Petition Writer] in 1949 and *Türkiyem* [My Turkey] in 1952. Besides the First New, the folk meters and village themes in these poems drew on the folk revivalist *Beş Hececiler* [Five Syllabists]. Two years into the DP’s rule Uyar was given a new posting in Ankara. After many years in rural Anatolia, he was to return to life in the big city. Life had changed and Uyar noticed. Looking back on this period in an interview from 1973, he reflected:

The thing that pushed me to write the poetry I did [in *The World’s Most Beautiful Arabia*] was seeing that my environment had changed. A suddenly urbanizing world, the neon lights I suddenly encountered, large hotels, a state of affairs foreshadowing a series of new developments: all these made it so that writing the poetry of Orhan Veli [i.e. the First New] could no longer save me. (*Korkulu* 512)

migrates to the big city and finds himself entangled in various adventures. In “Akçaburgazlı Yekta'nın Mahkeme Kararını Aldığında Söylediği Mezmurdur” [The Psalm Yekta from Akçaburgaz Recited Upon Receiving the Court Ruling], our hero introduces himself with his characteristic dead-pan simplicity:

I'm Yekta in his thirties.
I'm from Akçaburgaz, that is where I came from
Because everyone is a native of somewhere and I, Yekta, find this quite
pleasant. (136)⁷⁶

In this poem, the ever-wandering Yekta comes to stay as the house-guest of a married couple: “One of their names was Gülbeyaz, she was a woman, the other's name was Sinan, he was a man” [*Birinin adı Gülbeyaz'dı, o kadındı, öbürünün adı Sinan'dı, o erkekti*]. Yekta's hosts treat him well and all are content. They eat dinner together and engage in long conversations. Yekta stays in their house for three nights, but when Sinan leaves the house Yekta and Gülbeyaz begin sleeping together:

Gülbeyaz and I knew each other in a biblical sense
I never deceived her
Nor did she deceive me
I never led her astray. We both wanted to go beyond what we know, to rise
above what we had found (138)⁷⁷

[*Beni yazdığım şiiri yazmaya iten neden, çevremi değiştirdiğini görmemdi. Birdenbire kentleşen dünya, birdenbire karşılaştığım neon lambaları, büyük oteller, birtakım yeni gelişmeleri haber veren durumlar beni artık Orhan Veli şiiri yazmakla kurtaramıyordu.*]

Unlike Süreya, Uyar could not read in foreign languages. He does not attribute his change in poetic style to literary influences but to social-historical factors.

⁷⁶ *Ben otuzunda Yekta'ydim,*

Akçaburgazlıyım, oradan geldim,

Herkes bir yerlidir çünkü, Ben, Yekta bunu pek hoş buluyordum.

⁷⁷ *Ne o beni kandırmıştı,*

Ne ben onu baştan çıkarmıştım. İkimiz de bildiklerimizin ötesine, bulduklarımızın üstüne çıkmak istemiştik.

Yekta is at pains to distinguish this sexual relationship from a normal affair. Both parties knew what they were getting into and chose it willingly. What they sought was not just sex but self-transformation: “go[ing] beyond what we know.” However, when Sinan returns Yekta and Gülbeyaz expect the worse. Instead of kicking them out of the house, Sinan decides to get his revenge through the legal system. Yekta and Gülbeyaz are arrested and put on trial:

They showed my underwear and Gülbeyaz’s underwear
And the sheet we had laid on
To heartless people and then laughed.
Whereas when we lay on those sheets,
Our minds and strength were at lofty heights.
It was the exaltedness, not the sin, of what we did that were aware of (141)⁷⁸

The judges who laugh and spit on these two lovers transform their relationship into something sinful and sordid in the eyes of the public. Yekta and Gülbeyaz were pure, but the system of laws and morality debases what they stand for: “They brought us low and made us cry” [*bizi alçaltıp ağlattılar*]. Now the two have no faith left to hold onto. Yekta resumes his wandering, remembering the warm hospitality that Sinan and Gülbeyaz first showed him:

They would offer me freshly pressed apple juice.
They had cool cushions to sit on, I, Yekta from Akçaburgaz, ignorant, lacking children, find this quite pleasant.
I wasn’t mistaken, I have no regrets, there’s that too (142).⁷⁹

⁷⁸ *Benim donumu ve Gülbeyaz’ın donunu*

Ve yattığımız yatağın örtüsünü

Yüreksiz kişilere gösterip onları güldürdüler.

Halbuki biz o örtülerde yatarken,

Aklımız en ulu yerlerdeydi gücümüz.

Biz o zaman yaptıklarımızın günahını değil, yüceliğini biliyorduk.

⁷⁹ *Bana elmadan sıkılmış sular sunarlardı.*

Serin minderleri vardı, Ben, Akçaburgazlı Yekta, Caihl, çocuksuz, bunları pek hoş bulurdum.

Yanılmadım pişman değilim bu da vardı.

Yekta ends his “psalm” lonely and homeless again, he still rejects the morality and laws of the society that judged him and Gülbeyaz for their bold attempts at self-overcoming.

If the previous poem still centered the male perspective, “Toprak Çömlek Hikayesi” [The Earthen Pot] describes another of Yekta’s love affairs but this time the roles are reversed. Yekta and Adile are partners. Adile has taken a younger lover, Erhan. Much of the narrative follows Adile’s perspective as she hosts a soiree in their home by the beach for a group of bourgeois women. These guests make underhanded comments about Adile’s appearance that hint at her affair. The poem provides their dramatic dialogue in prose:

Şermin: But these days you look so well
Dear Adile, on top of it you seem so happy.

Adile: If that’s the case, then I’m pleased. But there’s no reason in the world not to be happy, you can be too, all it takes is a little courage and wanting to be happy, yes this is enough, plus loving, of course... (160-1)⁸⁰

Adile then moves into a soliloquy where she admits she knows they were talking about her before she entered the room. The women judge her out of envy. They do not have the courage to follow their own desires. Yet she is content and refuses to let their bourgeois morality and sexual mores dampen the joy of her affair with Erhan.

The long poem ends with the section “Sular Karardığında Yekta’nın Mezmurudur”

⁸⁰ Şermin –*ama bugünlerde çok iyi görünüyorsunuz Adileciğim, üstelik pek mutlu bir haliniz var.*
Adile –*Öyleyse sevindim. Ama mutlu olmamak için hiçbir gerek yok dünyada, siz de olabilirsiniz, biraz cesaret biraz da mutluluğu istemek yeter galiba, evet bu kadarı yeter, sevmekle elbet...*

[Yekta's Psalm When the Waters Darken]. Throughout the party Yekta has been sitting by sea near the house. He describes his relationship with Adile and his conflicted feelings about her affair with Erhan:

I found Adile and I loved her
My loneliness warmed itself on her city
The buildings weren't blocking my way anymore
The streets weren't tricking me
Maybe I didn't warm up but I was bearing it
I could tell from the way I started to love the nighttime best of all
Then Adile didn't distance herself
She found Erhan but she didn't leave
But she was split in two

Maybe she was expending the trust she gained from me on him, maybe she was taking the fresh tranquility she got from him and returning to me again, what they passed on from me to her and from her to me or what they thought they were passing on made her happy, there was no need for the sea in her lovemaking because I was there, without curses, without complaints, not even holding onto resentment, there was her flesh that delighted young Erhan and drew him in, seeing that he was happy in her was a kind of love that enveloped her—whereas I needed that too—the more that knowledge enveloped her, the taste of her own flesh, her imminent fading entered her flaming nights and purifying her in this way always [. . .] (170)⁸¹

Yekta begins with short, simple lines describing Adile as a refuge from the eternal

homelessness of the Anatolian migrant. While the big city gives him anxiety, “Adile’s

⁸¹ *Adile'yi buldum sevdim
Yalnızlığım onun şehrine ısındı
Yapılar önüme durmuyordu artık
Sokaklar aldatamıyordu
Belki ısınmadım ama katlanıyordum
En çok geceleri sevmemden anlıyordum bunu
Sonra Adile uzaklaşmadı
Erhan'ı buldu ama uzaklaşmadı
Ama ikiye bölündü*

Benden aldığı güveni onda harcıyordu belki, ondan aldığı serin huzurla bana dönüyordu gene, benden ona ondan bana ilettikleri yahut ilettiğini sandıkları onu mutlu ediyordu denizin gereği yoktu sevişmesinde ben vardım çünkü, ilençsiz, yakınmasız hatta kinsiz, genç Erhan'ı kıvanduran çeken eti vardı, onun kendisinde mutlu olduğunu görmek bilmek bir çeşit aşk gibi sarıyordu onu -oysa bana da gerekliydi- o bilgi böylece sardıkça onu, kendi etinin tadı, geçmeye yüz tutmuşluğu yalım yalım gecelerine giriyordu onu arıyordu hep böylece

city” protected him from the harshness of urban life. He admits that Adile never abandoned him, but as he begins to explore his conflicted feelings about the affair he moves to a breathless section of run-on prose. Love circulates between the three of them. At times the affair between Adile and Erhan creates a warmth that passes to Yekta as well. At other moments he feels neglected. Yet Yekta can imaginatively inhabit Adile’s position. He can see why the affair is significant to her and finds relief in the knowledge of her joy:

I found a consolation and consoled myself
The more I bear the more I’m purified
I purify in the taste and pain that bearing gives
It’s as if a part of me is cleansed and rises so beautifully like that (171)⁸²

In the final lines of the “Psalm,” Yekta finds something transcendent even in his own pain. Jealousy a religious purging ritual. He attempts to keep a utopian horizon of non-possessive love in mind as he watches the sun go down over the sea. These poems imagine a place beyond jealousy and conventional morality while also recognizing the pain of this subjective deprogramming. Passages like this embody the emergent ethos of sexual liberation. From the vantage-point of 1959 they try to think beyond the contradictions that would inhere in new arrangements. This is not to say Uyar or the other Second New poets lived out this new sexual ethos in their own lives. Even if it only remained on the page, the fact that Uyar and other poets were

⁸² *Bir avuntu buldum avunuyorum*
Katlandıkça arınıyorum
Katlanmanın tadında acısında arınıyorum
Bir yerlerim temize çıkıyor sanki öyle güzel

already working through these ideas reveal an expansion in what was thinkable at this historical moment.

The most thoroughly radical approach to sexuality in the Second New occurred in the poetry of Ece Ayhan.⁸³ Ayhan was the only non-heterosexual poet among his peers. Though the exploration of the taboo subject of queer sexuality was necessarily veiled in his poetry, it pushed the boundary both in representations of desire and in conceptions of identity. Sex in Ayhan's poetry is typically hidden within the second or even third meaning of words. His dense prose poems are thick with historical allusions and utilize the slang of Istanbul's gay underworld. His 1968 work *Ortodoksluklar* [Orthodoxies] was as radical as anything else written in that year.

"Orthodoxies 1" begins like this:

His only side—his face—to be talked about: the space between his legs. And he has grown a moustache and a beard. An inveterate. A pervert. Such talk about him. He doesn't go near women as he should. He whets suspicion. An erect plume on his head. A barber's piece. A pornographic masterpiece. He is buried alive in the ground. Head first. Ouch! A few sailboats, startled, shine at a distance. *Why couldn't I understand?* (translated by Nemet-Nejat 35)⁸⁴

Ayhan is a poet who delights in the sound of language. Many of the expressions are used for their evocative sounds, like the implosive and ejective consonants in

⁸³ Ece Ayhan was born in the Aegean town of Datça where his civil servant father was stationed. After growing up in Istanbul he attended the Political Sciences Faculty of Ankara University where he became friends with Süreya (another "penniless boarder" [parasız yatılı] studying with a scholarship) and participated in the artistic and intellectual scenes of the fifties. Ayhan became a public administrator in various provinces of Turkey before retiring from civil service in 1966. His first published book *Kınar Hanım'ın Denizleri* [Seas of Madam Kınar] (1959) was written his characteristically lush and melancholic Second New style.

⁸⁴ *Tek konuşulur yüzüdür bacaklarının arası. Sakal ve bıyık da bıraktığı. Dönmez bir sapkınım. Üzerine bir dedikodu. Yaklaşmaz kadınlara buyurulduğu gibi. Kışkırtır kuşkuları. Başlarındaki sorguç ve berbername. Gömdürülmüştür diri diri toprağa başaşağı. Ürker ve parlar birkaç katana ötede. Neden anlayamıyordum. (Bütün 87)*

“*kışkırtır kuşkuları*” [whets suspicion] and the doubled assonance in “*diri diri toprağa başaşağı*” [alive head first]. As for the content, these poems have a knowing tone. The unnamed, “perverted” anti-hero is presented as if the reader already knows all the bad things said about him. These innuendos split into choppy sentences are spoken in a collective voice, as if each neighbor is passing another item of gossip along. The poems in *Orthodoxies* deal with figures who would be considered unsavory by conventional standards. As translator Murat-Nejat explains, the word “Orthodox” is itself a pun referring both to the religiously Orthodox as well as, in slang usage, to “‘whore, homosexual, pederast, betrayer, etc.’; that is to say, it refers to the whole underbelly of Turkish society” (65). This word unites two of Ayhan’s central concerns: the Orthodox populations of Istanbul (Greeks, Russians, Georgians, Armenians) and the underworld of gay culture and prostitution located in the old Levantine quarter of Istanbul (Pera, known today as Beyoğlu).

Ayhan’s deep interest in both religious/ethnic and sexual minorities reveals the intense radicalism of his poetry. His work challenged not only homophobia but also Turkish nationalism. From the Armenian Genocide of the late Ottoman Empire, early Republican population exchanges with Greece and Bulgaria, pogroms against Jews, riots and attacks against the Greek residents of Istanbul (particularly in 6-7 April 1955 in Beyoğlu), and residency permit restrictions against minorities, the Turkish state sought through various planned and unplanned measures to make the country demographically more Muslim and more Turkish. In this context, the appearance of marginalized voices and figures in Ayhan’s poetry challenged the basic

tenant of Turkish nationalism, the idea that, as one scholar puts it, “[t]he nation [should] express a homogeneity deriving from ethnic unity, and this unity would be expressed in a single voice” (Keyder 42). Ayhan’s poetry undid this vision of unity by centering the history and voices of the forgotten ‘Other’ in modern Turkey. In fact, all of the Second New poets demonstrated engagement with the minority communities of Istanbul, the cosmopolitan character of Beyoğlu, Roman and Byzantine history, the figure of Christ, and other aspects of Christian theology.⁸⁵ Armenian, and Jewish characters (both men and women, often working class or lumpen) abound in this poetry and they often speak their own language—or the poets make up new languages.

This implicit anti-nationalist stance in Second New poetry is directly linked to the formal difficulty of this work. A distaste for ambiguity characterized the Turkish nationalist project, which sought its survival in eliminating traces of the ‘contaminating’ difference—whether linguistic, ethnic or religious—within the national borders. In contrast, there is an implicit politics in the Second New’s ambiguous and layered use of language, a refusal not only of public, monosemic, and unambiguous speech, but also the monovocality of the closed state, its insistence on self-sameness. The double- and triple-meanings of Ayhan’s poetry revels in ambiguity and unruly heterogeneity. Whereas both the First New and the Left wrote poetry that “was closed to any indecision born of division, any vagary or opacity

⁸⁵ See, for example, the following poems of İlhan Berk: “Arma Viriumque Cano” (*A Leaf* 48), “Denizens of Hristaki Arcade” (109), and “Saint-Antoine’s Pigeons” (71).

come of a difficulty in assigning meaning to a thing” (Koçak, “Our Master” 7), Ayhan, Cansever, Süreya, and Uyar used word play and linguistic inventiveness to blur national, as well as sexual, boundaries. Once again, even if this implicit politics was not translated into sexual or queer liberation, or solidarity movements with marginalized populations, these glimmers of a more expansive sense of individual and social transformation provide fuel for the imagination of a different Turkey and a different world that was radical in the sixties and remains so today.

To Love Is to Organize: The Second New in the Light of Gezi

The recuperative reading of the Second New outlined here has been partially confirmed by contemporary events in Turkey. Though the deeply political nature of this poetry was invisible to large segments of the Left throughout the sixties, the notable appearance of the Second New during Turkey’s most significant social movement of recent years, the Gezi Park protests, makes its re-interpretation necessary.

In 2013 a movement coalesced that brought together masses of people who had long felt frustrated with the neoliberal and religiously conservative policies of the ruling Justice and Development Party [Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or AKP]. The movement began when the government began destroying the trees of Gezi Park in Istanbul. On the early morning of 28 May police attacked the handful of protestors occupying the park, spraying them with tear gas and setting their tents aflame. Enraged citizens poured into Gezi Park and adjacent Taksim Square in solidarity. Throughout the summer a violent cycle ensued with city residents occupying the

park, being evicted, beaten, tear-gassed, and attempting to re-take the space. More than three and a half million people participated in protests against both the demolition and the AKP's authoritarian turn. Protests broke out in all but one of Turkey's eighty-one provinces, making it one of the largest national protests since the long sixties. What made this new eruption unique was its wide tent: Gezi brought together Leftists, nationalists, fanatics of rival soccer teams, organizations like the Anti-Capitalist Muslims, LGBTQ and feminist activists, ethnic and religious minorities, environmentalists, old-school Communists, sex workers, and Kurdish groups.

Throughout that eventful summer of 2013 the arts in general and poetry in particular played an important role. Influential musical groups like the folk outfit Kardeş Türküler and the rock band Duman no sooner uploaded pro-Gezi songs on social media than protestors were singing them in the streets. Lines of poetry were used as graffiti and then shared online with the *#şiiirsokakta* [#poetryinthestreets] hashtag. When Gezi protesters drew on the work of committed left-wing poets like Nâzım Hikmet this was unsurprising. Contemporary protest movements often allude to Turkey's rich legacy of political radicalism by reciting lines from communist writers, singing old workers' marches, or holding aloft images of martyred sixties radicals. What could not have been foreseen was the ubiquity of Second New poetry.

For example, the cryptic opening lines of Uyar's "Deer Night" were found spray-painted near Taksim Square: "Whereas there was nothing out there to be afraid of / Everything was made of nylon that's all" [*Halbuki korkulacak hiçbir şey yoktu*

ortalıkta / Her şey naylondandı o kadar] (113). Similarly, lines from Cansever's poem "Mendilimde Kan Sesleri" [Sounds of Blood in My Handkerchief] (1974) were hand-written in marker on a poster and held aloft during the protests "Laughing / is only laughing if it is the people laughing" [*Gülmek / Bir halk güliüyorsa gülmektir*] (*Sonrası*, 616). When the Atatürk Cultural Center in Taksim Square was occupied by protestors, someone hung a banner with large spray-painted text that read "*Aşk örgütlenmektir*" [To love is to organize], a line from Ayhan's 1973 poem "*Mor Külhanı*" [Violet Rascal] (*Bir Şiirin* 124).²⁴ A popular design of the words accompanied by the drawing of a rainbow was screen-printed on tote bags and quickly became a popular accessory among protesters.

The dense and imagistic work of the Second New does not exactly come to mind as protest poetry. Protestors' use of this work expressed something novel about the spirit of Gezi (in Turkey the park's name has become a metonymy for the events and the movement it spawned). A kind of political affinity existed between Gezi and the Second New. Yet what is the political meaning of Uyar's "Deer Night," for example? Nylon gains new significance in the twenty-first century context. Such evocative yet obscure images are particularly open to metaphorical substitutions and allegorical interpretations. Protesters found courage in repeating Uyar's words: "everything was made of nylon, that's all." Whereas earlier generations of Leftists were fond of quoting Mao Zedong's description of US imperialism as a "paper

²⁴ In addition to being used in Taksim Square and on banners and graffiti, For the use of graffiti by Gezi see: Gruber's "Gezi Graffiti: Shout-Outs to Resistance and Rebellion in Contemporary Turkey."

tiger”—that is, something that looks terrifying but is actually weak—for Gezi protestors the Turkish government’s particular mishmash of crony capitalism, ethnonationalism, and neoliberal authoritarianism was just as ineffectual: the politics of the AKP was as artificial as nylon. For those who had silently resented the state-led gentrification and the conservative social policies spearheaded by the government over the previous twelve years, Gezi Park was a place where they could finally meet openly. The spontaneous coming together of all these people showed that “there was nothing to be afraid of.” Similarly, for whoever transformed the opening lines of “Deer Night” into graffiti, Gezi Park itself—with its leafy, paved walkways; its green trees; and its calm coolness surrounded by the bustling buildings around Taksim Square—had *become* the Deer Night of the title, a utopian space that, as the later sections of Uyar’s poem explains, exists in “in green and feral forests far away” and “will save us all from time” [*Yeşil ve yabani uzak ormanlarda / Hepimizi vakitten kurtaracak*] (113). Threatened with destruction by bulldozers and encroaching development, the park and the fleeting community it represented needed to be saved.

Using Second New poems as protest material was also part of Gezi’s more general iconoclastic attitude. For example, a chant shouted at the 2013 Pride Parade in Istanbul that overlapped with the Gezi protests also referenced Uyar. Playfully subverting the common militarist-nationalist slogan “*Mustafa Kemal’in Askerleriyiz!*” [We are Mustafa Kemal’s (i.e. Atatürk’s) soldiers!] one group in the crowd declared, “*Turgut Uyar’in Askerleriyiz!*” [We are Turgut Uyar’s Soldiers]. Substituting the well-loved Second New poet for the founder of modern Turkey, this absurdist slogan

poked fun at the Kemalist rhetoric used by some in the crowd. Despite the participation of CHP supporters, Gezi emerged from “the moral and political failures of secularist politics” (Bakiner 66). To shout, “We are Turgut Uyar’s Soldiers!” was to search for a way out of these shortcomings. A slogan of this kind refuses to trade the authoritarianism of the AKP with the nationalism that have shaped so many currents of Turkish political thought. The Gezi protesters’ clever Situationist-style détournement of the patriotic slogan challenged what has been seen as continuity in styles of rule from Turkey’s early modernizers to today’s Islamists. The (political) content might be different, but the (repressive) form remains the same.⁸⁶

Furthermore, the act of declaring allegiance to a figure like Turgut Uyar is paradigmatic of the way the Gezi invested apolitical texts, subjective experiences, and everyday occurrences of all kinds with political meaning—thus refusing narrower definitions of the political. Potentially, the spirit of Gezi was not the old authoritarianism (of the secularist, socialist, or religious variety) but pluralism, openness, playfulness—qualities which we have shown to be reflected in the forms and tropes of Second New poetry. What both the poetry and the movement sacrificed in theoretical precision they made up for with imaginative boldness. The promise of Gezi, the largest resurgence of the Turkish Left since the 1980 military coup, was just not to affirm playfulness against seriousness, inclusiveness against combativeness, culture against politics. Rather, the short-lived moment sought to combine an

⁸⁶ For one recent expression of this continuity thesis see Karaveli’s *Why Turkey is Authoritarian: Right-Wing Rule from Atatürk to Erdoğan*. He argues that rather than a clash between secularism and religiosity, the story of modern Turkey should be seen as intra-class conflict between early bourgeois radicals and more recent bourgeois conservatives.

attention to everyday life, ecology, pleasure, and beauty with the fierce opposition to injustice and the solidarity with the victims of capitalism that is the legacy of the sixties Left. That the movement has since been mercilessly crushed does not mean that the event lacked meaning, or that similar energies cannot flare up again in some unpredictable manifestation.

Returning to Second New poetry itself, we can say that the political meaning of this work awaited activation until Gezi tapped it as a source of inspiration. The Second New was available as a local precedent for an expansive cultural revolutionary politics. It sought, in the terms of Ayhan's poem, to organize love. Ayhan's phrase is striking in the way it combines "love" with the language of radical politics: 'örgütlü' [organized] in the sense of giving order or purpose to a dispersed yet potentially powerful force, e.g. 'örgütlü işgücü' [organized labor].²⁵ "To love is to organize" was a critique of the separations and sectarianism that have traditionally prevented this kind of recomposition of the body politic. More broadly, the trope of love used by the Second New and then by Gezi calls for integration or overcoming of binaries, such as those between individual and collective, romantic and social love, even aesthetics and politics.

The Second New contained all the lineaments of a cultural revolutionary politics—a focus on subjectivity, an emphasis on sexuality, and an attention to the experiences of the Third World and social 'others.' However, these same qualities

²⁵ The term *örgüt* [organization] has a subversive connotation. It is the word used to describe a terrorist or outlawed political organization, but since the attempted coup of July 2016 has most recently been used as a catch-all charge against opposition journalists or dissidents.

made it illegible to the dominant segments of the Left, who expected explicit realism and unequivocal political statements from literature. Including the Second New in the narrative of the Turkish sixties reveals a different side of the period, a subterranean current that lay hidden within certain prescient lines of poetry waiting to be brought out into the world.

Chapter Three

Poetry and Revolution in Berkeley and Beyond: Denise Levertov in the Sixties

A religious devotion to the truth, to the splendor of the authentic, involves the writer in a process rewarding in itself; but when that devotion brings us to undreamed abysses and we find ourselves sailing slowly over them and landing on the other side—that's ecstasy. (73)

- "Some Notes on Organic Form" (*Poetry*, 1965)

In "Prologue: An Interim" some of my heroes—that is, those who stand for integrity, honesty, love of life—are draft resisters who go to jail in testimony of their refusal to take part in carnage. In the same poem I invoked the self-immolators—Vietnamese and American—not as models but as flares to keep us moving in the dark. [. . .] In the later sections of the Notebook the sense of who the guardians of life, of integrity, are, is extended to include not only those who 'disdain to kill' but all who struggle, violently if need be, to pull down this obscene system before it destroys all life on earth." (vii)

- *To Stay Alive*, 1971

These statements were both made by English-born poet Denise Levertov (1923-1997). In 1965, sixteen years after settling in the United States and seven books of poetry into an esteemed career, Levertov outlined her poetics for the magazine *Poetry*. Her manifesto defined "organic form" as "the concept that there is a form in all things (and in our experience) which the poet can discover and reveal" (*New* 67). Uniting a latter-day modernist aesthetic sensibility she had inherited from Ezra Pound, H.D., and William Carlos Williams with a Romantic, quasi-mystical approach to art, she asserted that "form is never more than a *revelation* of content" (73). That is, devout attention to the inner truth of an object or experience will reveal the poetic form proper to it. The religious language here is not accidental; for Levertov, there is no poetic or aesthetic conundrum that cannot be solved by ecstatic attention and dogged consistency.

By 1971, Levertov's poetic mysticism had transformed into political militancy. In the preface to her book of poetry *To Stay Alive* she praised draft resisters, broke ranks with pacifists to declare that even violence was warranted in the name of revolution, and found inspiration in acts of self-immolation in protest against the war. Critics typically attribute the shift in the poet's concerns to the traumatic and mobilizing effect of the Vietnam War, the influence of the civil rights movement and the student-based New Left, and the general climate of politicization that swept up many writers of the era. Certainly, few cultural producers in the United States remained insulated from the turbulent events of the long sixties, when traces of contemporary political struggles could be found in the work of figures from the jazz singer Nina Simone and the actor Jane Fonda to the confessional poet Robert Lowell. In fact, some of the era's most famous writers became particularly involved in anti-war activism. Lowell joined Galway Kinnell, W.S. Merwin, Allen Ginsberg, Adrienne Rich, and others in the organization of American Writers Against the Vietnam War. "Against the War," the September 1972 issue of *Poetry*, the country's most prominent poetic magazine, included works from many of these writers, including Levertov. She was such a frequent face at protests and rallies that Norman Mailer includes her as a participant in the famous 1967 March on the Pentagon in *The Armies of the Night* (1968). Levertov became a member of the Boston-based organization RESIST, which organized anti-draft activities. In 1972 Levertov and poet Muriel Rukeyser visited the North Vietnamese capital of Hanoi to visit hospitals and artists' collectives.

This chapter explores the historical context of Levertov's increasingly partisan political poetry to explore dominant understandings of the relationship between poetry and politics in the sixties. Levertov's political poems were panned by critics, friends, and erstwhile admirers (even and especially by literary figures similarly opposed to the war), who found poems like "Life at War" (1966), with its detailed descriptions of the effects of aerial bombings ("the scheduled breaking open of breasts whose milk / runs out over the entrails of still-alive babies"), to be gratuitously violent. These reactions and the rancorous debates that ensued reveals the animating aesthetic assumptions of the period. The famous split with her friend and mentor, fellow poet Robert Duncan, was centered around what Duncan saw as a betrayal of Poetry.⁸⁷ He opposed explicit depictions of violence or direct statements of political commitments for violating the autonomy of art (he called it "Art"). He wrote to her in 1971 that he saw the writing of directly political poems as "those with work to do deserting their work. And our work [as poets] is surely to get the words right" (*Letters* 662). The craft of poetry needed to come before politics.

To Stay Alive—much of which was written during and about Levertov's brief stay at University of California, Berkeley in winter and spring of 1969—was a major source of controversy. Levertov become a kind of participant-observer in both the countercultural and politically radicalized youth scenes centered around Telegraph Avenue and the Berkeley campus (Hollenberg 247). When she arrived in the Bay

⁸⁷ See Gelpi and Bertholf's anthology *Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Politics, the Politics of Poetry*.

Area in February 1969, the student strike demanding ethnic studies at San Francisco State College and led by the Third World Liberation Front had spread to Berkeley. Refusing to cross the picket-line, Levertov taught her poetry classes at home (249). In April a group of students and residents began cleaning up a derelict, 2.8-acre plot owned by the university with the intention of transforming it into a public space. Levertov and her students joined in. They called the space People's Park. In May Governor Ronald Reagan called in the police and Highway Patrol against this "haven for communist sympathizers, protesters and sex deviants," as he saw them (Voyce 93). The short-lived communal experiment in the park ended in violence with one young participant dead and many wounded; however, it had also brought together two antagonistic factions of the sixties scene: politicians and hippies.⁸⁸

The long narrative poem "Staying Alive" centers Levertov's experiences working with young activists and the struggle over People's Park. As is the case with "Life at War," prominent literary critics have accused her of sacrificing the aesthetic quality of her earlier work for the sake of agitprop. In *Enlarging the Temple: New Directions in Poetry during the 1960's* (1980) to take only one example, Charles Altieri singled out Levertov's People's Park poems for engaging in an "elaborate misuse of aesthetic categories" (137). By transforming "the particular experience of co-operation at People's Park into a universal model for the new society to be created by the revolution" she confused "aesthetic and natural processes" or "art and life."

⁸⁸ See Chapter One for a summary of this discourse of a hippie-political split as well as a critique of it. See Bloom and Breines' *Takin' It to the Streets* for a dossier on People's Park (pp.562-573).

Such reactions to Levertov's sixties poems reveal the fault lines of what appears in hindsight as a vigorous debate about the relationship of aesthetics and politics as well as poetry's ability to intervene in the world and, in particular, spaces of collective action.

Many themes of the debates over art and politics discussed in the previous chapter on the Turkish poets known as the Second New reappear in the reception of Levertov's more explicitly political poems: the stakes of emergent poetic experiment in the fifties, the coming to fruition of late modernist aesthetic imperatives in the context of sixties revolutionary movements, and subsequent debates over issues like social engagement, commitment, and aesthetic self-sufficiency. However, whereas the Second New poets were upbraided by the Left in the sixties for upholding a notion of the autonomy of art that did not yet have a basis in the Turkish cultural scene, in the distinct cultural milieu of the U.S., where modernism was already canonized in the universities and the self-contained character of literary texts taken as common sense (Jameson 4; 314), Levertov was criticized for 'degrading' the aesthetic realm by including politics in her conception of poetics. The advent of a new era of political poetry in the U.S. in the sixties reveals that the issue of poetic autonomy was not completely settled there either.

Whereas the Second New poets, as we saw in the case of Gezi Park, have been fully rehabilitated by academics and the reading public today, the consensus on Levertov is that she does not readily speak to our moment. Though the publication of two recent biographies (Hollenberg and Greene) suggest that critical reconsideration

may be around the corner, Levertov is seen an important twentieth-century poet whose work suffered through accusations of overinvolvement with politics in the long sixties. When she is taken seriously, it is by splitting her work up into an early period of short epiphanic lyric poems (1946-1967), a middle activist period (1967-1975), and a late period of devotional and nature poems (1975-1997).

Part I of this chapter unpacks Levertov's theory of the relationship between poetry and politics. It moves on to discuss the uneven nature of Levertov's reception and argues that it is exactly her liminal position between literary movements and periods that makes her work deeply representative of the sixties structure of feeling, even though this is precisely what causes her to fall between the cracks in terms of scholarly attention. Part II reappraises Levertov's oeuvre by broadly tracing her career trajectory through 1971, arguing that Levertov did not trade mysticism for militancy simply under the pressure of external events. The aesthetic philosophy underlying Levertov's poetry and prose writings from the late 1940s to the mid-sixties—grounded in “an ecstasy of attention, a passion for the thing known,” as she described it in a 1970 lecture (*Poet* 98)—led her inexorably to express more explicit political commitments in her poems. If anything, the limitations of her work lie not in the variability of its subject matter and approach to politics, but in an almost excessive internal consistency of attention to observable human and non-human realities. When the Vietnam War produced increasingly uncompromising calls for revolutionary action to stop it, she gave the experience of despair and outrage the same level of attention as she did blossoming fruit. Searching for “a form in all things

(and in our experience) which the poet can discover and reveal,” as a result she found herself writing explicitly partisan poetry (*New* 67). Part III situates this political work, as it is crystallized in *To Stay Alive*, within the theory and practice of cultural revolution. It also addresses the rancorous debate between Levertov and Duncan (expressed in their private correspondence) over the relationship between and aesthetics and politics. Finally, the chapter ends with the argument that Levertov’s particular position on the relationship of poetry—and art in general—with politics was shared by many other cultural producers, intellectuals, and revolutionaries on the cross-racial, international Third World Left.

Part I

Poetry and Revolution

Many of Levertov’s poems explicitly theorize her understanding of the intimate relationship of poetry and politics—and also her anxiety over moments of potential disconnect. The collection *To Stay Alive* provides an account of “one person’s inner/outer experience in America during the ‘60’s and the beginning of the ‘70’s” (ix). Levertov composes this impersonal autobiography through a combination of philosophical reflections, descriptions of protests and the non-human natural world, travelogues, and the inclusion of documentary materials like fliers and handbills. The poem features, in pride of place, “some of [Levertov’s] heroes”: young activists like the one described in one of the numerous *entr’actes* or interludes of the book. This one is entitled “‘Let Us Sing unto the Lord a New Song’”:

There’s a pulse in Richard
that day and night says

revolution revolution revolution

and another
not always heard:

poetry poetry

rippling through his sleep,
a river pulse.

Heart's fire
breaks the chest almost,
flame-pulse,
revolution.

and if its beat
falter
life itself
shall cease.

Heart's river,
living water,
poetry:

and if that pulse
grow faint
fever shall parch the soul, breath
choke upon ashes.

But when their rhythms
mesh
then though the pain of living
never lets up

the singing begins. (73-4)

Richard is caught between twin commitments: revolution, represented as fire, and poetry, a life-giving river. Without poetry, the flames of revolution are all-consuming; without revolution, life as we know it cannot be sustained. This same tension is present in much of Levertov's poetry. As seen in this chapter's two epigraphs, there

exists, on the one side, “the splendor of the authentic,” and on the other, the struggle “to pull down this obscene system before it destroys all life on earth.” Real poetry, Levertov suggests—“the singing”—will only ring out when these twin impulses are united.

By insisting on the “meshing” of poetry and revolution, Levertov implies that there must be a subjective, aesthetic, and cultural component to a struggle that is otherwise aimed at opposing structural forces, ascetic in its requirements for discipline and sacrifice, and focused on the ‘hard’ ground of economic and political realities. In her 1970 lecture “Great Possessions” she illustrates what poetry can contribute to this sense of revolutionary possibility:

And for myself—not without anguish, not without fear, not without the daily effort of rousing myself out of the inertia and energy-sapping nostalgia that would cling to old ways [. . .]—I believe our survival demands revolution, both cultural and political. If we are to survive the disasters that threaten and survive our own struggle to make it new—a struggle I believe we have no choice but to commit ourselves to—we need tremendous transfusions of imaginative energy. (*Poet* 99)

Here Levertov gives new meaning to Pound’s modernist slogan, to “make it new”—calling for the development of new poetic forms but also for harnessing the energy of aesthetic invention to a political project and vice versa. Only “tremendous transfusions” of imagination can challenge the dead weight of history and the habitual patterns of compromise, acceptance, and apathy that prevent the new from being born. The persistence of these patterns is why the revolution, for Levertov, must not only be political but also cultural: revolution must burn off everything inside us that “cling[s] to old ways.” The significance of fire in the poet’s descriptions of self-

immolators praised in *To Stay Alive*, remains a crucial if grisly trope for the transformation of subjectivity. The revolution Levertov refers to is not only directed outwardly but inward against the force of habit and “nostalgia.”

Marianne DeKoven asserts in *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* that the New Left “believed that revolutionary social change must be preceded, or at least accompanied, by a change in consciousness” (20). Though Levertov is a less canonical sixties figure than the others DeKoven discusses (R.D. Laing, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and so on) I argue that in her anti-war poetry Levertov embodies ideals of “cultural revolution” or the joining of “poetry and revolution.” The same holds true with respect to her concern with everyday life, countercultural milieus, and modes of communal living; and, most importantly, in her investment in the radical transformation of the human subject as a key aspect of revolutionary strategy. This is why the events of People’s Park, which united the New Left and the counterculture, formed such a central node in her most explicitly committed work.

At other times, Levertov seems to collapse the distinction between poetry and revolution. As we have seen,⁸⁹ Herbert Marcuse commended the sixties Left for its spirit of “Cultural Revolution,” as he termed it, which made “art [. . .] a weapon in the class struggle by prompting changes in the prevailing consciousness” and sought to overcome divisions (125). Yet he also recognized that the “entirely premature immediate identification of private and social freedom” would be depoliticizing (49).

⁸⁹ See Chapter One.

Art and consciousness have a role to play in the class struggle, but they cannot win it alone. When it comes to describing what role actual poems have in the struggle, Levertov appears to confirm Marcuse's worried diagnosis. Immediately after describing the "tremendous transfusions of imaginative energy" needed to break patterns of sloth and inertia, she adds:

If it is indeed revolution we are moving toward, we need life, and abundantly—we need poems of the spirit, to inform us of the essential, to help us live the revolution. And if instead it be the Last Days—then we need to taste the dearest, freshest drops before we die—why both with anything less than that, the essential? (99)

Rather than discussing the necessity of considering art and consciousness within politics, here she suggests that poems themselves can manifest the revolution through the individual subjectivity of each person. Poems make it possible to "live" the revolution—or else, if no revolution is coming, at least we get some consolation before perishing. Poetry and revolution do not maintain their productive tension but are collapsed into each other, the first standing in for the second. Yet the fact that Levertov continued to be an activist through the sixties and beyond shows that in her own practice she approached poetry as part of the larger work of revolution, not as a replacement for it. She is thus free of that familiar sleight of hand of avant-garde thinking that argues that radical poetic formal strategies, which subvert literary conventions or normative grammar, is automatically also politically radical.⁹⁰ Often

⁹⁰ See Mutlu Konuk Blasing's *Politics and Form in Postmodern Poetry* for an eloquent critique of the trope (active from modernism to Language writing and beyond) conflating aesthetic and political radicalism. In opposition to ahistorical readings of form she argues that "open forms are not automatically 'free' and closed forms are not automatically 'reactionary'" (17).

for Levertov, there is still a world outside of the poem that must be grappled with. Elsewhere, poems become the world.

Though there is something inextricably *sixties* about both Levertov's fiery apocalypticism and what might be deemed her overestimation of the powers of the imagination, Levertov's attempt to mediate the contradiction between art and political commitment, mysticism and militancy were more innovative and complex, albeit self-contradictory, than has been recognized by existing scholarly accounts of her work. Indeed, from the very beginning Levertov's poetry is animated by a series of oppositions: form and content, internal and external reality, affirmation and negation, poetry and revolution, among others. At its most insightful, her poetry stages the impossibility of reconciling these elements under current conditions. She seems to agree with Marcuse that "art can never eliminate the tension between art and reality. Elimination of this tension would be the impossible final unity of subject and object: the materialistic version of absolute idealism" (108). Elsewhere, however, she preemptively attempts to make them "mesh" by authorial fiat. But even such potential 'failures' of Levertov's poetry are productive, insofar as they reveal dominant understandings of where to draw the boundary between aesthetics and politics in the sixties.

Between Movements, Between Periods

Levertov's works from the sixties stirred up intense controversy. Later books like *Life in the Forest* (1978), however, written after the height of anti-Vietnam War activism and the New Left had passed, continued to reflect Levertov's ongoing

activism and yet were more widely celebrated. There were still poems of rage and love, which pushed the reader to identify imaginatively with seemingly distant suffering. As Levertov's activism developed into the late 1970s and 1980s, new causes appear: environmental and anti-nuclear struggles, as well as events in Chile, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. However, her politics began to be filtered through her newly found Catholic faith and her interest in observing and communing with the natural world. These ecological and especially theological themes alienated some readers while gaining her new ones. She continued teaching while publishing new volumes every two to four years. Until her death in 1997 she received numerous prestigious prizes and awards, from the Shelley Memorial Award and the Robert Frost Medal to Lenore Marshall Prize and the Lannan Award.

Given this centrality, why then does Levertov seem so irrelevant to contemporary discussions of poetry? Beyond just her political commitments, her posthumous marginalization is also a product of her particular poetic project. Levertov's aesthetic sensibilities remained grounded in her earlier influences, making her indifferent or even hostile to dominant post-1960s currents of poetic experimentalism like Language Writing.⁹¹ In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s critical attention and poetic efforts in the U.S. moved onto a variety of new concerns, many of them linguistic or structural and often explicitly anti-lyric and anti-Romantic.⁹² In

⁹¹ See Jarman "Lives of a Poet: Denise Levertov" in the *Hudson Review* for a similar description of Levertov's marginalization.

⁹² Marjorie Perloff, for example, has focused her critical career on challenging the "authenticity model" and the "true voice of feeling" in poetry (Voyce 5).

contrast to these, Levertov's poetry was grounded firmly in the lyric conventions of a mid-century past.

Levertov also had an ambiguous relationship to second wave feminism and to movement poetry.⁹³ Though she often spoke from a first-person voice that did not shy away from thematizing her life as a woman, Levertov thought art should "transcend gender" (*Conversations* 117). Her understanding of poetry separated her from figures like Marge Piercy or Adrienne Rich. She disliked the term "women's poetry" and said in 1980 that she "formed a habit, of late, of asking, when I hear this term, what the speaker thinks of Women's Mathematics or Women's Geology" (267). And just as Levertov did not find sisterhood or identity-based categories as relevant to her own art, she was also skeptical of the confessional poetry of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. She thought the salutary sixties slogan "Let it all hang out" had devolved into an "aesthetic of exhibitionism" (*New* 177-8). For this reason, she had doubts about the work of poets like Allen Ginsberg or Amiri Baraka, finding it sloppy and undisciplined at the level of craft, even if she found much to agree with at the level of content.

Levertov's liminal position between poetic currents actually makes her a highly representative figure of the sixties. In DeKoven's analysis, what defined the sixties structure of feeling was a combination of modern and postmodern elements.

⁹³ On poetry organically linked to social movements see Alfred Arteaga's *Chicano Poetics: Heterotexts and Hybridities* and James Smethurst's *The Black Arts Movement*. Juliana Spahr argues that the full significance of movement poetry has yet to be registered: "If scholars considered movement literature as a whole, rather than as a series of racially segregated subcategories such as Black Arts and Nuyorican and so on, it would be the dominant U.S. literary tradition in the last half of the twentieth century" (125).

That is, texts from the period often unite the “sincerity, originality, authenticity, aura, depth, reality, and directionality of modernity” with the “pervasive irony, a pervasive culture of the commodity, the image, and the simulacrum” of the postmodern (19). It is exactly this in-betweenness that causes certain cultural objects from this period to age so poorly:

These are [. . .] texts that, constituted by the dominant modern/emergent postmodern structure characteristic of the sixties, have been eclipsed and superseded by the shift in structure of feeling they reveal. It is the dominance of their modern paradigms, in such close proximity to incipient postmodern paradigms, that make them seem dated: they would have to be either more postmodern or more exclusively modern, and therefore of a different time, to remain current. Therefore, their near-disappearance off the intellectual-cultural map is part of what makes them interesting to me.

According to DeKoven’s paradigm, the postmodernism of a Diane di Prima (see Chapter 4), Frank O’Hara, or John Ashbery can still provide a certain kind of political and poetic pleasure. In contrast, the work of Levertov is an example of a poet caught within a period of historical transition in contemporary U.S. poetry.

To the mix of modernism (the emphasis on formal complexity and poetry as a path to authentic perception) and postmodernism (collage, popular culture, and anti-art tendencies), Levertov’s poetry combines another element: Romanticism. With one foot, by her own admission, in the nineteenth century and her English past, aspects of her poetry were already superannuated in the sixties. A childhood full of Keats and Rilke gave her a lifetime belief in poetry as magic and the poet as a magician. In her 1959 statement of poetics for the anthology *The New American Poetry* she wrote: “I believe poets are instruments on which the power of poetry plays” (*Poet* 3). And in 1968 she insisted that “[t]he poet—when he is writing—is a priest; the poem is a

temple; epiphanies and communion take place within it” (47). In this way, Levertov is both a modernist and a neo-Romantic writing at the advent of postmodernism.

Because the sixties counterculture was in many respects itself built on Romantic notions of truth of beauty and the innocence of childhood, her work sometimes reads like a time-capsule.

Despite being strongly located in her period, Levertov has notably not featured in several important studies of U.S. poetry in the twentieth century that use the sixties as a central hinge. Exploring the reasons for her absence will help us clarify how her poetry fits into this history. Recent books by Christopher Nealon and Jasper Bernes, which provide a more materialist description of the shift from modernism to postmodernism that DeKoven describes, not only do not include Levertov, but—I want to argue—*could not* incorporate her into their arguments. In *The Matter of Capital*, Nealon sets out the compelling thesis that “the workings of capital are a central subject matter of twentieth-century American poetry in English” and he engages in deft readings of Pound, W.H. Auden, John Ashbery, Jack Spicer and others to prove it (1). Bernes, in *The Work of Art in the Age of Deindustrialization*, includes a similar archive of poets (Frank O’Hara, Ashbery, and Bernadette Mayer in the first half of the book) to trace changing regimes of labor and show “how the work of art and work in general share a common destiny” in the post-war U.S. (1). Mostly concerned with mapping out the twists and turns of capitalism in the twentieth century, these two scholars select poets that best capture the emergent tendencies of what is often called neoliberalism.

Unlike the formally difficult, experimental, and somewhat hermetic poetry of Ashbery or Mayer—which can be incredibly suggestive in capturing the larger cultural-political-economic shifts of US postwar “long downturn” (Brenner) — Levertov’s work is characterized by explicitness and candor, wearing its commitments more clearly on its sleeve. Though deeply political, her poetry is attuned more to epiphanic moments of closeness to nature than transformations of post-Fordist labor regimes. It is more anarchist than explicitly anti-capitalist. Where her poetry does deal with economic realities, it is the poetic equivalent of nineteenth-century Luddites resisting industrialization by breaking machines. While emergent artists and poets were exploring the disposability of mass culture or else engaging with the turn to immaterial or affective labor by centering process and performance in their art, Levertov was committed to a notion of poetry as “craft.” Where Andy Warhol had the simulacrum of “Diamond Dust Shoes” (Jameson 8-10), Levertov still had her “clodhoppers” and “broken sandals” (*Collected* 766; 275). Instead of writing poetry distractedly on break from a service job, like O’Hara in *Lunch Poems*, Levertov described poetry as a vocation. Like William Blake in the early days of the industrial revolution decrying the “dark Satanic Mills” and painting Enlightenment reason as a monster with gaping maws, Levertov was a lone voice in the wilderness attempting to preserve older forms of artisanship, attention, and horizontal relationships in the face of the ravages of an even more unbridled capitalism.

Levertov’s writings can be read as part of the final flowering of what Raymond Williams calls a “dominant” tendency of the sixties, rather than an

“emergent” one of the next dispensation (121-7). While critics read postmodern poets to show early registering of the shockwaves of post-1973 capitalist crisis and its management through the flexibilization and feminization of labor, the neo-Romantic vatic sincerity of sixties poets like Levertov has gone extinct. Yet there is perhaps no better way to understand the sixties than to tarry with the occasional discomfort its artifacts elicit. This is not irrelevant to an understanding of the present, but rather helps us historicize why certain energies feel unavailable today.

Most strange perhaps about the period, from the vantage point of an era in which obituaries to poetry seem to appear several times each year, is what scholar Ben Hickman calls the incredible “faith in poetry as public expression” (93). This was a period when poets were interviewed on prime-time TV or invited to protests and rallies, poetry was sold in magazines and books, and activists and revolutionaries of various stripes devoted energy to debating the genre. This historical situation created an overblown rhetoric around poetry’s political power (and the power of literature in general) that continues to reverberate today. As Juliana Spahr contends:

[A] lot of things get said about literature that no sane person would ever say about a number of other art forms that have mainly an aging and dwindling audience and that are dependent entirely on support from the state and the rich such as opera or chamber music or ballet. (186)

Audiences make revolutionary claims about poetry that are not borne out the actual ability of the medium to effect political change. Yet this does not stop the hangover of “optimistic narratives about the resistance of literature, about its ability to decolonize, about its revolutionary potential” (5) while depending upon foundations and institutions whose stated orientation to cultural politics have historically been

opposed to radical social transformation.⁹⁴ This overestimation of literature's political effects shows that, in the wider culture of North America, the relationship of poetry to politics has been the cause of some confusion. This chapter returns to a period where the idea that poetry was revolutionary was not a fringe idea but the object of fierce debate.

Neither is the matter fully settled today. In a joint interview Nealon, Spahr, and Joshua Clover—three literary scholars and poets calling for a return to naming explicit political commitments in contemporary poetry—summarize post-Romantic approaches that shape the work of many contemporary politically engaged poets. Clover insists that making poetry should not be confused with making revolution: “for a long time my feeling has been: first organize a militant political action and then write about flowers or baseball or the lake in summer, write New Sentences or flarf or poesie concrete, it’s really fine.” Despite this necessary split between political work and literature (experimental or otherwise), he finds that “people really want to insist that the poetry is their militant political action. I’m not persuaded.” This conflation transforms the “once a necessary and provocative claim [. . .] that the personal is the political” into a meaningless and defanged gesture. No poem is automatically revolutionary. One can both write poems and foment revolution, but to conflate them is dangerous obfuscation. Yet in the same breath, Clover admits that the issue is not so easily solved:

⁹⁴ See Ferguson’s *Top Down: The Ford Foundation, Black Power, and the Reinvention of Racial Liberalism* for an account of how philanthropic organizations have supported the arts with the intention of pushing radical and separatist sixties movements into the reformist and liberal establishment.

Of course, the very way I've formulated it is riddled with the foundational problem: it's exactly because I can identify "movement" and "poetry" as discrete pursuits that I confront their inability to reach out to each other. And so when I say they fail to reach out to each other, I am missing the point, which is that they became alienated in the first place. Isn't that a way to restate the purpose of politics? To demand that there be no separation? Isn't the goal not to insist that poetry and movements find each other in the terrible dark, or try to engineer that, but to attack the dynamic which has isolated them — a dynamic which seems to be more advanced and even decisive here in the US than elsewhere?

In other words, one goal of revolution—impossible to realize, perhaps, but essential—is the unity of revolution and poetry, or art more generally. This is another way of stating the "dialectic of liberation" to which Marcuse refers. The alienation of poetry and revolution cannot be solved in a situation of general alienation, yet neither can the issue of the necessary unity be delayed indefinitely. Levertov's poetry struggles with this tension—a tension that arguably characterizes sixties-era political engaged poetry as a whole.

Part II

Levertov's Aesthetic-Political Consistency

Levertov's first published poem, "Listening to Distant Guns" (1940), was about war, describing the sounds of gunfire across the English Channel from her home in Essex. During WWII she worked as a nurse in London and aligned herself with a group of poets known as the New Romantics. Her poetry of the period partook in what Levertov later called "the lush, juicy emotionalism of the forties" (New and Selected, 196). Her first book of poetry, *The Double Image*, came out in 1946. Though she would soon abandon this melancholy aesthetic, faith in the "possibility of social renewal through the renewal of the individual," as Levertov's biographer

Donna Hollenberg describes the New Romantics, continued to be an important theme for her (65). Keats, D.H. Lawrence, Chekhov, and especially Rilke—whom she was also reading at this time—remained crucial touchstones.

After the war, Levertov met and married an American G.I. and writer named Mitchell Goodman. By 1948 she was living in Florence, “having married American literature, it seemed, as well as an American husband” (*Selected* 194). She began reading Sandburg, Frost, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens. She also encountered Robert Duncan’s *Heavenly City, Earthly City* in a local library. All these U.S. poets became for her “a kind of transatlantic stepping stone.” She felt that Duncan in particular had something of that “deeper, older tradition, the tradition of magic and prophecy and song, rather than of ironic statement,” which she saw as characterizing too much post-war poetry (196). This “old, incantatory tradition” linked the New Romantics and Duncan for her and allowed her to preserve something of the old world even as she became a U.S. poet.

In 1948 Levertov and Goodman moved to New York, and she became a U.S. citizen eight years later, in 1956. In the years following, *Here and Now* (1957) and *Overland to the Islands* (1958) were both published by City Lights, re-launching Levertov’s poetic career on this side of the Atlantic, specifically, as an inheritor of the modernist poetics of Ezra Pound, H.D., and—most importantly—Williams. Building off the latter poet’s focus on everyday language and propensity for discovering poetry in the quotidian aspects of everyday existence, Levertov started to incorporate a new “directness and hardness” in her poetry (Hollenberg 120). In 1960, she published

With Eyes at the Back of Our Heads, this time with New Directions. Switching to James Laughlin's publishing house further aligned her other U.S. torchbearers of modernism like Williams, as well as the European and Latin American avant-garde writers like Borges that New Directions published in translation.

Levertov's career reached a turning point in 1960, when her work was included in the watershed anthology *The New American Poetry 1945–1960* published by Grove Press. Within the four schools of non-academic, avant-garde poetry that editor Donald Allen identified—San Francisco (Jack Spicer, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and others), the Beats (Kerouac, Ginsberg, et al.), the New York poets (Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery), Black Mountain (Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan), and a fifth group with “no geographical definition” that included LeoRoi Jones, the only non-white poet in the anthology—Levertov was included, despite having only a tenuous connection, with the Black Mountain poets (xii). True, Levertov had been published in the *Black Mountain Review*, a magazine connected to Black Mountain College where poet Charles Olson was rector. Olson's “Projective Verse” manifesto (*Black Mountain Review*, 1950) had influenced a new generation of U.S. experimental poets with its championing of “open” instead of “closed” verse forms (the latter comprising predetermined structures such as sonnets and villanelles) and description of the poem as a field: “the large area of the whole poem, into the FIELD, if you like, where all the syllables and all the lines must be managed in their relations to each other” (Olson). Not only the verbal elements that made up the poem but also the real objects and social phenomena that enter into it form mutually

determining relationships to each other in the field of the poem. Levertov knew Olson's work, but she was both personally and aesthetically closer to both Creeley, who edited the *Review*, and Duncan, who taught briefly at Black Mountain. However, as she was still at pains to explain even as late as the early 1990s that "I myself was never at Black Mountain in my life" (*New* 139). Further, she realized later that she had unwittingly become "the token woman in the Black Mountain School" (142). And though she was invested in the search for more open, experimental forms for poetry, she took the useful principles of "Projective Verse" and adapted them. Where Olson had bombastically asserted that "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT," in her neo-Romantic interpretation form was a "revelation" of content. "I cannot simply enter a ready-made structure," she explained later, "I have to find components and construct my own" (*New* 245). She articulated her own structure in 1965's "Some Notes on Organic Form." In the early sixties she was already enacting this aesthetic.

The Jacob's Ladder (1961) is her first book of poetry with strong signs of the poetic voice that would define her career. Already in the second poem "A Common Ground" she declared what kind of language she was after:

Not 'common speech'
a dead level
but the uncommon speech of paradise,
tongue in which oracles
speak to beggars and pilgrims (*Collected* 135)

Though mystical, this kind of speech would be "not illusion," not an escape from the quotidian, but an intrepid dive deeper into everyday experience: "Poems stirred / into

paper coffee-cups, eaten / with petals on rye.” For Levertov, poetic language should both be immersed in the everyday and, from there, open the door to the luminous beyond. Only in this way can poetry hit the mark of becoming “a language / excelling itself to be itself.” It is by lingering with the physicality of things, Levertov suggests, and involving the entirety of our bodies, that poetic language can transfigure experience.

The Jacob’s Ladder was also Levertov’s first book to directly address contemporary political events. “During the Eichmann Trial” is a three-part poem based on the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem.⁹⁵ Levertov followed the trial through newspaper and radio reports. The poem begins with an epigraph from Robert Duncan: “*When we look up / each from his being,*” and brings it to bear on the figure of Eichmann:

He had not looked,
pitiful man whom none

pity, whom all
must pity if they look

into their own face[.] (*Collected* 173)

The poem centers around the theme of vision. The followers of the trial looking at Eichmann’s face behind bullet-proof glass at the witness stand literally see themselves reflected in his face. Eichmann is also unable to see his own face—let

⁹⁵ The first section, “When We Look Up,” was originally published in the left-wing magazine *The Catholic Worker* (Hollenberg 194).

alone those of his victims. To truly look up into another's face means, for Levertov, to be forced to confront a question:

Here is a mystery,

**a person, an
other, an I?**

Count them.
Who are five million? (174)

To register the weight of genocide one must be able to see each face as another person—even as another potential self. For Levertov, the mindless obedience of Eichmann during the Holocaust, what Hannah Arendt would two years later term the “banality of evil,” was essentially a failure of imagination to see Jews as other human beings. And even this man “whom none / pity” should be *seen*, so that those who look upon him can see their own complicity in his face:

we may view
ourselves, an apparition

telling us something he
does not know: we are members

of one another. (176)

Evil, in the poem, is represented as a basic failure of empathy, but the poem insists that imagination is a condition of possibility for this empathy—a practice that Levertov's poem suggests would render a citizenry less susceptible to state-engineered dehumanization. The Duncan poem Levertov used as an epigraph clarifies this possibility for mutuality through sight: “Come, eyes, see more than you see! / For

the world within and the outer world / rejoice as one” (173). Self and other are interconnected and mutually determined.

Already with her first explicitly political poem, Levertov faced backlash from critics and fellow poets. George Oppen found Levertov’s approach in this poem overly simplistic, failing to take evil seriously enough: “Mystic vision without sufficient doubt or terror, without a firm grasp of unequivocal evil, easily becomes sentimental” (quoted in Hollenberg 196). Levertov’s approach of seeing evil as fundamentally “privative,” Levertov’s biographer Hollenberg remarks, as stemming from a lack of imagination rather than any active force in itself, was consistent with her poetics. Just as she saw the material and the transcendental, everyday reality and luminous details, as interlinked, she thought evil and violence emerged from a blockage of the interchange between these two levels. If “mister death [. . .] signs papers / then eats,” it is because other people are unreal to him; if “[he] had not looked,” then it is up to the rest of us to *see* (*Collected* 176). “During the Eichmann Trial” began stating explicitly what had been implicitly present in Levertov’s work all along: an idea of poetry as a particular orientation to the world. Within a few years this emphasis on consciousness would be transformed into *To Stay Alive*’s central conceptual pair: poetry and revolution.

Levertov published *O Taste and See* in 1964 with the support of a Guggenheim Fellowship, a sign of the acclaim the poet was beginning to enjoy. The collection has few explicitly political moments, but Levertov’s modernist belief in poetry as a mode of perceiving history and life is strongly present throughout. The

volume's title poem plays with religious themes and exhibits some of the same modes of thinking that would characterize her most political period:

The world is
not with us enough
O taste and see

the subway Bible poster said,
meaning **The Lord**, meaning
if anything all that lives
to the imagination's tongue,

grief, mercy, language,
tangerine, weather, to
breathe them, bite,
savor, chew, swallow, transform

into our flesh our
deaths, crossing the street, plum, quince,
living in the orchard and being

hungry, and plucking
the fruit.

The poem's opening line challenges Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much with Us," in which the Romantic poet regrets how the workaday world dominates humanity's time and attention. We focus on buying and selling, profit and loss. The result? "Little we see in Nature that is ours." Levertov takes Wordsworth's sentiment and switches the terms. For Levertov, if "the world" is defined as nature and not factories, banks, and shops, then the problem is that "[t]he world is / not with us enough." This is how she reinterprets the exhortation from Psalm 34:8 ("O taste and see that the Lord is good") spotted in the subway. If the "world" is nature, then "The Lord" is whatever the human imagination can encompass. She goes on to a list a series of concrete and abstract nouns that can be literally or figuratively ingested to

become part of the self. The imaginative relationship to the world becomes a kind of sacrament. Eating a tangerine or plum, even walking down the street or feeling grief becomes, for Levertov, like the consuming of Christ's body. Experience of any kind can be transubstantiated. In this way, Levertov manages to re-Christianize the language of Wordsworth's desire to become "[a] Pagan suckled in a creed outworn," while articulating a form of pantheism that specifically refuses guilt or sin: "being / hungry, and plucking / the fruit." Levertov's version of Psalm 34 asserts that knowledge, like the imagination, is good.

In *The Sorrow Dance* (1967), Levertov takes seriously the proposition that the imagination can also encompass grief. The heart of the book is the "Olga Poems" written *in memoriam* for her elder sister Olga, who died in 1964 at the age of forty-nine. Olga was a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain who was a committed antifascist in Germany and had even gone to support the loyalists in the Spanish Civil War. Levertov looked up to her sister but was too young to join the Young Communist League in the 1930s; instead, she spent some her childhood selling copies of *The Daily Worker* door to door (Hollenberg 38). Olga later was stigmatized by her community for her unconventional lifestyle and for giving birth to four children outside of marriage. When she died of cancer, she was estranged from her family. Her death came as a shock to Levertov. In the "Olga Poems," Levertov goes back through memories of their shared childhood. The figures of Olga and little sister Denise become another one of Levertov's conceptual pairs. Olga wanted

to shout the world to its senses,
did you?—to browbeat

(*Conversations* 234). “Life at War,” first published in *Poetry* in 1966, shows how she reached this point. 1966 was a year of intense escalation for the war in Vietnam: U.S. troops inside the country exceeded 200,000, President Johnson ordered bombing in North Vietnam for the first time, and anti-war opposition in the U.S. gained momentum. Though Levertov and her husband Goodman were involved in anti-nuclear campaigning in the early sixties, they only became involved in anti-war activism in 1964. That year they both signed their names onto a full-page anti-war advertisement in the *New York Times* and helped organize the Writers and Artists Protest Against the Vietnam War campaign (Greene 84-5). Because “Life at War” is often isolated from its larger context both of *The Sorrow Dance* itself and Levertov’s oeuvre, here I want to approach the 1966 poem in a way that brings out what these “moral implications” had been for her all along.

Here is “Life at War” in its entirety:

The disasters numb within us
caught in the chest, rolling
in the brain like pebbles. The feeling
resembles lumps of raw dough

weighing down a child’s stomach on baking day.
Or Rilke said it, ‘My heart . . .
Could I say of it, it overflows
with bitterness . . . but no, as though

its contents were simply balled into
formless lumps, thus
so I carry it about.’
The same war

continues.

We have breathed the grits of it in, all our lives,
our lungs are pocked with it,

the mucous membrane of our dreams
coated with it, the imagination
filmed over with the gray filth of it:

the knowledge that humankind,

delicate Man, whose flesh
responds to a caress, whose eyes
are flowers that perceive the stars,

whose music excels the music of birds,
whose laughter matches the laughter of dogs,
whose understanding manifests designs
fairer than the spider's most intricate web,

still turns without surprise, with mere regret
to the scheduled breaking open of breasts whose milk
runs out over the entrails of still-alive babies,
transformation of witnessing eyes to pulp-fragments,
implosion of skinned penises into carcass-gulleys.

We are the humans, men who can make;
whose language imagines mercy,
lovingkindness; we have believed one another
mirrored forms of a God we felt as good—

who do these acts, who convince ourselves
it is necessary; these acts are done
to our own flesh; burned human flesh
is smelling in Viet Nam as I write.

Yes, this is the knowledge that jostles for space
in our bodies along with all we
go on knowing of joy, of love;

our nerve filaments twitch in its presence
day and night,
nothing we say has not the husky phlegm of it in the saying,
nothing we do has the quickness, the sureness,
the deep intelligence living at peace would have. (*Collected* 340-341)

The adjectives and verbs in the first half of the poem express a kind of blockage:

“numb,” “caught,” “rolling,” “weighed down,” “packed,” “coated,” “filmed over.” It

as if the process of imaginative incorporation described in “O Taste and See” had been arrested. Here it is the impossibility of breathing in an extremity of grief and violence with which Levertov lingers. After describing what human imagination should be capable of—conscious creation through art, laughter, and language—the shocking middle section of the poem, using data from Medical Committee for Human Rights reports about the human costs of the war, brings the same attention to flayed and exploded bodies as she had to the tangerines and plums of “O Taste and See.” They enter the field of the poem. Yet atrocity cannot be intellectually or bodily incorporated. It “jostles for space” with other forms of knowledge. Levertov suggests that one must let it in anyway, though it covers vision with its “husky phlegm” and tears her poetic method off its track.

Writing in 1975, Levertov explained the difficult and even graphic content present in “Life at War” and other poems of the late 1960s and early 1970s: “Because I believe that ‘we are members one of another’ I considered myself morally obliged to attempt to contemplate, however much it hurt to do so, just what that violence can be” (*New* 222). Levertov had made the same allusion to 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 in “During the Eichmann Trial” when she discussed the knowledge Eichmann lacked. In 1966 this biblical dictum meant for Levertov that whatever is done in Vietnam is “done / to our own flesh.” The same revolutionary morality has long been present in the socialist tradition with which Levertov associates her sister Olga. Both would have been aware of Eugene V. Debs’ famous statement during his 1918 conviction: “while there is a lower class, I am in it, and while there is a criminal element I am of

it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free.” Levertov makes the religious precedent more explicit in arguing that struggling against the war is also a form of self-defense.

Yet for many of Levertov’s contemporaries, the shocking images of the poem had the opposite effect—the vicarious violence separates the poet (and, by extension, the reader) from the brutality of the war, or else teaches them to relate to it through a dangerous over-identification. For example, in a 1974 interview published in the volume *Vietnam Vortex: A Study of Poets and Poetry Against the War*, Robert Duncan said:

[Levertov]’ll be writing about the war and suddenly—in one of the earlier poems that’s most shocking—you get a flayed penis, and . . . when she reads it you get an effect and tone of disgusted sensuality [. . .]. Suddenly you see a charged, bloody, sexual image that’s haunting the whole thing, and the war then acts as a magnet, and the poem is not a protest though she thinks she’s protesting. (*Letters* 749)

Duncan’s propensity for psychoanalyzing Levertov was one reason for the eventual break in their friendship. For him, the violent images in her poetry do not stem from Levertov’s tarrying with the difficult knowledge of war and attempting to absorb it, but rather from a repressed fascination with carnage. Similarly, Robert J. Bertholf asserts that images like “the scheduled breaking open of breasts” are “so grotesque [and] so inappropriate in attribution, that we are aware the sado-masochistic images that appear to illustrate not what soldiers do in war but what war excites in the poet’s mind.” In his 1975 essay “Levertov’s Political Poetry,” Cary Nelson focused on the same section of the poem: “Brutal and accurate as these lines may be, they are essentially clichés of violent war [. . .] Our own physical security makes the language

flat and unconvincing. We have no historical ground for sympathetic identification” (163). Nelson—whose academic career is focused on recuperating explicitly political poetry from the 1930s from the charge of ‘propaganda’—also argues that the problem with Levertov’s work is that “a perfectly commendable moral commitment to practical action outside poetry enters the poetry itself” (162).

Psychologizing interpretations of literature are no longer in currency. It is impossible to say what Levertov’s own psychic investment in these images were. What these criticisms reveal is a dominant conception that images of war have no place in poetry—they are either unaesthetic or else can only be motivated by a perverse pleasure. If we take Levertov’s poetry itself as the measure of criticism, what makes these anti-war passages undoubtedly jarring is their utilization of the same method of incorporative, imaginative empathy that Levertov also uses to describe a flower or a lover. If this method is ineffective, the causes should be explained formally and structurally. While Nelson argued that “[t]hese poems are made of personal defeat” (163), using Levertov’s own terms it is clear that the war itself is the defeat. The poetic vision is not autonomous but subject to history—the poem cannot be imagined as victorious over such circumstances. If there is war, Levertov asserts in the poem, then “nothing we say has not the husky phlegm of it in the saying.”

“Life at War” intentionally stages poetry’s necessary impossibility in times of war. As Hickman writes, formally, “Life at War” “enact[s] the crisis of Vietnam as the crisis of the poem itself” (102). Nevertheless, he finds the poem “irritating,” its

“tone... triumphant” and full of “maudlin self-satisfaction.” For Hickman, Levertov’s anti-war poetry “testifies to...the separation of political and poetry, compartmentalized into two ‘extremes of diction” (104). I will soon test this claim against the poetry of *To Stay Alive*, Hickman’s immediate occasion for this remark. However, if there is a formal flaw in “Life at War,” it is that Levertov categorically *refuses* to compartmentalize her approach to the subject she is exploring. Everything is subject to the same imaginative in-dwelling—whether dreams, fruit, sorrow, or munitions. The poetry’s similar rhetorical approach to these wildly disparate subjects heightens a reader’s sensation of the irreconcilability of different orders of experience beyond the page. It is only radical transformation that can overcome the separations that give rise to such casual and impersonal violence. Rather than creating an “anti-political poem” of “disengagement” (105), poetic vision leads the poem—just as it led Levertov herself—off the page and into the world so that poetry can be seen as embedded within a wider field of social action.

Part III

Prefiguring the Commune in People’s Park

In the previous section I traced some of the central themes that reappear throughout Levertov’s early oeuvre to argue that her explicitly political poems, far from being anomalous, emerge almost inevitably out of the understanding of aesthetics and ethics she had developed through unflinching attention to the everyday which she brings to bear on images of atrocity. *To Stay Alive* (1971), Levertov’s most politically militant work, reflects the details of Levertov’s direct involvement in an

emergent Bay Area political movement. Or, in the case of Berkeley in spring of 1969, off campus and into the park. Levertov brought her students to join the clean-up of People's Park in those early hopeful days. Then in May police fenced off the area. After massive protests, the National Guard was called in. One person was killed, another blinded, and many injured in the violence.

On May 16th, the day after the police closed off the park, Levertov wrote an open letter to other faculty members, urging them to have solidarity with the students and young people of People's Park in the name of acting in accordance with their values as educators:

A university is supposed to teach, among other things, the Humanities. Are you, brothers and sisters who teach, going to let this inhumane thing happen, in your name—our name—the name of the University of which we, the Faculty, are part—without a squeak? Do we believe in humane values, in constructive, creative life, or don't we? OR does the average professor—as many of the kids believe, or at least suspect—consider Property as scared, and people and their needs and aspirations as dispensable? (*Takin' 571*)

Levertov, 46 years old at the time, was throwing in her lot with the revolutionary youth against what she suspected was an aloof, privileged, and compromised faculty body. For her there was a straight line leading from her life as a poet to the struggle in the park.

To Stay Alive was Levertov's most personal work to date. She justified this turn in her preface to the book, arguing that it is:

a document of some historical value, a record of one person's inner/outer experience in America during the '60's and the beginning of the '70's, an experience which is shared by so many and transcends the particular details of each life, though it can only be expressed in and through such details. (ix)

Her own example is valuable insofar as it points to something larger and shared. This linking of particular and universal was not a new thought for her but had been sketched out in 1965 in “Some Thoughts on Organic Form.” There she described organic poetry as:

a method of apperception, i.e., of recognizing what we perceive [. . .] based on an intuition of an order, a form beyond forms, in which forms partake, and of which man’s creative works are analogies [. . .]. (*New* 67-8)

The content of the form is revealed through allegorical resemblances in the poem itself, just as external life reflected internal life. In 1971 Levertov was extending this same aesthetic principle. The object her perceptions was not (just) a tree or a scene in the street, but her own experiences in the movement as they overlap with the experiences of others. These experiences had an order and coherence. Once she perceived their analogy in poetic form, she would only have to stay loyal to it.

The variety of languages, styles, and texts that appear in *To Stay Alive* reflects a focus on community that was always latent in the poetic approach of Levertov and her peers. Critic Stephen Voynich helpfully identifies a correspondence between Levertov’s formal approach—based, like Duncan, Olson, and Creeley’s, on the poem as a “field” incorporating multiple elements—and her activism, specifically in Berkeley:

the formal politics of her poem operates by converting the page into a site of public assembly, converting the poetic field into a park, and thus opposing the property relations that restrict the function of a university campus or a written text. (94)

The space of the poem itself becomes something like People’s Park, in all its crowded and contradictory heterogeneity. For this reason, Levertov’s “I” is “exposed to a

multiplicity of poetic and non-poetic forms” which include “autobiographical lyric with narrative modes, visual signs, and an intertextual network of quotations from friends, poets, and members of revolutionary collectives" (92).

Yet it is not only the case that the park enters the poem; poetry also enters the park. Most basically, Levertov brought her students with her to People’s Park and incorporated poetry into the activities of cleaning the park and creating a communal space. Linking practice with theory, her actions suggest that the poem cannot stay trapped on the page—even if it is a “field”—or in cultural institutions like the university. The poem must enter the world, becoming one participant among many in political struggle.

We have seen that the relationship between poetry and revolution forms a key leitmotif of *To Stay Alive*. She writes about a young friend caught between the fierce, frenetic energy of revolution and healing waters of poetry:

But when their rhythms
mesh
then though the pain of living
never lets up

the singing begins. (73-4)

Levertov was not alone in envisioning a movement that combined art and life, poetry and revolution. On this point, many sixties artists, thinkers, and figures agreed. The controversy over *To Stay Alive* emerges from exactly how these two were to be united in a single project. Duncan argues that the internal revolution he thought poetry was capable of stimulating must come before social revolution—perhaps even make literal struggle unnecessary. More focused on immediacy, Levertov wanted art to be part of

the movement now, but she was also unable to countenance the complete absorption of poetry into life. With all its wavering and internal contradictions, *To Stay Alive* provides insights into the available solutions to these questions that were thinkable in this period.

To Stay Alive's call for the "meshing" of poetry and revolution reflects Levertov's longstanding preoccupations with the role of culture in struggle. By bringing into *To Stay Alive* explicit autobiographical content, prose passages, snippets from popular rock songs, and texts from the Berkeley left-wing newspaper *The Instant News*, Levertov's commitment to a total revolution breached the borders of the self-contained artwork still partially assumed by Black Mountain poetry and other post-Poundian "composition by field" approaches. A gesture like Levertov's, aimed at overcoming the separation between art and life, could be read as part of a longer European "avant-garde" tradition—a collection of movements that, in Peter Bürger's classic formulation, aimed to abolish the institutions of art, particularly the museum (12). Russian Futurism and Dada are classic examples of avant-garde movements with determined critiques of bourgeois taste and culture. For Walter Benjamin, surrealism also exhibited this avant-garde impulse. The goal of the French surrealists was "[t]o win the energies of intoxication for the revolution' in other words, poetic politics" (55). Something of this impulse survives in Levertov.

In the context of the sixties, however, Levertov's tentative merging of high and low would more accurately be described as a harbinger of the anti-art tendencies of postmodernism. This impulse can be seen in a famous statement by Jerry Rubin: "I

didn't get my ideas from Mao, Lenin or Ho Chi Minh; I got my ideas from the Lone Ranger" (Stephens 102) Abbie Hoffman expresses a more radical side of this neo-avant garde desire for the abolition of art: "Let me say that the Vietcong attacking the U.S. Embassy in Saigon is a work of art" (Stephens 96). In both cases, the notion of art as high culture, as something edifying and *other than* the world is rejected.

Levertov's incorporation of lyrics by Jefferson Airplane or countercultural newspapers make sense within this tendency. Robert Duncan's vehement opposition to this political and prosaic turn in his friend's poetry reflects a late modernist belief in poetry as autonomous from—and providing a counterweight to—the fallen secular world. Yet Levertov did not fully abandon attempts to cultivate some measure of aesthetic distance. Though she references the Grateful Dead in *To Stay Alive*, Swinburne, Rilke, and the King James Bible appear with more frequency. Similarly, she maintained a commitment to the vocation of Art and this separated her off from more obviously anti-art tendencies in this period and also from the poetry of the Black Arts or Women's Liberation movements. This in-between quality—neither fully committed to autonomy nor completely avant-garde or anti-art—is what has made *To Stay Alive* a controversial work, caught between modernism and postmodernism in the early 1970s.

In her preface to *To Stay Alive*, Levertov justified the contents of the book on aesthetic grounds. Several of the poems included, like "Life at War" and the "Olga Poems," had already been published in earlier books. Containing only seven shorter lyric poems, three-fourths of the book was made up of the long, central poem

“Staying Alive.” Yet parts of this too had already been published as “From a Notebook” in her 1970 book *Relearning the Alphabet*. The relationship among these poems, Levertov asserted, realized after the fact, “demand[ed] their reissue” (vii). Levertov admitted that including them again might be interpreted as “immodest, narcissistic,” but she needed to be consistent to her art:

[T]he artist as craftsman is engaged in making discrete and autonomous works—each of which, like a chair or a table, will have, as Ezra Pound said, the requisite number of legs, and not wobble—yet at the same time more unconsciously, as these attempts accumulate over the years, *the artist as explorer in language of the experiences of his or her life* is, willy-nilly, weaving a fabric, building a whole in which each discrete work is a part that functions in some way in relation to all the others. (vii)

In using the image of the craftsman and the solid table, Levertov was insisting that her motivations for bringing all these poems together were neither personal nor political but artistic. For her, the artist’s career forms an organic whole. Levertov was drawing a connection between her earlier political work with her latest poems. For this reason, she titled the first section of the book, which included earlier lyrics (including “Life at War”), “Preludes.”

Two competing claims—one for autonomy, the other for heteronomy—compete throughout *To Stay Alive*. For Levertov, the organic whole of the oeuvre is not disconnected from an artist’s life, which also has an internal logic. *To Stay Alive* tells the story of her gradual politicization. Levertov describes how the memories of her sister in the “Olga Poems” are linked to her experiences in Berkeley; both are linked to the social totality of capitalism, racism, and imperial aggression:

The sense of community, of fellowship, experienced in the People’s Park in Berkeley in 1969, deepened and intensified under the vicious police attack

between poetry and revolution, but glimpse their potential unification only in fleeting moments.

The opening section, “Prologue: An Interim,” reveals what happens to the poem, and to one’s internal life, when “the war drags on” (21). After a meditation on the damage done to common language by statements such as a U.S. major’s about bombing in North Vietnam—“It became necessary / to destroy the town to save it”—Levertov turns to autobiographical details. In January 1968 Levertov’s husband Mitchell Goodman was indicted by a grand jury for “having conspired [. . .] to counsel, aid, and abet violations of the Selective Service law and to hinder administration of the draft” (Hollenberg 239). He became part of the Boston Five, along with Dr. Benjamin Spock. This high-profile case became a means of challenging the draft, but it was exhausting for Levertov and Goodman. In winter of 1968 the couple decided to regroup by spending time in Puerto Rico, yet even by the beach they were unable to forget the war:

To repossess our souls we fly
to the sea. To be reminded
of its immensity, and the immense sky
in which clouds move at leisure,
transforming their lives ceaselessly,
sternly, playfully.

*Today is the 65th day since Courcy Squire, war-resister, began her fast in jail.
She is 18. (22)*

The opening lyrical passage is disrupted by the factual section in italics. Squire was arrested in December of 1968 for blocking a police vehicle to stop friends from being

arrested. Her example interrupts whatever peace Levertov and Goodman could find in Puerto Rico, just as the prose sections interrupts poetry with prose.

This hijacking of the poem by history continues in Section VI of the “Prologue” where Levertov includes passages from journal entries in which she expresses anger that friends seem to feel more upset about Goodman’s legal troubles than the violence of the war. By the end of the section, Levertov has given up on the clouds, the sea, and the Romantic poetic traditions they represent. Squire and other young activists move to the center of the speaker’s attention because of their refusal to flee from the truth:

And the great savage saints of outrage—
who have no lawyers,
who have no interim
in which to come and go,
for whom there is no world left—
their bodies rush upon the air in flames,
sparks fly, fragments of a charred rag
spin in the whirlwind, a vacuum
where there used to be this monk or that,
Norman Morrison, Alice Hertz.

Maybe they are crazy. I know I could never
bring myself to injure my own flesh, deliberately. (27)

Even when Levertov returns to verse line-forms, the language is emphatically prosaic, as if formally enacting the same refusal of compartmentalization that her young heroes exhibit. Though Levertov rejects self-immolation as the sole tactic, the image of fire becomes an important theme throughout the poem. Even after putting aside the idea, she describes self-destruction as perhaps one of the only sane ways to behave given knowledge of the war:

But we need
the few who could bear no more,
who would try anything,
who would take the chance
that their death among the uncountable
masses of dead might be real to those who
don't dare imagine death.
Might burn through the veil that blinds
those who do not imagine the burned bodies
of other people's children. (27)

Fire is linked to the vision Levertov had described in “During the Eichmann Trial” and especially in “O Taste and See,” where “all that lives / to the imagination’s tongue” is made real through physical acts of internalization. Yet the image of self-immolation takes the same theme further, describing a subjective transformation that requires the total destruction of the old self. The person does not breathe in or consume the world, but lets the world consume them. Levertov’s figurative version of this process is allowing the poem to be fuel for transformative political action.

Fire is one of several key tropes for cultural revolution in *To Stay Alive*. We can connect the language of self-immolation to other uses of fire imagery in sixties thinking. For example, Norman O. Brown’s 1966 psychoanalytic-philosophical work *Love’s Body* contains a chapter entitled “Fire” which also uses flames to stand in for total self-transformation in a number of short aphorisms: “To heal, to cauterize. Therapy as apocalypse, conflagration; error burned up” (177). Like Levertov, Brown connects fire to correct vision and the burning of veils that obscure reality. For Brown, the revolution would also have to destroy the bourgeois self, obsessed with physical and psychic private property, in an apocalyptic explosion: “Violent eruption, vulcanism; the patient becomes violent as he wakes up. The madness of the millennia

breaks out: madness it is, Dionysus is, violence” (180). In Levertov, too, clear vision leads to a kind of holy madness. Her example of the hunger-fasting young activist Courcy Squire refuses the muddled vision of common sense: “*She had said in court ‘I don’t think there should be / roles like judge and defendant’*” (22). Out of this knowledge, she goes on hunger-strike. Because of her self-sacrifice, Levertov describes Squire and her friends as “[b]rands that flare to show us / the dark we are in” (28). In a similar vein, Brown writes: “The final judgment, the everlasting bonfire, is here now. Truth is error burned up” (183). Though Brown himself recognized an affinity with Levertov (and the two sixties figures eventually began a correspondence and friendship), more than a direct line of influence the fire tropology of *Love’s Body* shows how cultural revolution became embodied in certain recurring images in the period.

Later in the poem Levertov revises this theme of apocalyptic transformation by describing a conversation with a young revolutionary:

Arn says it’s
the Year one.
And I
know such violent
revolution has ached
my marrowbones, my

soul changing
its cells, my

cracked heart tolling
such songs of

unknown morning-star
ecstatic anguish, the clamor

of unquenched desire
radiant decibels shattering

the patient wine glasses
set out by private history's ignorant

quiet hands, —I keep
enduring such pangs of giving

birth or being
born,
I dream

maybe he's right. (52)

For Levertov, revolution must be accompanied by a burning off of one's old self and a refusal of maintaining strict boundaries between public and private experience.

One's corporeal form must be transformed through committed action. Yet Levertov maintains a certain tentativeness: "maybe he's right."

Elsewhere Levertov expresses some ambivalence about the self-destructive character of these images of revolutionary self-transformation. Instead, she opposes revolution to death, implicitly linking life to collectivity. "Part I" of the poem works through these themes, finding a model for cultural revolution in the individual lives of young activists and multiplying the tropes and images used to articulate cultural revolution:

"Revolution or death. Revolution or death
...
Which side are you on?
Revolution, of course. Death is Mayor Daley.
The revolution has no blueprints, and
(What makes this night different
from all other nights?)
is the first that laughter and pleasure aren't shot down in.

Life that

wants to live.

(Unlived life

of which one can die.)

I want the world to go on
unfolding

...

I see Dennis Riordon and de Courcy Squire
gentle David Worstell, intransigent Chuck Matthei
Blowing angel horns at the imagined corners.
Jennie Orvino singing
beatitudes in the cold wind
outside a Milwaukee courthouse.

I want their world--in which they already live,
they're not waiting for demolition and reconstruction.

'Begin here.'

Of course I choose
revolution. (29)

This passage's dense field of discourses, quotations, and references mirrors the non-hierarchical life Levertov sees the young activists embodying. The struggle between revolution and death is followed by a line from the union anthem "Which Side Are You On?", linking the sixties to the more explicitly communist 1930s through Florence Reece's 1931 mine workers' song. The inclusion of Chicago's notorious mayor Daley, responsible for the violent "police riot" of the 1968 Democratic National Convention, brings the reference back to the present while treating a contemporary figure as an avatar of a cosmic struggle between life and death. In a similar move, Levertov links Marx's famous refusal to offer a blueprint of the post-revolutionary society to one of the traditional questions asked by the child at Passover seder: "What makes this night different from all other nights?" The entrance of the sacred into the Pesach meal is used as a model for how this revolution is different

than previous ones. That “laughter and pleasure aren’t shot down” suggests that the movement should not subordinate means to ends. From here, Levertov moves to two idiosyncratic references that remained touchstones throughout her career. “I am life that wants to live, in the midst of life that wants to live” is a phrase from Alsatian philosopher Albert Schweitzer’s definition of “reverence for life” (86). “Unlived life,” on the other hand, is a phrase from Rilke’s *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge*. The vision of a fully lived life is taken up by the examples of various beatific young revolutionaries, given idealized portraits reminiscent of Ginsberg’s “best minds of my generation” in *Howl*. “[T]heir world” is not death but the present. Levertov finally chooses revolution over death by fire, asserting that a model of the world to come is immanent in what she called—in the title of an earlier book—the “here and now.” While still partly trapped in the language of individual choice and conscience, from this point forward the poem opens itself up increasingly to collective life as a prefiguration of revolutionary political activity. The transformation of subjectivity is not a private affair.

With the events of People’s Park, the individual is transformed by their immersion in community. In a parallel manner, the poem lets in the world. Even more radically, it descends into the soil and even the garbage and refuse of the park.

Levertov describes her experiences that spring in a dated diary poem:

May 14th, 1969--Berkeley

Went with some of my students to work in the People’s Park. There seemed to be plenty of digging and gardening help so we decided, as Jeff had his truck available, to shovel up the garbage that had been thrown into the west part of the lot and take it out to the city dump.

O happiness

in the sun! Is it
 that simple, then,
 to live?
 --crazy rhythm of
 scooping up barehanded
 (all the shovels already in use)
 careless of filth and broken glass
 --scooping up garbage together
 poets and dreamers studying
 joy together, clearing
 refuse off the neglected, newly recognized
 humbly waiting ground, place, locus, of what could be our
 New World even now, our revolution, one and one and
 one and one together, black children swinging, green
 guitars, that energy, that music, no one
 telling anyone what to do,
 everyone doing,
 each leaf of
 the new grass near us
 A new testament . . .

Out to the dump:
 acres of garbage glitter and stink in wild sunlight, gulls
 float and scream in the brilliant sky,
 polluted waters bob and dazzle, we laugh, our arms ache,
 we work together [. . .]
 even though we know
 the irony of adding to the Bay fill, the System has us there--
 but we love each other and return to the Park. (43-4)

Levertov's typical diction—"O happiness," "studying joy," "waiting ground,"
 "locus"—is cut through with elements a more youthful and countercultural idiom:
 "crazy rhythm," "no one telling anyone what to do," "the System," "we love each
 other." The differences in register are glaring in the poem, separating out like oil and
 water. Through heavy-handed imagery, the park that Levertov, her students, and the
 wider community are creating on the university's derelict lot becomes a "New
 World" that points to the mutuality and pleasure of a post-revolutionary society.

Echoes of William Blake (“To see the world in a blade of grass. / And heaven in a wild flower”) are contained in Levertov’s description of each leaf of grass as a “new testament.” Levertov was not alone in uniting youth counterculture with nineteenth-century Romanticism. R.D. Laing, for example, used the child as a figure for revolution when he stated that “an intensive discipline of unlearning is necessary for anyone before one can begin to experience the world afresh, with innocence, truth and love” (DeKoven 204). Levertov’s “poets and dreamers studying / joy together” are also unlearning obedience and separation through their collective labor. They clear their thoughts of authoritarian detritus just as they clean the field. For Levertov, people’s park is also a place in the mind.

Unsurprisingly, it is this People’s Park section of *To Stay Alive* that has been most subjected to critique. One study of post-war poetry refers to it as “the nadir of political poetry of the later 1960s”:

Students were angelic, politicians were demonic, and worst of all poets, like voyeurs, trafficked freely in between. This is what choosing sides can come to for poets: a sentimental simplification of history. (von Hallberg 68)

Many criticisms similarly reject the inclusion of politics in poetry. Charles Altieri’s criticisms, in contrast, appear at first more aesthetic than political. The problem for him is not People’s Park per se but the “easy rhetoric or slack generalizations” in her treatment of the park (134). “The details are flat,” he writes, “often sentimental, asserting rather than manifesting value” (136). Altieri’s most interesting contribution is to connect these limitations to what he describes as Levertov’s larger “aesthetics of presence,” an aesthetic approach:

in the pursuit of an unmediated sense of being and in its attempts to make ontologically real harmonies perceived between aesthetic and natural processes, [which] tends in social questions to confuse art and life and to misuse poetic categories of thought. (136-7)

Levertov's poetry is indeed full of analogies: between personal example and collective life, between vision and justice, between blades of grass and a libertarian society. The problem with this approach for Altieri is its grounding in a "dream [. . .] that proper action will follow naturally from a correct understanding" (137). He connects Levertov's approach to her understanding evil as something merely "privative." That is, the understanding that, wherever there is imagination and vision, evil will evaporate. If we see others as equally alive and their lives equal in worth to our own, we cannot kill them in wars.

Certainly, in her poetry on the Eichmann trial onward, Levertov's poetry had been strongly invested in the individual conscience. As Altieri writes, "Personal example is perhaps the only ethical model for social action that makes coherent sense within an aesthetic of presence" (133). However, what Levertov is straining towards in the People's Park section of *To Stay Alive* is modes of collective being. Yet Altieri finds equal fault with this aspect of the book, which for him "facilely extends the particular experience of cooperation at People's Park into a universal model for the new society to be created by the revolution" (137). The disagreement hinges on the relationship between particular and universal as much as life and art.

We must recall that Altieri was writing this critique in 1980, taking stock of the sixties with its "ambitious dreams" (36). In a more recent reappraisal of Altieri's project Christopher Nealon describes a "powerful structure of feeling in American

political life [. . .] which congeals in the idea that it is a betrayal to think against the system—a betrayal against one’s friends, one’s community, one’s art” (7). This is a fear that utopian politics will lead to the sacrifice of art. Altieri, Nealon says, explains what he himself called the “failed expectations” of sixties movements with reference to psychological flaws, such as Levertov’s understanding of evil. Altieri’s own “theodicy,” according to Nealon, is the original sin of “the encouragement of ‘the political’ per se into the domain of the aesthetic” (11). Whether or not we follow Nealon in ascribing to Altieri a pattern of post-sixties guilt, the grounding of Altieri’s objections to Levertov’s “aesthetic of presence” do appear to be as political as aesthetic insofar as it refuses the entry of politics into the aesthetic realm. While Altieri holds open the possibility of political poetry, the example he gives reinforces the autonomy of the artwork: “as high modernism makes clear, in style if not in content, political poetry need not be embarrassingly simplistic” (138). For whom is this poetry embarrassing or sentimental? Certainly not for the activist milieu Levertov evokes in *To Stay Alive*, but for the professional writer or critic of modern poetry.

The terms of the objection to Levertov’s political poetry are similar in Robert Duncan’s formulations. The friendly disagreements that arose between the two poets when Levertov’s activism appeared in “Life at War” reached a fever-pitch with the publication of *To Stay Alive*. The debate they engaged in through their voluminous letters have provided a helpful source for many scholars to unpack what is retroactively seen as one of the major fault-lines of post-war U.S. poetry. Though Duncan was equally disgusted by the war, he accused Levertov of misusing poetry to

express opposition to it. On 4 October 1971 he expressed his thoughts to her in a letter:

I feel that revolution, politics, making history, is one of the great falsehoods—is Orc in his burning madness—this is not to disapprove of the fire's raging. But Art has only one place in which to be and that is in our lives right now. . . . It would take Art, anyway, to get this matter of revolution into the dimension of the revealed, to create the idea, something more than and toward which one's longing goes. (661)

Duncan not only opposed the expression of political opinions in poetry, he was skeptical of the idea of revolution as a material project. Given to mythological thinking and interested in long cycles of history (he repeatedly refers to the Hindu concept of the Kali Yuga, the last in four cycles of “man,” a period of discord that proceeds the restarting of the wheel) rather than the specificities of contemporary politics, he tells Levertov that “THERE HAS BEEN NO TIME IN HUMAN HISTORY THAT WAS NOT A TIME OF WAR.” To myopically oppose the Vietnam War, however horrendous, is too limiting. He elaborated in an interview: “You can't scold an earthquake and you can't scold a war... It isn't a moral question at all. It is a catastrophe” (Smith 431). Similarly, Duncan was skeptical of the anger (“the fire’s raging”) expressed by Levertov and the movement. A committed pacifist and life-long anarchist skeptical of collective action as repressive of individual volition, Duncan feared that she was replicating the war-machine she opposed by calling for violent revolution. Later in October, he quoted her preface to *To Stay Alive* back at her, where she called for ““opposition to the whole system of insane greed, or racism and imperialism””:

These, Denny, are empty and vain slogans because those who use them are destitute of any imagination of or feeling of what such greed, racism or imperialism is like. The poet's role is not to oppose evil, but to imagine it: what if Shakespeare had opposed Iago, or Dostoevsky opposed Raskolnikov—the vital thing is that they *created* Iago and Raskolnikov. And we begin to see betrayal and murder and theft in a new light. (669)

Duncan saw opposing evil as reproducing evil, whereas the task of art should be portraying it—without comment. Here he was referring back to his 1968 poetic sequence “Santa Cruz Propositions,” which included his impressions on seeing footage of Levertov speak at an anti-draft rally in D.C. released on public television.

He mythologized the rage he saw in her speech and demeanor:

SHE appears, Kālī dancing, whirling her necklace of skulls,
trampling the despoiling armies and the exploiters of natural resources
under her feet. Revolution or Death!
Wine! The wine of men's blood in the vat
of the Woman's anger [. . .]
“And I know such violent revolution has ached my marrow-bones,

my soul changing its cells”

—so immediately the lines of her poem come into mine. (*Ground* 49)

Duncan saw Levertov's anti-war politics as channeling the Hindu goddess and destroyer Kālī. In describing the “Woman's anger” and the “wine of men's blood,” he pathologizes Levertov's anger, claiming its source was as much misandry as it was opposition to the war. In a letter, he stood by his description and asserted that a similar darkness permeated the entire movement: “The wish for *reprisal* is the Kālī wish, and not only the rebels—all up-risings, Nazi as well as Communist, anarchist as well as totalitarian—demand ‘reprisal’ for wrongs” (*Letters* 664). Using the familiar Cold War trope of “totalitarianism,” in which Stalinism and Nazism are identical,

politics as such is war. Finally, in November he wrote that he was “dumb-founded” by her description of the People’s Park protest. Its goal was not the creation of community but rather to “prove that the administrative tyranny is willing to kill and to blind” (672). The protesters were “ignorant.”

Over several letters in 1971 Levertov responded to Duncan point by point. “You *do*,” she wrote, “have a habit of projection, of setting people up in roles—of mythologizing, as you did for instance when you identified me with Kali” (672). She argued that the Vietnam poems were about just that: Vietnam. Though she was slowly being educated by the Women’s Liberation Movement, she admitted, rage against men had no part in her opposition to the war. She opposed it out of long-held beliefs and commitments, not psychological complexes: “We are members of one another.’ I’ve always believed that [. . .] Goya wasn’t painting the disasters of Goya but the disasters of war” (678-9). She described the confusing circumstances of her televised anti-war speech in which she had not “‘used’ poetry and [her] position as a poet” but spoke as a private citizen. She added: “and one shouldn’t USE poetry anyway, I couldn’t agree more” (678). She also fired back against Duncan’s claims that her revolutionary “slogans” in the preface to *To Stay Alive* were “vain”:

THAT HAS NOT BEEN MY EXPERIENCE AND I THINK IT IS
BULLSHIT, WHAT YOU SAY, AND I WOULD SAY IT IS
DISGUSTINGLY ELITIST IF I DID NOT KNOW YOU WOULD
IMMEDIATELY DISMISS THAT AS ANOTHER EMPTY SLOGAN. BUT
I’M SAYING IT ANYWAY. (683)

She argued that ideological pacifism could transform into quiescent relativism: “The North Vietnamese are not to be equated with the U.S. forces just because they are

using military force” (681). War was not a transhistorical truth, as Duncan claimed, but rather is grounded in material circumstances and shifting balances of power.

Violence can play a role in the cultural revolution:

What the end of our movement towards what we call revolution (a *changed society* in which the components—individual lives—change not only the institutions) will ultimately be (if we indeed survive at all) I don’t pretend to know, but I do know that I really like my comrades in that movement, I like being with them better than I like being with most of the people I know who aren’t in it, & I know that many of them accept (regretfully) the prospect that armed struggle may be on the cards. Some of them—those included—may very well be wiser than I am, not to speak of braver, but even if they are not, I wd [sic] sooner struggle, in any case, at their sides than go down—or even survive—desperately keeping my moral hands clean. I have some friends who are Weather-people, underground, & when I last saw them I was deeply impressed by their freedom & life-quality, good like good bread. [. . .]
Yes, this is a naive, romantic, emotional point of view.
I know. (681)

Here Levertov holds fast to the idea of relationships of solidarity and courage in the present as prefigurative of an (unknowable) future revolution—or else, because the ends are immanent in the means, to die living a joyful life of struggle is better than dying having avoided involvement out of concern with moral high ground. As for what happened in People’s Park, Levertov does not hold back from her own *ad hominem* accusations: “You were not a participant in the PP struggle, so what makes you think you know more about it than I do? IT is damned arrogant of you” (675).

She holds to the vision of a future utopia that she found there.

Finally, the letters between Duncan and Levertov explore the deeper aesthetic grounding of their political disagreement. Duncan had insisted on poetry remaining Art, preserving its distance from everyday realities. If Art has any role in revolution, it is to make the imagination of it possible, not to get its hands dirty working actively

towards it. Art is not “meshed” with revolution, but proceeds it, keeping the idea of it alive. It is not lost on Levertov that Duncan’s almost Adornian perspective is based on an autonomous status granted to poems. She retorts:

If it (the poem) ‘has its own meaning’ it is only that the revelation is not only the realization, concretization, clarification, affirmation, of what one knows one knows but also of what one didn't know one knew. I do not believe, as you seem to, in the *contradictory* (& autonomous) ‘meaning’ of poem [. . .].” (682)

Quoting herself that poetic form is a “REVELATION (not extension) of content,” she insists that anything she writes, political poetry included, is based on an “unmanipulative listening” (681). She writes about the war because that is what her world is shaped by and poetry requires receptiveness to the world: “I do not at all have a sense of luring anyone into the poetic by catching hold of them through my subject matter. The idea appalls me in fact” (680). *To Stay Alive* appears the way it does because form and content, poem and world, are mutually determining.

The revelation of content through form is another way of talking about internal and external, art and life, culture and politics, poetry and revolution. If attempting to join them was part of a reductive “aesthetics of presence,” as Altieri argued, or an instrumentalization of the aesthetic, as suggested by Duncan, then this impulse was not only present in Levertov’s poetics but the wider field of sixties thinking, art, and activism. It was not Levertov alone who found in People’s Park a prefiguration of the dream of cultural revolution. In his reflections on the experience, poet, participant, and Berkeley resident John Oliver Simon wrote that People’s Park was

substance and sign of a possible participatory order, as the living and hand-made proof that necessary institutions need not be overplanned, absentee-owned, hierarchical—as such the Park came to stand in many minds as one tantalizing trace of a good society, as the practical negation of American death, as a redemption worth fighting for. (Bloom and Breines 563)

What made the experience so evocative was the way People's Park stood for a potential unity of opposites. People's Park represented the “cross between the spring dreams of flower children and the devious plots of SDS-inspired revolutionaries” (565). Simon saw the community park as an embodiment of the Black Panther Party principle of “serving the people” (562) and even some BPP members were themselves supportive of the actions. The Third World Liberation Front also released a statement of solidarity with the People's Park protests in the wake of the police shut-down. In the documentary *Berkeley in the 60s*, commentators describe the park as a rare fusing of the counterculture and the revolutionary left. One speaker notes: “It's amazing that these movements existed at the same time, but as the sixties continued they took on qualities of each other.” What was shared, then, was a sense of prefiguration. As Simon writes, People's Park was “building a new society on the vacant lots of the old” (566). On Memorial Day 1969, the day of a massive march against the police closure, a 13-point “Berkeley Liberation Program” was printed in the *Berkeley Barb*. It called for the area south of campus to be transformed into a “strategic free territory for revolution,” announced the Park's solidarity with “all Third World Liberation movements” as well as Women's Liberation, and described the “liberating potential of drugs” (Bloom and Breines 568). In Simon's gloss this amounted to a demand for the “flowering of revolutionary culture.”

The experiment in the park ended in violent repression, and this is part of why Duncan and others found these sentiments to be over-exaggerated. But this revolutionary hope is part of what makes the sixties structure of feeling as a whole feel distant in the post-sixties period. DeKoven writes that “This apocalyptic sense of imminent upheaval, either annihilating or redemptive, is one of the least currently accessible aspects of the sixties structure of feeling, but one of the most decisive” (203). As difficult to bear as these notions might seem today, this sense of imminent revolution was what made the events so central to Levertov’s poem, and even to her poetic project as a whole. In 1973, she wrote that poetry and political commitment were one to her: “I believe in the essential interrelatedness and mutual reinforcement of the meditative and the active” (*Poet* viii). This statement illuminates the appeal of People’s Park. What she found there was a vision of the reconciliation of mental and material labor, that age-old ideal of the socialist project. What critics miss is that the act of taking garbage to the dump to clear the park was not an embarrassing detail of *To Stay Alive* but rather an essential part of her vision. What she found in her experiences with young activists was, she wrote, “a new vision of what life might be like in a world of gentle and life-loving people,” particularly when they

cook together...and grow vegetables and flowers together, and mend each other's clothes—and study not only one subject as a group, but several related and unrelated ones. (Smith 419)

She was opposed to separations of all kinds, not only between physical work and art, but between different academic disciplines. The vehemence with which Duncan and others rejected this view was based not only in the way it removed art from its

rarefied realm, finding it even in the soil and trash, but also in its emphasis on activities of care—cleaning, cooking, educating, growing food—in other words, acts of social reproduction that are typically feminized and therefore devalued.⁹⁶ Nothing could be more “embarrassing” or “sentimental” to a vision of art as autonomous than describing mending clothes as also part of poetry.

The expansion of the concept of revolution to include all of these elements does not only characterize Berkeley or the U.S. in the sixties, as the later sections of *To Stay Alive* make clear. After the People’s Park section, Levertov offers a travelogue, describing her journey home to England and then to Italy and Yugoslavia in summer of 1970. Away from

dynamic
deathly-sick America, of whose energy,
in whose fever, in whose wild
cacaphonous music I have lived
and will live

she finds similar, if gentler, energies at play (66). At a conference in what is today Croatia, she meets young “Third World” revolutionaries:

Two hours after reaching Rijeka
(that was once Fiume)
I’m drinking *vinjak* with five Sudanese.
[. . .]

Jugoslavia is still unknown, mysterious,
slow train-ride, rocky fields in heat haze
And now
a roomful of subtle
black faces!
They refill my glass and give me

⁹⁶ See Tithi Bhattacharya’s recent study *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*.

*The Baghdad Observer: 'Al-Ali Reviews
Revolutionary Achievements.'* I give them
the news about Bobby Seale.
[. . .]

To Abubakar I gave
my Panther button, the yellow one
with the great Black Cat emerging
in power from behind bars.



they read, and repeated it
to each other in Arabic.
[. . .]

Abubakar, gat-toothed
like me. 'They say it's lucky,'
I told him, 'and means you will journey
very far.' (67-8)

Just as in her relationships with young activists stateside, Levertov finds in these new-found comrades a vision of revolutionary friendship. They make a meal together, drink and converse, and clear the tables. In the following prose paragraph Levertov moves tellingly from the BPP and her Sudanese friends to Cuba:

In that room I knew the truth of what José Yglesias writes, in his book on revolutionary Cuba that I'm reading here on this Adriatic island 3 days later: he had been to a film, a good one but these Cuban country people took it with "none of the tension, the concentration there would have been in New York. . . . Their presence made me see that for all its artistry . . . it was a false picture of life: [they] knew that the easy-going goodness of people was missing from it, that it allowed no avenue for joy such as they know exists as soon as any bar to its enjoyment is let down. Nor does it take a revolution to know this, just a bit of living." (68)

Art—Levertov finds confirmed through Yglesias' *In The Fist of the Revolution* (1969)—should be not isolated from life, just as joy and pleasure must not contradict rage. Referring to a screening of *Rock Around the Clock* she attended in Boston earlier that year, she found “the same sense of generosity and good humor,” but the white counterculture is “more frantic, [with] a sense of stolen time” (69). In her travels she finds a more unhurried and non-neurotic combination of revolutionary seriousness and joyfulness. Her earlier sense of a revolution in which “laughter and pleasure aren't shot down” expands and becomes more complex as the poem continues (29). The thought returns her to People's Park, ever insistent on its significance:

Again—
 as in the act of clearing garbage off the land
together with those I loved
and later dodging with them
 the swinging clubs of the cops,
living
in that momentary community—
again happiness
astonished me, so easy, ‘amazing grace.’
Easy as the undreamed
dreamlike reality
of Abubakr and his friends. (77)

Poetry for Levertov, is not only words on a page, but a demeanor or habitus, a way of engaging in and being receptive to the world. From Yugoslavia to Sudan to Berkeley, this is what the revolution means.

The poem ends with a stock-taking on the years between 1969 and 1971. She uses Williams Carlos Williams' stepped lines to make a statement neither he nor most of his other followers would have thought worth including in a poem:

only conjunctions
of song's
raging magic
with patient courage
will make a new
life[.] (82)

The rage that Duncan objected to must be tempered by art—and only from that combination will a revolution worthy of the name come. She returns to the opening theme of poetry and revolution:

Get my head together. Mesh. Knit
idiom with idiom in the
‘push and shove of events.’
What I hold fast to
is what I wrote last May, not Kali speaking
‘When the pulse rhythms
of revolution and poetry
mesh,
then the singing begins.’
But that when must be
now! (83)

All the urgency and the apocalypticism of the sixties structure of feeling are active here. There is a sense that history will not wait, but any errors that exist will be burned off through action. The poem ends with antiphonic voices making varied claims about the road ahead:

‘Let us become men’ says Dan Berrigan.
‘Maybe you see it all, whiteman,
or maybe you blind,’
says Etheridge Knight to Dan.
‘We gotta work
at our own pace, slow if need be,
work together and learn from within,’
Richard said to me just today, the day
news of invasion of Laos started to be ‘official.’ (83)

The poet Etheridge Knight came into prominence for his 1968 collection *Poems from Prison*. He became one of the major poets of the Black Arts Movement in the 1970s.⁹⁷ Father Daniel Berrigan was an important figure for Levertov for his bringing together of militancy and spirituality in opposition the war. In 1968 he and eight other Catholic anti-war activists destroyed draft cards with napalm in front of the Catonsville, Maryland, draft board. He was sentenced to jail but went underground to escape imprisonment. “Let us become men” was a line from his last underground communiqué before being apprehended in 1970. As a pacifist, Berrigan had made critiques of the Black Power movement and thought figures like Knight were too critical of Martin Luther King Jr. Compassion, he thought, was as essential as rage. Knight’s line is from a short poem in response called “For Dan Berrigan.” The juxtaposition to these two statements suggests that the issue of violence and non-violence is still unsettled for Levertov at the end of the poem. Significantly, she opens up the text to a movement poet like Knight, who once stated that “Ideas are not the source of poetry. For me it’s passion and feeling” (Collins 1). She thereby distances herself further from pacificism and, with it, the autonomy of art—all, implicitly, limitations of the white New Left.⁹⁸ Her inclusion of competing voices reads like a

⁹⁷ See Chapter Four for more on the Black Arts Movement.

⁹⁸ Her poem “The Day the Audience Walked Out on Me, and Why (*May 8th, 1970, Goucher College Maryland*)” continues this auto-critique. At a church reading she recited “Life at War” and other anti-war poems to audience approval. She then “began [her] rap,” saying that “it is well that we have gathered / in this chapel to remember / the students shot at Kent state” on 4 May 1970. However, she added:

our gathering is a mockery unless
we remember also
the black students shot at Orangeburg two years ago,
and Fred Hampton murdered in his bed

self-critique, or at least an acknowledgment that in the wake of history's ever-growing disasters (in particular, the 1971 South Vietnamese/U.S. offensive campaign in the Kingdom of Laos) she will never have the answers but must learn by acting. She implicitly interrogates her own whiteness, which like Berrigan's, can trap her in an incomplete vision. She ends the poem praising the young figures that have been her source of inspiration throughout:

O holy innocents! I have
no virtue but to praise
you who believe
life is possible . . . (84)

By the conclusion of *To Stay Alive* Levertov has chosen revolution over death, even if she cannot know where the road will lead or how one should best travel it.

Conclusion

Kristin Ross' study *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* describes an event with greater gravitas in the history of socialism than People's Park. However, much of how Ross describes the status of art in moments of revolutionary hope has relevance for later periods. The Paris Commune challenged the division between "manual and artistic or intellectual labor" (50). Craftspeople elevated themselves to the status of artists in those seventy-one days in the barricaded

by the police only months ago. (*Collected* 420)

The mostly older white audience begins to abandon their pews. After she calls for "actions of militant resistance" to honor the memories of the dead, one man accuses her of "desecrate[ing] a holy place." She ends the poem on a wry note. Shortly after this reading two black students were shot at Jackson State in Mississippi on 15 May 1970. This time "no one desecrated the white folks' chapel / because no memorial service was held" (421).

city, and workers demanded the same “luxury of playing with words or images.” This overcoming of boundaries was essential to the meaning of the event, which was a form of “communal luxury.” This term, taken from the writings of a communitarian, pointed to “the demand that beauty flourish in spaces shared in common and not just in special privatized preserves reconfiguring art to be fully integrated into everyday life” (58). Levertov was suggesting a similar ideal when she brought garbage, posters, movement slang, Black Panther buttons, and conversations with young activists into the space of the poem. What her critics saw as a demeaning of art she saw as an expansion of it. At the same time, the communality of beauty was not an excuse for a slackening in craft. She had strong concepts of what made strong poetry, developed over a lifetime, and she did not hold back from criticizing the work of others if it compromised art’s internal standards.

Of course, People’s Park was not the Paris Commune and the sixties in the U.S. did not give rise to any revolution in the literal sense—not even one that managed to last seventy-one days. Despite the off-putting apocalypticism we should be wary of the “enormous condescension of posterity,” as historian E.P. Thompson famously put it, when analyzing artifacts from this period. Relieved from the necessity of judgement, we instead devote energy to understanding why the period looked and felt as it did. Art and revolution were not joined, though it felt overwhelmingly at moments like their unity might be imminent. The overblown rhetoric arose from this sense that a cultural revolution that would transform not only politics and economics but art, habits, and the individual psyche was just a few days

away. As Marcuse recognized already in 1972, the journey would be much longer.

The New Left was simultaneously strong and flawed:

The new individualism raises the problem of the relation between personal and political rebellion, private liberation and social revolution. The inevitable antagonism, the tension between these two, easily collapses into an immediate identification, destroying the potential in both of them. (Marcuse 48)

The meshing of poetry and revolution—internal and external transformation—was and should remain, his reflections suggest, the project. The dialectic of liberation requires that movements refuse to give up on chasing this ever-receding horizon.

Holding onto these contradictory notions is a way to avoid both the overestimation and the underestimation of art:

Art itself, in practice, cannot change reality, and art cannot submit to the actual requirements of the revolution without denying itself. But art can and will draw its inspirations, and its very form, from the then-prevailing revolutionary movement—for revolution is in the substance of art. (Marcuse 116)

Levertov's poetry opened itself up to the energies of its prevailing movements, and that is part of what critics understood as both its strength and its fatal weakness.

This sixties energy, as we will see in the following chapter, was not only expressed in poetry but often in song. In fact, Levertov's own image for cultural revolution referred to music: "when the pulse-rhythms sing" and "Let us sing unto the lord a new song." A poem from 1969 that she dedicated to John Sinclair and his band M.C. 5 shows how this pulse could transform into a *beat*. Sinclair, founder of the White Panther Party, thought the "the long-haired dope-smoking rock and roll culture" of counter-cultural youth represented a "revolutionary culture" on par with the National Liberation Front in Vietnam (Dale 145). He wanted hippies to form a

Chapter Four

Radicals and Rockers in the Turkish Countryside: The Revolutionary

Antinomies of Anadolu Rock

[T]he '60s [. . .] has not yet yielded such narratives [. . .] that would weave together political commitment and cultural dream work, theory and carnival, student movements and psychedelics and rock 'n' roll.”

- Nick Bromell, *Tomorrow Never Knows: Rock and Psychedelics in the 1960s*

The blistering electric guitar sounds like it was piped in from some intergalactic radio frequency, yet the lyrics are planted firmly in the poverty-stricken Anatolian land mass of Turkey. The swirling guitar riff circles upon itself as the drums propel the song mercilessly forward. Then a voice is heard—shrill and cold as wind. The lyrics, shrieked as if by a vengeance-hungry ghost, begin with the haunting image that serves as the song's title:

A thin, thin snow falls upon the poor
Why does fate not believe the word of the poor?
We're dying, dying of hunger—don't, my lord, please!¹⁰⁰

“A Thin, Thin Snow Falls” [İnce İnce Bir Kar Yağar] was released in 1976 by Selda Bağcan.¹⁰¹ While the musical style is psychedelic rock, the song's lyrics provides a harsh view of realities among the Turkish peasantry, whom revolutionaries saw as the most exploited (and therefore most radical) segment of the national body. The lyrics issue from the voice of poor villagers in eastern Anatolia who describe their

¹⁰⁰ *İnce ince bir kar yağar fakirlerin üstüne,
Neden felek inanmıyor fukaranın sözüne,
Öldük öldük biz açlıktan, etme ağam n'olur*

¹⁰¹ The YouTube channel *Anatolian Rock Revival Project* provides high quality uploads of Turkish rock songs, including “A Light, Light Snow Falls” and the other songs featured in this chapter, all with original artwork and English subtitles. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

miserable conditions and supplicate the listener for assistance. Rather than being a spectacular disaster like a blizzard or storm, the snow that oppresses them falls lightly [*ince ince*—literally, “thin, thin”]. It is as if the snow mirrors the piling up of centuries of small indignities. Alone, each injustice might be bearable. Together, they are intolerable. Either the state will help them, or they will revolt.

The genre of rock music (associated with supposedly apolitical phenomena like drugs, hippies, and commercial youth culture) is often assumed to have little to do with the radical politics of the period.¹⁰² Yet the lyrics of “Thin, Thin” and songs like it show how many of the urgent questions that animated the revolutionary Left in Turkey as well as beyond—who composes ‘the people;’ the question of commercialism and authenticity; the relationship of city and country; localism and internationalism—could be explored through rock music. “Thin, “Thin” is part of a Turkish musical genre known as “Anadolu Rock.” Named after the Anatolian landmass upon which most of modern Turkey is located, Anadolu Rock is an experimental genre that combined melodies, instruments, and subject matter from the countryside with world currents of surf, psychedelic, and progressive rock. Rock ‘n’ roll first took root in Turkey as early as 1957, when local youth, many of them

¹⁰² For example, Emin Alper’s otherwise pathbreaking sociological study of the period paints the cultural realm with overly broad strokes, echoing the established view that Anadolu Rock was not a significant or revealing component of the Turkish sixties:

The cultural manifestation of the libertarian, counter-cultural movements in 1968 was rock music in the Western world. However, in Turkey rock music was not so important for the student movement, nor were its implications of an alternative culture strong. Although there were left-wing and oppositional singers in the genre of Anatolian Rock [its] prevailing character [. . .] was not oppositional and this music was *by no means* emblematic for the radical student movement. (498, emphasis added)

students at prestigious military academies, began forming bands to sing English-language covers of Chubby Checker and Bill Haley. The hybridized genre of Anadolu Rock, first called “Anadolu Pop,” coalesced around 1964 under the direction of jazz-singer-turned-folk-revivalist Tülay German (born 1935). Following her example of performing traditional tunes and lyrics with arrangements inspired by North American and Western European popular music, artists like Erkin Koray, Barış Manço, Haramiler, Fikret Kızılok, Selçuk Alagöz Orkestrası, and Üç Hürel began adapting Turkish folk songs to drum kit, electric guitar, bass, and vocals. With the band Moğollar [The Mongols] (active 1967-1976, 1993-present) the intermingling of Western musical currents and Turkish folk traditions—once the dream of Ottoman reformers and Kemalist modernizers—reached a formal complexity few could have predicted. The long-haired rockers in Moğollar, who wore colorful outfits acquired from village bazaars, transformed the dream of nationally minded modernization into something more ludic and rebellious. In the hands of other musicians, the lyrical content of Anadolu Rock went in explicitly socialist directions. As radical Left politics heated up into the decade of the 1970s, Selda and Cem Karaca (1945-2004) began producing protest rock that drew on folk culture to express the hidden realities of the countryside. While nationalist state-builders in Turkey had long vaunted the pure genius of the *volk*, in this new amalgamated musical form radical rockers turned elements of rural folk culture into a weapon against the very ruling class that claimed to embody the will of Turkey’s poor.

This chapter traces the development of Anadolu Rock through the music of trailblazer Tülay German, the trippy ensemble Moğollar, and the militant rockers Selda Bağcan and Cem Karaca. Where other scholars have asserted that Turkish artists in general, and rockers in particular, lacked organic links to revolutionary movement and were apolitical, I show that Anadolu Rock was intimately connected to the Leftist currents from its very origins, when German collaborated with prominent Turkish socialists to kick off a craze of adapting anonymous and folk songs into “Western” popular music. It is true that radicals and rockers were sometimes engaged in different pursuits. However, they must still be thought of as two wings of the same movement. *Radical rockers*, who combined both identity categories, were in contact with the organized and extra-parliamentary Left. Despite tensions, Left-wing cultural workers and activist-militants were involved in the same campaigns and met in the same spaces.

Anadolu Rock also has implications for the study of the global sixties. In the dominant historiography, phenomena like revolutionary peasantist politics and youth counterculture are often presented as opposed, with rural-based struggles (connected to a militant anti-imperialism) as the focus of poor countries and countercultural experimentation as the defining feature of the capitalist core. In Anadolu Rock, Left-wing political tendencies most strongly associated with what Turkish revolutionaries themselves thought of as the “Third World”—an emphasis on issues of national liberation, the working class, the peasant majority, economic development—were expressed through a musical idiom associated with the supposedly apolitical cultural

movement of the “decadent West”: rock music. By the early 1970s Anadolu Rock had become a cultural revolutionary genre that sought to unite the anti-imperialist, peasantist demands of the Turkish Left with calls for a more subjectively pleasurable and meaningful everyday life.

To argue that Anadolu Rock was deeply political does not mean that it was always political in the level of content. For example, when the band Mavi Işıklar [The Blue Lights] performed their adaptation of the insouciant folk song “Helvacı” [The Helva-seller] in 1965 sporting matching bowl cuts and suits, their infectious combination of the English “Beat” style and distinctively Turkish rhythms inadvertently staked a claim in the animating assumptions of Turkish-style modernization. In this sense, singing “Let’s go to the helva-seller / Let’s eat a little helva” [*Helvacıya gidelim / Biraz helva yiyelim*] was no less political than Cem Karaca’s “Bir Mayıs Marşı” [May Day March] (1977). Only the second example is explicitly oppositional (with lyrics like “the people’s celebration progresses on the glorious road to revolution” [*devrimin şanlı yolunda ilerleyen halkın bayramı*]), but in a context where the Left-wing itself drew so strongly on official nationalism it is difficult to draw a firm boundary.¹⁰³

Similarly, the explicitly revolutionary songs of Karaca could have a countercultural and even psychedelic valence. His famous hit “Tamirci Çırağı” [The

¹⁰³ It is not just closeness to nationalism that makes a song like “The Helva-Maker” political. For example, Bromell interprets the famous screaming of women and girls in the audiences of Beatles concerts, often chocked up to an apolitical ‘female hysteria,’ as “taking power and space away from the control of the adults” and “demonstrating the force of an impulse [. . .] that would drive young people just a few years later to seize university buildings and city streets” (25). A similar impulse was alive in Turkey, where revolution was first disguised as good clean fun.

Mechanic's Apprentice] (1975), which ends with the class-conscious exhortation: "You're a worker / Remain a worker! [*İşçisin sen / İşçi kal!*], featured trippy synthesizers straight out of the band Deep Purple. Even if it was not known that Karaca composed this song after taking LSD and watching Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* the sonic signifiers complicate the socialist realist message (Erkal 102). One strength of the concept of cultural revolution is that it prevents us from over hastily reifying the distinction between the political and psychedelia.

Anadolu Rock, like sixties rock in general, was an active force in social movements. This argument is informed by the scholarship of people like Nick Bromell, who asserts in *Tomorrow Never Knows: Rock and Psychedelics in the 1960s* that rock's apparent frivolity is no excuse for not taking it seriously: "Rock was fun, but it was also a vital and spontaneous public philosophizing, a medium through which important questions were raised and rehearsed, and sometimes focused, and sometimes (rarely) answered" (16). Rock is a cultural form whose appeal stems from its ability to raise the foundational questions: "Where do we come from?" "What do we want?" "Who is this 'we?'" These are exactly the topics a youth movement aiming to transform their country and their world needed to ponder. In the case of Karaca and Selda's protest songs, this philosophizing was quite explicit. In the work of German and Moğollar, the political content of songs needs to be interpretively teased out. An Anadolu Rock song may seemingly be about a shepherd or a mountain, but behind the backs of its creators, and even in excess of their deliberate intentions, it may also participate in debates about as something as arcane as the

Maoist strategy of “surrounding the cities from the countryside”—crucial issues for the sixties Left in Turkey and in the world.

Like the theory and practice of cultural revolution, rock music turns out to be anything but the patrimony of the ‘First World.’ Rock music is a genre without a homeland—based as it is, from the genre’s very first moments, on a process of importation, translation, and mistranslation.¹⁰⁴ Yet the complex origins of rock music do not contradict the fact that in the context of the global Cold War, even radicals in Western European countries could feel rock to be part of capitalist domination and cultural imperialism (Warne). In Turkey too people had good reason to be suspicious of musical forms associated with the U.S.¹⁰⁵ One key factor in the creation of Anadolu Rock is the U.S. military and Cold War aid apparatus. It was no accident that aspects of the ‘American way of life,’ from Elvis to bubble gum, became popular in

¹⁰⁴ Skoog follows a dominant line of rock scholarship in asserting that the genre was founded in multiple, overlapping acts of theft and decontextualization. For example, writing of Elvis’ epoch-opening performance of “Hound Dog” on the Milton Berle Show in June 1956, Skoog notes that this was “a song written by two Jewish men [Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller], popularized by a black woman [Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton], and bowdlerized by an Italian performer from Philadelphia for the Las Vegas stage” (72). Pointing to the complexity of the genre’s origins, Skoog asserts that because rock “is a genre predicated on appropriation, imitation, and youth rebellion [it] was easily adapted to local context around the world making it simultaneously a marker of U.S. cultural imperialism and domestic identity” (28). In a certain sense, rock is not even a fully U.S. or ‘western’ genre, as a genre-defining song like Dick Dale’s 1962 “Misirlou” [“Egyptian Woman,” a Greek assimilation of the Turkish word *Mısrılı* “Egyptian”] reveals. The anonymous regional melody was first made famous by a recording made in the U.S. of the Ottoman-Greek rebetiko musician Tetos Demetriades. So rather than saying, for example, that the Turkish band Silüetler (The Silhouettes) was imitating a more famous band like The Shadows, one could plausibly argue the opposite: surf rock is an Aegean or Levantine genre.

¹⁰⁵ In a certain sense, rock cannot be untangled from imperialism. The introduction of jazz was more deliberate, supported through soft power programs like American Cultural Societies that hosted listening parties in Turkey’s cities. It is worth noting that when the USS Missouri came to Istanbul in 1946, in that first harbinger of the U.S. Cold War presence in Turkey, it carried the body of a key musical figure: Münir Ertegün, ambassador of Turkey to the U.S., key in the desegregation of the jazz scene in Washington D.C., and father of Ahmet Ertegün, founder of Atlantic Records (Erkal 43).

the 1950s when Turkey became ensconced in the Western Bloc and foreign soldiers and aid workers began appearing under the Marshall Plan. In the 1950s and early 1960s having an American friend was the easiest way to hear the latest rock ‘n’ roll song or acquire a guitar (BGST 115). Yet this “imperialist” genre was transformed into a sonic medium for militating against imperialism. Rock’s rootlessness contains a kernel of revolutionary internationalism.

At times, however, this ambiguity was unacceptable for the radical Left. For example, in 1976 Selda performed “Thin, Thin” and other songs at a benefit concert held for a radical Left organization at a sports arena. As she played, a “village group” [*köylüler grubu*] in the audience, likely representing a Maoist faction, began booing her for playing the guitar—an ‘imperialist’ instrument (290; personal interview, 12/9/2018). After the concert the peasant-based group insultingly pushed money into her pocket for “chocolate money”—another symbol of cultural imperialism.

Despite this occasional hostility, Left-leaning Anadolu rockers saw their musical project as fundamentally in unison with the aims of the anti-imperialist Left. Selda recalls that by “1971 in Turkey, for all young people a process of turning to ourselves, getting to know ourselves had begun” [*Türkiye’de, artık bütün gençlerde bir kendimize dönme, kendimizi tanıma olayı başladı*] (283). Music was a central part of this generation’s discovery of folk culture. Yet according to the ultimate logic of becoming “ourselves,” even playing a Turkish folk song on guitar made you an imperialist stooge. Once they embarked on this path of localization, artists like Selda were led inexorably toward a more fundamentalist definition of ‘we.’ A national self

must be defined against a foreign non-self. In this way, the project of localization sometimes transformed, under the weight of its own contradictions, into a patriotic chauvinism.¹⁰⁶ By the end of the 1970s Selda traded her guitar for *bağlama* and her blue jeans for *şalvar*. In doing so, she tacitly expressed agreement with her hecklers. Anadolu Rock had come to an end.

Such a complex relationship to global mass culture is not unique to Turkey. As Eric Zolov writes in *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture*, a study of rock in Mexico that has implications far beyond that country, rock music provided a

wedge [. . .] for societies caught in the throes of rapid modernization. Rock was a wedge in the sense that it challenged traditional boundaries of propriety, gender relations, social hierarchies, and the very meanings of national identity in an era of heightened nationalism. (10)

In Mexico as in Turkey, an ‘imported’ rock music could be used to shake up local hierarchies and forms of conservatism or nationalism. However, the same songs could just as often reinforce them. Everywhere it appeared, rock provided a window onto the aspirations and anxieties of young people. Turkish or Mexican bands—unlike their counterparts in the U.S. or Britain—had to contend not only with the question of national space (who are we?) but also with the fact of an international arena (who are they?) within which they felt at a cultural and political disadvantage.

¹⁰⁶ Çubukçu recalls that the '68 movement “started from something like the Cyprus protests, characterized by completely jingoistic motifs [against Greeks and Greek-Cypriots], and that then turned into a movement that had anti-American protests where students . . . would burn American flags” [*Kıbrıs sorunu gibi son derece şoven motifler taşıyan bir olaydan hareket ederek başlayan, ve antiAmerikan bir gösteriye dönülen ve . . . öğrencilerin Amerikan bayrapını yaktıkları olaylar . . .*] (59). In this way, chauvinistic nationalism and anti-imperialism were intertwined in Turkey’s Left.

In the periphery, rock could be seen both as a product of and challenge to cultural imperialism. Anadolu Rock was powerful precisely because it occupied this grey area.

Within Turkey, scholarship on Anadolu Rock considers the Turkish case mostly in isolation not only from the U.S. but also from developments in countries like Mexico, Brazil, and Greece in a roughly comparable geopolitical position.¹⁰⁷ In the sixties Anadolu rockers produced a triumphalist narrative, still echoed by many who study the genre, that goes something like this: “We used to just copy Western hits, but now Turkish popular music has turned back to our own cultural wellsprings.” The problem with this story is that the same emphasis on localization, rural musical traditions, and returning to an authentic national self was strongly present in the very U.S. against which Turkish rockers, especially the anti-imperialist ones, defined themselves. Similarly, the conservatism of the nationalist/localizing reflex is not particular to Turkey—in the U.S. and elsewhere the folk revival movement’s emphasis on authenticity sometimes lapsed into proud parochialism.¹⁰⁸ By exploring

¹⁰⁷ See the work of Bengi, Dilmener, Erkal, Meriç, and Tireli. Daniel Spicer’s *Anadolu Psych* is the only book-length treatment of Anadolu Rock in English. However, Spicer, a British music critic for *The Wire*, does not appear to read Turkish and has very little to say about the historical backdrop of the Turkish sixties.

¹⁰⁸ As Greil Marcus shows in painstaking detail in *The Old, Weird America*, the vociferous and sometimes violent reaction against Bob Dylan’s ‘going electric’ in 1965-6 was based in a similar obsession with eliminating the inauthentic non-self. This ethos came out of the U.S. folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s, when musicians like Joan Baez or Pete Seeger and their fans discovered “purity [and a] glimpse of a democratic oasis unsullied by commerce or greed” in folk songs from the 1920s and 1930s (20). This idealization of ‘the people,’ this fantasy of an “organic community [that is] buttressed ... from the corrupt outside world,” can be profoundly conservative. In fact, the loudest jeremiads against cultural imperialism actually issued from the advanced capitalist countries themselves, as in Mantle Hood’s denunciation of rock (he called it “beatle music”) as an infestation rotting world musical culture (17). In 1972 ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax influentially drew on the language of

Turkish rock in a world context this chapter challenges established forms of exceptionalism.

What the global folk revival movements and their rock ‘n’ roll outgrowth reveal is that the national ‘self’ is always more mediated and composite than anyone prefers to let on. Greil Marcus’ description of the music lauded in the revival of folk traditions in the U.S. sixties can also stand as a description of the Anatolian folk music that inspired Anadolu Rock. Youth in both countries loved folk because they felt it to be

music that seemed the product of no ego but of the inherent genius of the people—the people—people one could embrace and, perhaps, become. It was the sound of another country—a country that, once glimpsed from afar, could be felt within oneself. (21)

On one level, this is the eminently portable rhetoric of Romantic nationalism. In its mid-twentieth-century iteration this idealized vision of the ‘people’ morphed into the left-populism of Joan Baez and the early Dylan (US), Violeta Parra (Chile), Mikis Theodorakis (Greece), and others. Given this globally renewed interest in all things folk in the sixties, Anadolu Rock represented less a heroic shirking of outside influence than the local absorption of an international wave that gave cultural producers everywhere express permission to ‘go back to themselves.’¹⁰⁹ The sixties was a fortuitous and short-lived moment where Turkish rockers could be ultra-hip, politically revolutionary, and nationally minded in a single gesture.

environmental devastation to assert that “cultural variety lies under threat of extinction. A gray-out is in progress which, if it continues unchecked, will fill our human skies with smog of the phony and cut the families of men off from a vision of their own cultural constellations.”

¹⁰⁹ See Denning on the “antinomies of folk revivals” across the world in *Noise Uprising* (220-227).

Anadolu Rock complicates the border between world and nation. As Pelin Gürel explains, “since no cultural formation is ever entirely foreign or fully local, we can only speak of ‘cycles of hybridization’ and indigenization” (4). Even so, various social forces in Turkey have established strategies and formed reflexes for policing the boundary of foreign and local and “determin[ing] the proper limits of westernization” (4-5). Attempting to “regulate foreign . . . influence” makes sense in an asymmetrical geopolitical situation (4-5). However, the most richly suggestive music of the sixties (as exemplified by Tülay German in the early days of Anadolu Pop, further developed Moğollar, and brought to the height of productive contradiction in Karaca and Selda) emerged out of a recognition of, or even a reveling in, the complexities of this worlded self in which foreign and local cease to be coherent and self-identical categories. To recognize the aspects of the self that are *other* does not mean capitulating to cultural or political domination. It is what the sixties counterculture called “love”—a force that, in the hands of cultural revolutionaries all over the world, was central to forging internationalist bonds of solidarity in the refusal of narrow certainties.

Urban Youth Discover the Peasantry

Selda’s song “Thin, Thin” illustrates the complex ideological underpinnings of Anadolu Rock’s combination of local folk culture, anti-imperialism, peasantist nationalism, and cultural revolution. After the opening lyrics describing the oppressive snow that falls on the rural poor, the hypnotic guitar riff returns with its

piercing distortion. Then the haunting voice continues, seeking through her song a
reprieve to unnecessary misery:

Some are in parliament, some are governors, education is forbidden to us
I can't stand your lying posture any more
We're doomed, doomed—schools for us, roads for us, a life for us
Don't do it, my lord, please, please, please, please, please, please!

Would it kill you if roads were built?
If schools were here, if life was found?
Please, please, please, please, please...

Your Istanbul is nothing like Urfa
Poor Maraş, parched Urfa, and what about Diyarbakır?
We're doomed, doomed, we're dead, dead, a drop of water
Don't do it, my lord, please

We're dead, we're dead, write a letter, don't do it, my lord
Please, please, please, please, please...

Would it kill you if land was given,
If humans loved, if you were to know yourself?¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ *Kimi mebus kimi vali, bize tahsil haramdır,
Dayanamam artık senin bu yalancı pozuna,
Yandık yandık bize okul, bize yol, bize hayat,
Etme ağam, n'olur, n'olur, n'olur, n'olur, n'olur n'olur.
Adam mı ölür yol yapılınca,
Okul olunca, hayat bulunca,
N'olur, n'olur, n'olur, n'olur n'olur...*

*İstanbul'un benzemiyor neden o Urfalara,
Yoksul Maraş, susuz Urfa, ya Diyarbakırların?
Yandık yandık, öldük öldük, bir yudum su,
Etme ağam, n'olur...*

*Öldük öldük, bir mektup yaz, yapma ağam,
N'olur, n'olur, n'olur, n'olur, n'olur n'olur...*

*Adam mı ölür toprak verince,
İnsan sevince, kendin bilince.
N'olur, n'olur, n'olur, n'olur n'olur...*

These desperate entreaties draw attention to disparities between urban and rural conditions, western and eastern Turkey. The speaker begs for the “life” represented by infrastructural investment in roads and schools to be brought to the east. She demands a new allocation of resources to remedy the underdevelopment of the hinterland. Anything less would be deception: the duplicitous politician posing for campaign photographs with poor villagers.

Yet the song’s final verse abandons the supplication of ruled to ruler to directly address the singer’s equals. No longer speaking from the depths of poverty to the heights of power, she appeals to her *gardaş*—a regional Anatolian pronunciation of the standard Turkish *kardeş* [sibling]:

You from you mother, me from my father, we weren’t born lords
Come let’s live together, don’t think I’m upset with you
I’m doomed, doomed, don’t be a stranger, don’t do it sibling [*gardaş*]
Please, please, please, please, please...¹¹¹

The poor may have walked separately in the past, they may have fallen on different sides of struggles, but by virtue of their humble birth they share something in common. So long as the poor are not strangers to each other, fate will have to take their word seriously. No longer will they have to beg the lord, or anyone else, for what they need to live.

Sung by Selda—a member of the educated urban middle class—and performed with all the generic cues of psychedelic rock (a musical current that was

¹¹¹ *Sen anandan ben babamdan ağa doğmadık dostum,
Gel beraber yaşayalım, sanma ki sana küstüm,
Yandım yandım, ayrı gezme, etme gardaş,
N’olur, n’olur, n’olur, n’olur, n’olur n’olur...*

associated with bands like Jefferson Airplane and Jimi Hendrix, having its heyday between the 1967 Summer of Love and the 1969 Woodstock Festival) *gardas* suggests that all who are not lords, whether in the cities or the villages of the nation, are siblings. In this way, by the song's end, an alliance of peasant-to-peasant, peasant-to-worker, and now peasant-to-student has been formed. Like the thin snow falling on the poor, these singular connections—made gradually, person to person, through the bonds of solidarity—eventually gather themselves into a force to be reckoned with.

“Thin, Thin” resonates with dominant sixties countercultural sentiments. The song's hyper-modern sound and its message of land, love, and consciousness could have issued just as easily from a hippy commune in California as a village in Anatolia. Selda does not just agitate for roads and schools to be brought to the countryside: she demands love. Would it really be such a disaster—literally, “would it kill a man”—she asks, “if land was given/if humans loved/If you were to know yourself?” The Turkish is ambiguous: “*kendin bilince*” [once/if you know yourself] can mean “to know for oneself” (to know what it is to love, for example) but also suggests the meaning “to know oneself.” Whether it is awareness of the existence of others or consciousness of the self, the line implies that exploitation cannot withstand the force of love. It is love, the song suggests, that awakens humans to the fact of their own existence and the existence of others.

Knowing more about the history of “Thin, Thin” brings further nuance to its message of love. Though Selda made “Thin, Thin” famous, like many Anadolu Rock songs, it is a cover. The original *türkü* [folk song ‘of the Turk’] was composed by

Aşık Mahzuni Şerif (1940-2002), a musician from the central Anatolian province of Kahramanmaraş who grew up in Berçenek, a village with no water or electricity that was dominated by a rich lord (Yağız 49). Mahzuni first recorded “Thin, Thin” in 1967 with only *bağlama* (a long-necked lute, the most common instrument in Turkish folk music) and vocals, drawing on the *aşık* (wandering minstrel) tradition which reaches back to medieval Anatolian and Caucasian musical itinerants who performed their bawdy, mystical, or political compositions for a living. Mahzuni’s “love” had nothing to do with the global counterculture but drew instead on Alevi mystical and philosophical traditions—an important source for *aşıks* past and present.¹¹² Alevis are a minority religious group that share certain beliefs with Shi’a Muslims (for example, following mystical teachings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad's nephew 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib) but they have their own heterodox mode of worship, in which music plays a central role. Alevis have long been often persecuted in Sunni-majority Anatolia for their non-standard practices (like women and men praying together and using worship spaces called *cemevis* instead of mosques). When Mahuzni began composing folk music, he chose the rebellious and mystical poet/saint Pir Sultan Abdal (ca. 1480–1550) as his “guide for action” [*eylem kılavuzu*] and a source for his “philosophy of thought” [*düşün felsefemi. . .*] (Yağız 12). The philosophy of love expressed in “Thin, Thin” gains significance in the context of an Alevi worldview that focuses on mutual

¹¹² On the Alevis (not to be confused with Alawites) see David Shankland’s *The Alevis in Turkey: The Emergence of a Secular Islamic Tradition*.

respect and oneness across division.¹¹³ In the sixties, this philosophy was politicized as many Alevi *aşıks* formed close ties to the socialist movement.¹¹⁴

While Mahzuni's emphasis on love and consciousness has this local provenance, it overlaps with global concepts of cultural revolution. "Thin, Thin" participates in the dominant sixties structure of feeling, not despite but *because* of its peripheral origin. It reverses the assumed directionality of influence from 'First World' to 'Third World.' While the sixties counterculture in the core capitalist countries was mining the intellectual and religious traditions of poorer countries for 'Eastern' philosophy, including Sufism and other forms of heterodox Islam (like the Rolling Stones in Morocco), a figure like Mahzuni could simply draw on established Anatolian traditions. In this way, "Thin, Thin" is not just an example of Turkish folk music that resembles the counterculture (while also demanding something as practical as infrastructural investment in roads or schools—something you would be hard-pressed to find in a 'first world' rock song). It is rather the counterculture that resembles Turkish folk music. Or else, we can refuse to give either side priority: the fact that parallel phenomena sprouted up all across the world in the same historical moment reinforces that the sixties was a truly world period.

¹¹³ For example, in one of his songs, Mahzuni expressed central Alevi tenets in the rhyme and syllabic meter typical of folk poetry:

I don't divide the value of human beings

East, West, infidel, Muslim—they're all the same to me. (20) [*insanın değerini bölemem / Doğu, batı, gavur müslim bir bana.*]

¹¹⁴ Musician Sadık Gürbüz recalls that "*aşıks* started touching on social topics in the [context of the] social movement, development, and retreat; they got organized" [*Aşıklar, o toplumsal devinimle, gelişimle, gerilmeye sosyal konulara yöneldiler, örgütlendiler*] (272). Left-wing unions were particularly important as a catalyst. *Aşıks* often performed at their cultural events and benefit concerts.

As we have seen, the influence of the ‘Third World’ was a shared factor across otherwise disparate sixties movements. But while young people all over the world became captivated and inspired by events unfolding in Algeria, Cuba, and Vietnam, Turkish students discovered the ‘Third World’ located in the hinterland of their own country. Adapting an insight of Nurdan Gürbilek’s, this new-found interest in the peasantry parallels the U.S. Left’s ‘discovery’ of the “women, Black people, homosexuals and marginalinalized—the internally repressed” [*kendi içinde bastırıldığını, kadınları, siyahları, eşcinsellier, marjinalleri...*] (106).¹¹⁵ This quality of ‘discovery’ is another thing that separates Mahzuni’s original version of “Thin, Thin” from Selda’s cover. Whereas the lyrics Mahzuni sang expressed a *lived* reality of poverty, Selda’s appropriation of the same words narrates a process of political awakening. What is happening to the rest of the country? What about those who have been left behind? How can we act in solidarity with those most exploited? These were exactly the questions Selda—like other young people in Istanbul, Ankara, and other western cities—began asking about the Turkish countryside in this period. The deeper they dug into the history of Anatolia, the more surprised they were about what their school textbooks had left out.

Learning about Anatolia was a radicalizing experience for many urban youth:

¹¹⁵ Gürbilek builds on Jameson’s description of the “3rd world origins” of the world sixties to argue that in the 1980s urban elite in Istanbul and Ankara “were forced to discover its own periphery, its own ‘third world,’ its own ‘natives’ . . . the Kurds” as well as other “alt-cultures” outside of the Kemalist, westernizing pale (105-6) [*Türkiye bu dönemde öncelikle kendi perifersini, kendi ‘üçüncü dünya’sını, kendi ‘yerliler’ini, merkezin dışına ittiği, taşralaştırdığı dünyayı -Kürtleri- keşfetmek zorunda kaldı*]. Though Leftists only fully woke up to the ethnic/minority dimension of the country’s internal ‘third world’ after the sixties, I want to argue that the process actually began then.

As young teaching assistants in various universities, as lecturers, we're concentrating our research on the social structure. In the name of strengthening the revolutionary theses that we defend we are not daunted by combing through documents and land registers in search of data; for the sake of research we would cross Anatolia from East to West. Some of us were at Istanbul University, some of us in Ankara, Erzurum, Trabzon. We would board those long-nosed Anatolian busses we liked to call "faith in God" and travel thousands of kilometers to meet and debate our research [. . .]. The cotton fields of Söke and Çukurova, the coastal villages of the Black Sea, hazelnut farms, tobacco fields, mountains, plateaus; southeastern villages forgotten by everything but the smack of the gendarme and the cruelty of feudal lords; mines, factories, workshops: these were the fields in which we worked. Our lives, youth, hopes are all tied to the fate of the country; they flow together with Turkey. (Baydar 29)¹¹⁶

These academic forays into the countryside strengthened the connections between urban youth and villagers: out of this interchange peasant activism, land occupations, agricultural cooperatives, "producer meetings," and guerrilla movements blossomed.¹¹⁷ Together students and peasants demanded a system that went beyond paying lip service to the peasantry to provide them with the conditions to flourish.

These journeys into the countryside for research and revolution were mirrored in the

¹¹⁶ *Çeşitli üniversitelerin genç asistanları, doçentleri, sosyal yapı araştırmalarına yoğunlaşıyoruz. Savunduğumuz devrimci tezini güçlendirecek bilimsel veriler peşinde arşivleri, belgeleri, tapu kayıtlarını taramaya üşenmiyor, araştırma için Doğu'dan Batı'ya Anadolu'yu arşınlıyoruz. Kimimiz İstanbul Üniversitesi'ndeyiz, kimimiz Ankara'da, Erzurum'da, Trabzon'da. 'Allaha Emanet' adını verdiğimiz, burunlu Anadolu otobüsleriyle yüzlerce kilometre yol gidip buluşuyor, araştırmalarımızı, vardığımız sonuçları, devrim tezlerini tartışıyoruz. Söke'nin, Çukurova'nın pamuk tarlaları, Karadeniz'in sahil köyleri, fındık bahçeleri, tütün tarlaları, dağları, yaylaları; Güneydoğu'nun jandarma dayacağı ve ağa zulmünden başka kimsenin hatırlamadığı unutulmuş köyleri, ve madenler, ve fabrikalar, ve atölyeler çalışma alanımız. Yaşamlarımız, gençliğimiz, umutlarımız, ülkenin kaderine bağlanmış, Türkiye ile birlikte akıyor.*

¹¹⁷ Students were key in the spreading of radical politics to rural areas. In 1967, for example, the national student organization Idea Clubs Federation [Fikir Kulüpleri Federasyonu] worked with the Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP) to hold the famous "Eastern Meetings" in the mostly Kurdish cities of Diyarbakır, Batman, and Dersim to agitate for the needs of farmers. In 1970 alone there were close to 100 protests by agricultural producers in various regions (Mater 52). See Çubukçu (74-5) for descriptions of the growing influence of Left-wing student organizations in villages in the late 1960s. As the peasant movement became more radical between 1967 and 1971 students became increasingly involved in protests and marches against large landlords or *ağas* (Yaraşır 540). On guerrilla currents and armed struggle in Turkey see Aydınöğlü (243-244, 299-320).

cultural realm by urban musicians visiting provincial towns and villages to collect folk songs, acquire regional instruments, and hold concerts in which they often shared the stage with folk musicians like Mahzuni. Just as the countryside was seen by radicals as a hotbed for revolutionary activity, rockers viewed Anatolia as a space of musical inspiration. In other words, Anadolu Rock enacted musically the same cross-class, rural-urban alliance that student activists from Turkish cities enacted politically when they sent themselves down to eastern cities to make connections with peasants.

Turkish nationalism had long been invested in the idea of the peasant. “Populism” [*halkçılık*] (based on a corporatist model of a united, classless society separated only by profession) was one of the six arrows¹¹⁸ of Turkey’s founding Republican People’s Party (CHP) and enshrined in the constitution. Peasants were central to the populist project because of their numbers—even into the 1980s Turkey’s population was majority rural (Yıldırımaz 46). Despite the focus on the peasantry in official rhetoric, peasants themselves fared less well in the early Republic. The Turkish state’s peasantist discourse was designed to forestall potential social movements and keep peasants on the land, thereby avoiding the social unrest that mass proletarianization might cause (136). “For the people, despite the people” [*halka rağmen, halk için*] sums up its ideology (49). Yet the principle kept open

¹¹⁸ The six arrows are populism, laicism [*laiklik*], and transformationism [*inkılapçılık*], nationalism [*milliyetçilik*], statism [*devletçilik*], and republicanism [*cumhuriyetçilik*]. For a description of these principles see Davidson and Parla (54). The Kemalist form of populism asserted either that social classes did not exist in Turkey, or that there was no conflict between them (65). Davidson and Parla describe Kemalism as having an “authoritarian corporatist ideological core” (10) that stressed “unity, harmony, and efficiency across differently situated, functional spheres of industrial society” (30).

discursive space for sixties radicals to re-interpret populism as justification for radical social movement (64).¹¹⁹

Peasants were also important for cultural policy. Turkey's state-builders saw rural traditions as the 'pure' repository of the nation. For Kemalism, the best way to be both 'Western' and 'ourselves' was combining these traditions with European/North American forms and technologies. In uniting folk and rock, Anadolu rockers were fulfilling the dream of Kemalist cultural modernization. By treating Anatolian musical traditions as the vanguard of cultural creativity (and later, political radicalism) musicians were radicalizing the unrealized early Republican slogan that "the peasant is the lord of the nation" [*köylü milletin efendisidir*]. Selda followed other young musicians from the cities who took peasant musicians like Aşık Mahzuni as their elders and guides. They came to sit at their feet like apprentices before taking on the rural struggle as their own. Radicalizing the official heroization of the peasantry, urban youth revealed the limitations of the state's approach of putting the peasantry first in word alone.

It is not surprising that in Turkey, that "peasant stronghold" of Europe (Hobsbawm 289), the countryside figured larger than life in both the cultural

¹¹⁹ Taha and Parla argue that Leftist have long "have mistaken etatism for socialism" in Turkey, though what the principle meant in practice was "support for capitalist relations under the tutelage of the state" (128). See Atılğan and Koçak for the relationship of Kemalism and the Left. Ulus discusses the Turkish Left's relationship to the Kemalist military through the influential National Democratic Revolution [*Milli Demokratik Devrim*] tendency (32). NDR's main ideologue, Doğan Avcıoğlu, considered underdevelopment the biggest problem plaguing Turkey and thought that the solution was socialist revolution led by an alliance of intellectuals, Leftist officers, and the radical bourgeoisie—not the working class or peasantry. In a combination reminiscent of strands of "Third World Marxism" in Vietnam, China or Cambodia, NDR advocated anti-imperialist struggle that set national autonomy and economic development as its main goals while reproducing elitist views of the 'people' (93).

production and the politics of the sixties.¹²⁰ Ironically, the peasantry became central to the national imagination at the exact time that it began its slow march towards political semi-irrelevance. The decade between 1960 and 1970, exactly the years in which Anadolu Rock developed, saw the urban population grow by five million to reach 39% of the total mainly due to internal migration from the countryside (Keyder 49). Already in the 1950s former peasants had begun filling shantytowns on the periphery of Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir, thereby transforming the character and demography of Turkey's major cities, which by the end of the decade were growing in population by 10% every year (Zürcher 226).

If the peasant had always been a key brick in the Turkish state's wall of political legitimacy, in the sixties peasants were speaking *for* themselves rather than letting the state speak for them.¹²¹ Faced with greater mobility and access to information, even their compatriots who stayed on the land became more politically assertive in this period, forging connections with young radicals who found their way to the mountains and steppes of Anatolia in search of a new revolutionary subject. In an ironic way, official nationalism fueled radicalization. Because the Turkish state was built on populist discourse regarding the peasantry, both radicals and rockers felt justified in turning their gaze to rural Anatolia. What could be more patriotic than expressing interest in the cultural traditions and lives of the peasantry, that repository

¹²⁰ It was not just in music that rural themes became dominant. Literary works like Kemal Bilbaşar's 1966 "village novel" *Cemo*, or the highly influential film *Dry Summer* [Sussuz Yaz] (Metin Erksan, 1967) were transforming feudalism and rural suffering into hot-button issues in the cities (Karaömerlioğlu 226).

¹²¹ Aydınöglü characterizes 1960-1980 as a period when workers, peasants, and regular people were first able to become political beings in Turkey (1).

of the people's genius? Musicians began incorporating folk music into rock in the mid-1960s as a way to express national mindedness. By the late-1960s Anadolu Rock became an expression of peasant-based revolutionary strategy. Using state ideology against itself, sixties rockers composed songs to decry rural poverty, exploitation, and underdevelopment while radicals organized on the ground against these same ills.

Yet even when Anadolu Rock took on explicitly anti-imperialist or revolutionary lyrical content this musical synthesis still had a nationalist substrate. In the same way that the sixties Turkish Left remained committed to a vision of Kemalism as revolutionary, thereby reproducing various nationalist assumptions, so too most Anadolu Rock music remained firmly wedded to nationalism—especially in the genre's most politically radical iterations. The more Leftists tried to crawl their way out of nationalism to reach more revolutionary terrain, the deeper they sunk into its rhetorical quicksand.

The Origins of Anadolu Rock: A Peasant Woman's Revolt

In 1964 a chic and talented young jazz singer named Tülay German surprised listeners by adding a Turkish folk song to her repertoire. "Burçak Tarlası" [The Bitter Vetch Field], named after an ancient Anatolian crop, is an anonymous song narrated by a peasant woman harvesting in the fields. As she gathers the vetch she rails against the injustice of the feudal lord. Tülay German took this song's traditional lyrics and melody, updated the instrumentation, producing a swanky version complete with piano, electric guitar, and saxophone. Before long, other popular re-interpretations of Turkish folk songs took root—the first green shoots of a new musical genre.

The song narrates the sufferings of a young bride newly ensconced in her husband's household:

I woke up in the morning to the sound of the call to prayer
It's not the sound of the call to prayer, it is the mourning of vetch picking, my dear
Look at that man, how many fields he has

[Chorus] Oh girls, how hard it is to tear up vetch,
And to be a bride in the vetch field, my dear
Don't tip your hat to me, or I'll get up and leave you, my dear
I'll raze your house to the ground and leave, my dear

I woke up in the morning and I boiled some milk.
My milk bubbled over onto the floor, my dear
I lost my mind in the vetch field

I swung my hand and it touched a thorn,
I cursed whoever planted the vetch, my dear
Oh, mother-in-law, may your life be cut short¹²²

A young woman is working in a village harvesting vetch. She wakes up at first light to work in the fields, like she does every day. The work is so exhausting that even simple household tasks have become a challenge. Not only her body but her mind is taxed by this routine. The arduous work of picking vetch in the hot fields is made

¹²² *Sabahtan kalktım ki ezan sesi var,
Ezan da sesi değil yar yar, burçak yası var.
Bakın şu adamın kaç tarlası var.*

*Aman da kızlar ne zor imiş burçak yolması
Burçak tarlasında yar yar gelin de olması.
Eğdirme fesini yar yar, kalkar da giderim
Evini başına yar yar yıkar da giderim.*

*Sabahtan kalktım da sütü pişirdim
Sütün de köpüğünü yar yar, yere taşırdım
Burçak tarlasında aklımı şaşırdım*

*Elimi salladım değdi dikene
İntizar eyledim yar yar, burçak ekene.
İlahi kaynana, ömrün tükene.*

even more unbearable by the presence of a man: “that man” who owns not only the field she works in but many others besides. As she strains to yank the vetch out of the ground, he tips his hat [*fez*] at her in a suggestive manner. Bubbling over with rage just like the milk she forgets on the stove, the woman yells at the landlord. Despite the indication that he is wealthy and powerful, she threatens violence against both his property and his person. Not content only with this, the young bride curses her husband’s mother and, for good measure, the hands of whoever first decided to cultivate this crop. Vetch has given her life nothing but bitterness.¹²³

Despite the strongly rural context and themes of the song (I’ll return to the lyrics shortly), it was performed in a jazz style with overtones from Latin music. Though there had been previous scattered attempts to perform Turkish folk songs in a Western style, “Bitter Vetch” represented the first successful “re-interpretation of local melodies with Western instruments” [*Yerli melodileri Batı sazlarla yeniden yorumlama*], as music critic Murat Meriç defines Anadolu Rock (37).

Yet it would take until 1970 for this genre to receive its name. Giving an interview with the press after a concert tour through the Anatolian countryside, the disheveled but smiling members of the band Moğollar dubbed their music “Anadolu Pop.” (Before 1970, this genre was known as “light Western music” [*hafif Batı*

¹²³ Bitter vetch (*Vicia ervilia*) is a Mediterranean legume. It has been an important crop since the Neolithic period. Vetch is quite versatile in that it can be grown even in shallow soil. However, because of the plant’s bitter taste it must be repeatedly boiled before it is edible. Already by the twentieth century vetch was being used mostly as animal fodder. Only the very poor, a category which presumably includes the singing persona of “Burçak Tarlası,” would resort to eating it (Hopf et al, 116).

müziği]. Only later, in accordance with our notions of pop and rock as opposing currents, did the music come to be known as Anadolu Rock.)

Initially “Bitter Vetch” polarized audiences. Listeners who had come to expect covers of Ella Fitzgerald and other jazz luminaries reacted hostilely to the inclusion of this peasant music in their swanky nightclubs. Even as Kemalism vaunted folk music as an expression of Turkishness, urban elites looked down on *türkü* as uncouth. As Doğan Canku, a member of the Peter, Paul and Mary-esque group Modern Folk Üçlüsü [Modern Folk Trio] memorably put it:

In our youth we would pooh-pooh the *bağlama* whenever it was mentioned. It was seen as the musical instrument of the low, plebeian classes. Same goes for *türkü*. ‘Let Anatolia listen to that. We listen to Elvis Presley, man!’” (180)¹²⁴

This attitude stemmed from garden-variety urban elitism but is also representative of a more specific legacy of Turkish musical modernization, to which I will briefly turn.

What is traditionally called ‘Turkish music’ is based on three intertwined traditions: folk music, urban/palace art music [*sanat müziği*], and western music. Anatolian folk music describes a variety of distinct regional traditions and genres: the songs of minstrels (*aşıks*), Aegean warrior dances, mystical hymns, Eastern Anatolian story-songs, crowd-rousing Thracian wedding music, and so on. What these traditions share is their distance from the urban centers and their proximity to folk literature. Turkish folk music developed in relation to folk literature figures like thirteenth-century Sufi poet Yunus Emre and the nature-loving, seventeenth-century *aşık*

¹²⁴ *Bizim gençliğimizde, bağlama dendiği zaman ‘tu kaka’ denirdi. Aşağılık, avam tabakasının enstrümanı diye bilinirdi, bağlama. Türküler dediğin zaman da öyleydi. ‘Anadolu dinlesin onu, biz Elvis Presley dinleriz abi!’*

Karacaođlan. Opposed to these folk traditions is the music of the Ottoman court and dervish lodges of Istanbul. A close relative to Arabic and Persian musical traditions, Ottoman classical music makes use of complex modal (*makam*) and rhythmic (*usul*) systems. Dede Efendi (1778-1846) is considered one of the great composers of Ottoman art music.

These two traditions, folk and urban music, dominated Turkish music until the introduction of western music. In 1828 the modernizing sultan Mahmut II invited Giuseppe Donizetti (1788-1856) to Istanbul by to reform Ottoman military music. Over three decades Giuseppe Pařa trained European-style military bands and helped spread Italian opera in Istanbul. Musicologists identify his arrival as a major turning point in the introduction of polyphonic music to the Ottoman Empire (İlyasođlu 70). From the late nineteenth century onward, Istanbul's residents welcomed a series of Westernized genres. Brass bands, operetta, *kanto*, waltz, tango, rumba, samba, calypso, and, of course, jazz all took the city by storm, existing alongside (but mostly isolated from) the older folk and courtly traditions.

With the formation of the Turkish Republic, official musical policy was transformed. Building on the ideas of Turkist ideologue Ziya Gokalp (1876-1924), the reforming Kemalist state considered Ottoman and Sufi music eastern and 'decadent.' In 1934 the *alaturka* genre was even temporarily banned from radio and concert venues (37). In 1930 Mustafa Kemal Atatürk explained to a journalist that this music was made up of "residues from the Byzantines. Our real music can only be heard among Anatolian people" (Erol 45). Yet Mustafa Kemal himself was a

connoisseur of art music in his private life. And many continued to listen to modern adaptations of this forlorn and urbane musical genre so suited to the gathering of friends at a *rakı* table.

Turkish folk music, like the concept of Turkishness itself, was a recent invention. Around the time of the disastrous First Balkan War (1912-1913), some Ottoman thinkers sought their national salvation in imported textual sources about ‘the Turks’ by European Orientalists. After the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the work of French and German ethnographers inspired Turkish folklore studies (Fossum 89). In 1936 Hungarian composer Bela Bartok was invited to Turkey to conduct song-collecting expeditions in the Anatolian countryside. The notions and the methodological skills he imparted were crucial in developing an official state archive of folk songs (Erol 42).¹²⁵ If what these expeditions discovered in the countryside was “pure and uncontaminated ‘Turkish’ culture,” this is because, as musicologist Martin Stokes remarks, the idea of a pure culture “had been decided in advance as the organizing and legitimizing myth of the Turkish state” (51). As a result of these state efforts, Turkish folk music became homogeneous and mono-ethnic in a way

¹²⁵ To create a monolithic folk culture out of Anatolian diversity meant discarding anything did not fit the organizational frame. Songs did not make it into the catalog if they were overly regional in sound, performed in languages other than Turkish, contained references to non-mainstream religious beliefs, or used rare or obscure instruments. Or else they were adapted: Stokes gives the example of a song whose meaning was so mangled by the effort to remove foreign ‘loan words’ that it resulted in the singer boarding a boat in Samsun (on the Black Sea) to arrive in Iğdır (land-locked in Anatolia) (66). Other songs were Turkified, like the still-canonical “Sarı Gelin” [Yellow Bride]—a curious title clarified by the fact that *sari* is an Armenian word meaning “from the mountains” (BGST 319). The songs that made it through this process of assimilation were housed in the state folklore archives. From 1964 to 1990, when the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT, Turkey’s single media outlet) ruled the airwaves, it was nearly impossible to play a folk song on air that was not housed in the state repertoire (Fossum 134).

unreflective of realities on the ground (Skoog 61). And so, when Anadolu Rockers set out to discover their ‘roots’ and create music grounded in the local geography, this nationalist repertoire was their first influence. Gazing into the mirror of the folk ‘tradition,’ the face they saw was one shaped especially for them.

The new Republic also supported European classical music. If folk music symbolized nationalism, Mozart and Beethoven stood for modernization. The state opened conservatories and founded symphony orchestras. Less officially, urban elites listened to lighter Western genres: the famous balls of the early Republic featured tangos and waltzes. Jazz came in the 1920s, becoming popular in the 1940s and 1950s (Erkal 22). Some musicians who went on to be involved in Anadolu Rock had cut their teeth playing in one of the many jazz orchestras that were in high demand for social occasions. This firm rooting of a genre from abroad in the local scene helped lead the way for the first Turkish rock ‘n’ roll group in 1957. Barış Manço, whose band Harmoniler released the first 45 of this new genre in 1962 with *Twistin’ U.S.A. / The Jet*, remembers of this early “apprenticeship” period: “[W]e didn’t produce anything ourselves . . . Whatever Elvis Presley sang is what I would sing” (Ok 249).¹²⁶ Until the mid-1960s these rock groups sang almost exclusively in English, covering popular hits from abroad like “Rock Around the Clock” or “House of the Rising Sun.”

¹²⁶ *Çıraklık döneminde herkesin yaptığı gibi o zaman kendi ürettiğimiz müzik zaten yok . . . Elvis Presley ne söylüyorsa ben de onu söyledim.*

The new culture of urban popular music had its sonic expression in a genre called *aranjman*, a phonetic spelling of the musical term “*arrangement*.” Instead of note-for-note, word-for-word replication of jazz or rock hits, Turkish musicians now began to produce versions of these songs with Turkish lyrics. The song that launched a thousand *aranjman* was İlham Gencer’s “Once Upon a Time” [Bak Bir Varmış Bir Yokmuş] (1961), a re-writing of Bob Azzam’s 1960 hit “C'est Ecrit Dans Le Ciel” with new lyrics about a Bosphorus love story. Throughout the sixties musicians would compete to produce quick versions of European hits for the domestic market as a kind of import-substitution (Dilmener 40-43). The genre was crucial in getting urban, elite audiences to accept Turkish-language lyrics in popular music.

And so, by the time of “The Bitter Vetch Field” in 1964 the situation was roughly as follows: A single, national folk music tradition had been created out of various regional and generic strands, though city dwellers did not care for it. Ottoman art music had fallen out of official favor, though many still indulged privately. Classical western music enjoyed state sponsorship, but light Western music (tango, jazz, and—slowly but surely—rock ‘n’ roll) with foreign-language or, increasingly, Turkish lyrics was at the center of urban culture. It was in this context that German’s adaptation of “Bitter Vetch” united western popular music and Turkish folk in one bold gesture. Though performed in a jazz style, the song would pave the way for the eventual meeting of Turkish rock with musical traditions from the countryside.

How did one of Istanbul’s most promising young singers risk her budding fame by performing peasant songs about harvesting crops for the elegantly dressed

audiences in Istanbul and Ankara’s nightclubs? German credits left-wing jazz innovator Erdem Buri (1925-1993) with inspiring her to work with folk music. Buri’s Istanbul home was a hub for musicians, artists, and intellectuals. During one of these soirées in 1962 Buri pressed German on why she performed songs by Ella Fitzgerald and Nat King Cole: “You’re a Turk! Why don’t you sing the music of your own people in your own language?” (357).¹²⁷ German took this advice to heart and together they explored ways to adapt their ‘own’ tradition to a popular, jazz-inspired format. By 1963 German’s conversion had transformed her nightclub performances. In September 1964, when Turkey sent its National Orchestra [Milli Orkestra], including German, to compete at the Balkan Melodies Festival in Belgrade, “The Bitter Vetch Field” was an enormous hit. The audience was so enthusiastic that rumors filtered back home to Turkey that the National Orchestra had won first place. Back in Istanbul they were given a hero’s welcome. The awaited moment had arrived. Erdem and Buri immediately set to work.

The 1964 single *Burçak Tarlası / Mecnunum Leylâmı Gördüm* [The Bitter Vetch Field / I’m Majnun and I’ve Seen My Leyla] featured two Turkish folk songs (in fact, the second was based on a twelfth-century Persian romance). The Doruk Onatkut Orkestrası successfully preserved the melodic structure of the original songs while making them legible as jazz. Erdem Buri wrote a note to listeners printed on the back sleeve of the record inaugurating a new current of music:

Those who are working towards the birth of Turkish Popular Music are trying to realize it on two fronts: One is to arrange folk songs—without at all

¹²⁷ *Türk’sün! Neden kendi halkının müziğini, kendi dilinde söylemiyorsun?*

destroying the melody and rhythmic structure of the *türkü*s—within popular musical forms. The other is to write new pieces that try to explain Turkish realities. (Meriç 1960'lı, 990)¹²⁸

This German-Doruk Onatkut Orkestrası collaboration was certainly successful on the first front. “Bitter Vetch” combined *bağlama* with guitar. A slow, unmeasured opening featuring haunting vocal harmonies gives way to a jaunty 2/4 rhythm complete with cowbell and saxophone flourishes between verses. This faithful reinterpretation of a folk song with Western instruments was popular not only in Turkey’s cities but in the countryside as well. At least for three and a half minutes, the contradiction between city and country was suspended.

“Bitter Vetch” was a perfect embodiment of Buri’s Left-wing program of “explain[ing] Turkish realities.” German’s version utilized the lyrics of a traditional folk song to articulate and decry conditions in the country. The rebelliousness and innate class consciousness of “Bitter Vetch” is even more palpable in the non-bowdlerized lyrics. When German was recording the song, the owner of the record company Ezgi Plâkları pushed her to change certain words from the original *türkü*. German explains in her memoirs:

“Tülay dear, please don’t say “Look how many fields that pimp [*deyyus*] has” but say instead, “Look how many fields that man has.” Also, wouldn’t it be better to say “Oh, mother-in-law, may your life be cut short” instead of “Oh, gendarme [*zaptiye*], may your life be cut short”?”¹²⁹ (German *Düşmemiş* 107)

¹²⁸ *Türk Popüler Müziğinin doğmasına çalışanlar işi iki yönden gerçekleştirmek istiyorlar: Biri halk türkülerini -türkünün melodi ve ritim yapısını hiç bozmadan- popüler müzik biçimleri içinde düzenlemek, öbürü de Türk gerçeklerini anlatmağa çalışan yeni parçalar yasmak.*

¹²⁹ 'Tülaycığım ne olur, 'BAKIN ŞU DEYYUSUN KAÇ TARLASI VAR' deme de, 'BAKIN ŞU ADAMIN KAÇ TARLASI VAR' de. Bir de, 'İLAHİ ZAPTİYE ÖMRÜN TÜKENE' yerine, 'İLAHİ KAYNANA ÖMRÜN TÜKENE' desen daha iyi olmaz mı?

In the original lyrics, the singer's husband has been conscripted into military duty by the gendarme. In his absence, she is subject to sexual harassment by the large landowner. In this version, her suffering is simultaneously personal and systemic: a product of property relations, patriarchal oppression, and state power. Trapped by the forces arrayed against her, the young bride fantasizes burning it all down. The first Anadolu Rock song was not only political but feminist.

German's choice of song about an *ağa* also helps explain the song's appeal for the Turkish Left. *Ağa* comes from a Persian word meaning "lord" or "sir." It can also be used as an honorific to describe an important person. In the rural context *ağa* can designate a landowner or other notable. With the boom in Turkish "village novels" in the 1950s, *ağa* was most often used to mean "feudal lord." The novels of Yaşar Kemal, for example, are full of heroic peasants (like the Robin Hood-style-bandit in the 1955 work *İnce Memed* [Memed, My Hawk]) coming head to head with dastardly feudal lords. Left-wing sociology of the period was equally obsessed with the figure of the *ağa*. Committed academics conducted research in rural Turkey to establish the existence of so-called 'feudal remnants' in rural society. Their goal was to understand the social structure in order to stamp out feudalism, thereby moving the country one stage closer to socialism. The figure of the *ağa*, the fez-wearing man in the song, becomes a clear stand-in for pre-capitalist oppression when re-purposed in German's 1964 version. The song performs a class and gender analysis of a peasant-majority society.

Though this political subtext is unmistakable, “Bitter Vetch” was a popular song. The record sold well and was touted by the press. However, for those urban youth exposed to only the official take on folk music, if at all, German’s project came as a revelation. There was a danger to this music—and it was not only those sympathetic to the cause who could feel it. Performing live, German used the original lyrics, stressing the word “pimp” [*deyyus*] as loudly as she could. During one nightclub performance a man took out a pistol and shouted: “Because of this whore our fields are going to be taken from us” [*Bu o...nun yüzünden tarlalarımız elimizden gidecek!*] (362). The misogyny and class panic of this reaction reveal, in negative, exactly what cultural work was performed by this song.

It was no accident that the first recognizably Anadolu Pop song emerged out of a strongly Left-wing context. Buri and German were strongly involved with *Türkiye İşçi Partisi* (TİP), the Workers Party of Turkey. Intellectuals were drawn to TİP for its promise of social justice and equality: “Land to the peasants, work for all” [*Köylüye toprak, herkese iş*] was its popular slogan. But the party also had an aesthetic dimension to its politics, being strongly invested in art and culture.¹³⁰ TİP’s 1965 campaign song was another Buri-German collaboration. Of this period German recalled: “I was swimming in cultural richness. In TİP workers and intellectuals were shoulder to shoulder [. . .] In my songs there was a longing for a happy tomorrow. I

¹³⁰ See the Chapter One for the significance of TİP in the context of the Turkish sixties. Yaşar Kemal, satirical writer Aziz Nesin, poets Can Yücel and Edip Cansever, and novelist Orhan Kemal were also members or supporters of TİP.

was full of hope. We were full of hope (358).¹³¹ Many Leftists felt that art had a role to play in revolution.¹³²

One critically important member of this mid-1960s cultural-political scene was musician Ruhi Su (1912-1985). Su took on Buri as a student. This tutoring was a major factor in Buri's vision of "Turkish Popular Music." Su was also a close friend and mentor to German, and a major inspiration for many of the subsequent generation of Anadolu Rock musicians, though he began his eventful life in a manner as distant as imaginable from the environment of nightclub socialists in Istanbul. Born a poor orphan (most likely of Armenian origin) from eastern Turkey, he graduated from the opera department of State Conservatory in 1942. In a poignant symbol for the larger project of Kemalist modernization, the poor shepherd had become an opera singer. Throughout the 1940s Su performed in the State Opera and hosted a program on *türkü* and folk music, his great passion, for state radio. In 1951 he was arrested in a major operation against suspected members of the Türkiye Komünist Partisi. When Su was released in 1957 he was banned from state employment and began performing in Istanbul nightclubs to make ends meet. In the relatively relaxed political environment following the 1960 coup, he could again sing on the radio and document folk songs in

¹³¹ *Kültür zenginliği içinde yüzyordum. İşçi ile aydının el ele verdiği TİP, on beş milletvekili çıkararak meclise girecekti. Mutlu bir yarının özlemi şarkılarımdaydı. Umut doluydum. Umut doluyduk.*

¹³² This mingling of culture and politics even carried into Istanbul's nightlife. Buri opened up a nightclub in the swanky district of Şişli that catered to the Left-wing scene. On any given night at his venue As Kulüp one could spot Buri's aunt Suat Derviş (a feminist novelist) and her husband Reşat Fuat Baraner (an old Turkish Communist Party member), Behice Boran and Mehmet Ali Aybar from TİP, playwright Haldun Tander, Kurdish actor/director Yılmaz Güney, and soon-to-be Anadolu Rocker Cem Karaca (34; 360). Even the chanteuse Ajda Pekkan and art music legend Zeki Müren could be spotted. A percentage of As Kulüp's revenue was donated to TİP. Despite the venue's elite appearance no one was turned away for lack of funds, making it more inclusive than many of the stylish spots of the period.

Anatolia. Su continued performing commercially, however, and met Buri and then German thanks to the entertainment circuit.

The politicization of folk songs exemplified by “The Bitter Vetch Field” was a strategy theorized by Su and passed onto his students. Adapting traditional songs was one of the main tactics used by radical rockers. How can you make popular songs about local realities that will not be immediately censored as communist propaganda? Let the ‘people’ speak through you. By putting on the mask of an unknown or long-dead peasant, one could appear patriotic while commenting allegorically on the present—without putting oneself in (too much) danger.

Su laid out the thinking behind this method in “Türkülerimiz” [Our Folk Songs], an article published under a pseudonym in 1949, where he argues that “it [is] possible to understand the situation of a people through their folk songs,” which is the true purpose of folk music for Leftists like Su:

Aren’t these the stories of whole communities who [others] attempt to kill en masse and destroy told by these *türküis*? Isn’t the alienation and suffering of the millions of nationless, homeless people who have been traveling from one end of the country to the other for ages told by these *türküis*? Seeing as these *türküis* are so dreary [*hazin*], this must mean that the living conditions of the people are so dreary as to be unbearable. (48)

For Su, folk songs are an expression of the real struggles of a society. Disaster, poverty, sickness, injustice, death: all of this is present in the musical tradition because it is present in the world. Su’s theory of folk music influenced not just German, but later Cem Karaca and Selda. The communist musician’s role in the creation and development of Anadolu Rock cannot be overestimated. German, Buri, and Su’s efforts transformed Turkish music. Soon musicians were composing original

songs or cover the work of living *aşıks*. Whereas the earliest Anadolu Pop bands in 1965 and 1966 simply adapted folk songs to rock instrumentation, bands like Moğollar started going in more creative directions. And feeding off the emboldening energies of the ascendant Turkish student movements, Karaca wrote revolutionary anthems designed to rouse large audiences.

The influence of “The Bitter Vetch Field” can be summarized by two key concepts: *localization*—the incorporation of genre cues, techniques, and themes from local folk music into pop music—and *politicization*, the uniting of a popular/countercultural musical form with (implicit or explicit) Left-wing politics. Localization came first. As I will show in more detail the next section, bringing Western popular music and Turkish folk together was in concert with official state ideology. For this reason, Anadolu Rock initially enjoyed the support of some powerful institutions in Turkish society. However, as the aesthetic of localization developed, politicization started to sneak back in. So, while Anadolu Rock developed with semi-official patronage, before long it would be activating that formal combination of folk and pop in the name of a revolutionary message.

Moğollar: The Youth Discover Nature, and Themselves

After the success of “Bitter Vetch” and its imitators, the major daily newspaper *Hürriyet* [Freedom] decided to capitalize on and encourage this inchoate trend in Turkish music. From 1965 to 1968 *Hürriyet* hosted the Golden Microphone Prize Competition [*Altın Mikrofon Armağanı Yarışması*], which transformed Turkish music, uniting Turkish folk music and global pop into a coherent movement. The

Golden Microphone and other copy-cat competitions made household names of many of the musical artists (Edip Akbayram, Fikret Kızılok, Mavi Işıklar) who would dominate the late 1960s and 1970s. Most importantly for us, this is where Moğollar got their start.¹³³

Why would one of Turkey's major newspapers decide to take an active role in shaping the local musical scene? The initial call for musicians to participate in the contest clarified its goals: "To give a new direction to Turkish music by taking advantage of the rich techniques and forms of Western music" [*Batı müziğinin zengin teknik ve şekillerinden fayadalanılarak, yine Batı müziği aletleriyle çalınmak suretiyle Türk musikisine yeni bir yön vermek*] (Bengi 17, "60'lı"). The goal of the Golden Microphone was to incorporate the "rich *techniques* and *forms* of Western music" (emphasis mine) while staying true to local traditions. This terminology makes the nationalist ideological content of the project unmistakable. It draws on a specific discourse of modernization in circulation from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth. Like other reforming intellectuals and statesmen, Ziya Gökalp thought the Ottoman Empire needed to incorporate the science and technology that had made the 'West' so successful. And yet he was fearful that the technical transformation of

¹³³ The competition went like this: Aspiring contestants would perform in an initial selection process. A jury of illustrious musical figures would select a round of finalists to play a live event in Istanbul. In the first competition in 1965 the band Mavi Işıklar wowed audiences with four-part harmonies while Silüetler performed the folk dance "Spoon Dance" [Kaşık Havası] with guitars and drums over an infectious 9/8 beat (Skoog 128). After the Istanbul concert the winning groups would embark on a short tour of the country, allowing them to make connections with rural audiences. The three winners were announced at a final event in Ankara and went on to record a *Hürriyet*-funded 45 record.¹³³ The scope of the competition (combining "Turkish" and "Western" music) and the wide exposure afforded to finalists succeeded in setting a new agenda for music in Turkey and established the rulebook for Anadolu Rock.

Ottoman society would not remain on the level of technique and might instead corrupt the character of the people. He devised a theoretical solution. Societies, Gökalp argued, are a product of both *hars* [culture] and *medeniyet* [civilization] (Armağan 38). According to this bipartite schema culture determines the unique character of a society while civilization is universal. He proposed that Ottomans adopt the science and technology of Europe while retaining their own beliefs, moral code, and aesthetic sensibility.

This theory of a radical split between culture and civilization, content and form, mirrors the logic of Golden Microphone and the Anadolu Rock genre, at least initially. While the competition encouraged technical development in Western forms, this was subsumed to the goal of strengthening national culture. Assessing the progress of the early competition, an editorial in *Hürriyet* stated: “All in all, by showing that monophonic Turkish music can move towards polyphonic Western music the contestants have proved what an immense and sui generis treasure we possess” (Bengi 18).¹³⁴ Performing folk songs with guitars and drums meant learning modern (‘civilized’) technique in the service of rediscovering the cultural riches of the nation. By sponsoring this contest, *Hürriyet* was putting its modern open-mindedness and nationalist bonafides on display simultaneously.¹³⁵ Though the

¹³⁴ *Neticede yarışmacılar, tek sesli Türk müziğinin çok sesli Batı müziğine yönelebileceğini göstererek kendine has karakteri bulunan bir hazineye sahip olduğumuzu ispat ettiler.*

¹³⁵ Gökalp’s formula, so inspirational to later reformers, imagined synthesis without commingling. Today this description of science and technology as value-free and non-ideological strikes us as quaintly positivist (Gökalp was a devotee of Durkheim). He speculated that it was possible to introduce ‘foreign’ materials into a local society while preserving the national ‘essence’ untouched. But in music as in state-building, it proved difficult to completely isolate culture and civilization. For example,

competition didn't allow for explicitly political music, it did not take long to go from an interest in the cultural traditions and conditions in the countryside, or 'finding yourself' in Anatolia, to Leftist anti-imperialism. One band shows how Anadolu rockers declared their independence from the sponsorship of their elders.

Moğollar began their musical journey deeply immersed in musical psychedelia (and discreetly experimenting with psychedelic drugs) before bringing that background into service as Cem Karaca's backing band during his most politically militant period. However, even their *seemingly* pre-political songs actively envisioned new ways of inhabiting the world. While Anadolu Rock's protest wing engaged in an almost sociological investigation of rural misery, Moğollar and the more obviously countercultural partisans of the genre were exploring the very meaning of the human relationship with the natural world and imagining fresh psychological states that would allow youth to liberate themselves from the programming of their parents' generation.

Moğollar first became widely known in 1968 in the Golden Microphone. Moğollar won third place with "I Flew a Hawk from Castle to Castle," a canonical folk song from Adıyaman. They were important innovators of the Anadolu Pop genre. As the band's guitarist and instrumentalist Cahit Berkay put it in a later interview, Anadolu Pop was formed out of a process of localization:

Golden Microphone's rules required the use of Turkish melodies but banned the use of 'eastern' instruments. The spirit of a song could be Turkish, but it had to be performed with 'western' technique. Skoog notes that this prohibition had the surprising result of pushing participants to learn how to make a saxophone sound like a *zurna* or a violin like a Black Sea *kemençe* (120-121).

If you're going to make music in this country, you need to understand that this country is not made up of [just] Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. The music you make needs to be nourished by Anatolia. For it to develop an identity it must be a genre of music whose feet step [firmly] on Anatolia. (167)¹³⁶

On this basis, they began incorporating local instruments into their sound in the early 1970s. Looking back on their approach Berkay declares that the response they received allowed them to “see what a correct decision we had made. We said, let's give this thing we're doing a name. Taner [Öngür, bassist of Moğollar] said [in 1970] “Let it be Anadolu Pop!”¹³⁷ Formally, Moğollar's inspiration to ‘look within’ came from without: the band was partly inspired to use Anatolian insurgents and melodies by the example of the British band Jethro Tull who brought rural musical traditions to the cities. Yet this way of thinking was equally consonant with the Turkish nationalist commitment to rural authenticity. Öngür coined the term “Anadolu Pop” in 1969 after the band went on a long tour of Anatolia, playing shows, acquiring local instruments, and, significantly, collecting folk songs—just as teams of state-sponsored folklorists had done in the 1930s and 1940s.

In 1970 the band released a song that would become the sonic “manifesto of Anadolu Rock” (Tireli 154). After “Bitter Vetch Field” and the Golden Microphone competition, the fledgling genre was taking its first steps through an original composition: “Dağ ve Çocuk” [Mountain and Child]. Moğollar's pop sensibility and experimental tendencies—their experience as seasoned rockers and their willingness

¹³⁶ *Bu ülkede müzik yapacaksan, bu ülkenin sadece İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir'den ibaret olmadığını bilmen gerekir. Yapacağın müziğin Anadolu'dan beslenmesi gerekir. Ayakları Anadolu'ya basan bir müzik türü yapılması gerekir ki bir kimlik oluşsun.*

¹³⁷ *Ne kadar da doğru bir karar verdiğimizizi gördük. Dedik ki, 'Bu yaptığımız şeye bir de isim bulalım. Taner (Öngür), 'Anadolu pop olsun!' dedi.*

to discover the psychedelic quality inhering in Anatolian instruments and melodies—united in this genre-defining track. In Moğollar’s early period, the band was interested in Anatolia both as cultural heartland and as ‘nature’ in the abstract. The emphasis on self-discovery through the natural world in “Mountain and Child” exemplifies Anadolu Rock’s parallels to the global counterculture, but their choice of Anatolia made this journey also patriotic.

A brief opening motif in the song gives no hint as to where “Mountain and Child” is about to go. Guitar and bass pick out an eerie, descending melody for two measures. Then an organ begins to drone. A lightening-brief coda hints towards soothing melodies to come before all the instruments pulse jerkily together, as if announcing that there are still miles to go before it is time to rest. The same push and pull between tension and relaxation, tightness and release, are present in the lyrics, sung in a tremulous wail by Aziz Azmet:

Its green, green plains
Its ice-cold springs
Birds chirp in the forest
I miss lying in emerald-green meadows
Give me leave to go¹³⁸

The eponymous mountain in “Mountain and Child” makes no appearance in this first verse, but it is clear who these plains and springs belong to. *Rubber Soul*-like vocal harmonies burst through the clouds with the mention of the birds’ chirping. The

¹³⁸ *Yemyeşil ovaları,
Buz gibi pınarları,
Kuşlar öter ormanlarda,
Zümrüt yeşili çayırlarda yatmayı özledim.
Bırakın beni, gideyim.*

idyllic scene established in the first three lines is transformed into a site of longing with the appearance of a melancholy “I.” Who is holding the singer back from his past happiness? Why can’t he return?

The protagonist returns to tell his story in a second verse. Taner’s spry electric bass wends its way up and down the track in a soothing contrast to the pulsing beat:

I have no mother or father anymore
It’s now only me
I search everywhere
For my green, green mountains
The sun will rise, birds will fly¹³⁹

Alone with no parents, the singer is free to search out past happiness. Aziz Azmet’s falsetto quivers with excitement when announcing the object of his quest: “My green, green mountains.” The elliptic images of the verse’s final two lines signal anticipation for a world that will be utterly transformed by this search. The listener is left to ruminate on this fresh, rising-sun world as the song winds up for an extended instrumental passage. Roughly a fourth of this four-minute-and-twenty-second song is taken up by keyboardist Murat Ses’s instrumental solo. His tremulous Hammond organ takes a simple melody, flips it back on itself, and teases it out into a psychedelic minute and a half of circuitous wanderings.

In the final verse the song’s lyrics follow the strange path set by the organ:

The mountain summoned me yesterday
Fate separated me from my home [literally, “nest”]
“Run,” it said, “lay at my feet” [literally, “my skirts”]

¹³⁹ *Anam babam yok gayri,
Kaldım tek başıma ben.
Her yerde arıyorum yemyeşil dağlarımı.
Güneş doğacak, kuşlar uçacak.*

“Tear the sorrow out of your heart”
Don’t be late, run to it
A happy home [“nest”] for you¹⁴⁰

The lyrics are fundamentally ambiguous: is the “home” that fate has separated the boy from the house where he lived with his mother and father? Or rather is “home” the mountain he was already seeking to return to at the beginning of the song? Was the cruel act of fate to be separated from his beloved mountain or to be born into a human family? When the mountain suddenly speaks to the boy directly with the imperative “Run!” it is clear that the mountain is itself a figure for homecoming and serenity. And yet the way Azmet’s voice shakes increasingly desperately as he speaks from the mountain’s perspective also gives the theme of return a slightly sinister valence, as if the cessation of suffering might also mean death.

The original lyrics and musical arrangement of “Mountain and Child” is distinctive in its attitude towards nature. In Moğollar’s 1969 rendition of the traditional song “I Went Down to the Fountain” the anonymous lyrics use nature only as a backdrop for an amorous encounter. In “I Flew a Hawk from Castle to Castle,” the speaker’s tumultuous mental state is projected onto the images of hawk and stone. In neither case is nature a presence in its own right. While drawing on the themes of these classic compositions, “Mountain and Child” provide a more detailed description of a natural scene with its springs, meadows, forests, and birds. There is also the

¹⁴⁰ *Dağ diin beni çağırđı.
Kader beni yuvamdan ayırđı.
Koş, dedi, eteklerimde yat,
Üzüntüünü sök, içinden at.
Geç kalma, koş ona.
Sana mutlu bir yuva.*

surreal addition of the anthropomorphic mountain. Most importantly, in this song the natural world of the countryside—rather than being merely a backdrop for a more important narrative or a near-at-hand metaphorical displacement for psychological states—is explicitly thematized. To be able to thematize a phenomenon presupposes a certain distance from it. However much “Mountain and Child” utilizes rural codes, this is urban music. The song’s call for a *nostos* to nature is issued from outside of it.

Not only does “Mountain and Child” reflect the city-dweller’s idealization of nature as a place of peace, in this sense regurgitating some nationalist clichés about the bleating lambs and merry villagers of Anatolia, it also participates in discourse about nature and naturalness contemporaneous in the worldwide counterculture. For example, Moğollar’s song resembles Paul McCartney’s “Mother Nature’s Son” released on the 1968 record *The Beatles* (the White Album). “Born a poor young country boy,” McCartney’s narrator begins—an unlikely self-description to use if you were truly born a poor young country boy. As in “Mountain and Child” the main thrust of this song is the peace to be found in nature. Like the boy talking to his maternal mountain there is a son describing Mother Nature: “Sit beside a mountain stream / See her waters rise / Listen to the pretty sound of music as she flies.” Both songs provide a simple message attuned with the neo-Romantic hippie practice of going ‘back to the land’ paired with an emphasis on the ‘noble savagery’ of childhood—on recovering the wisdom that comes from the mouth of babes. Anomalous in the Turkish context, the tropes animating “Mountain and Child” make sense when placed in a world context.

Yet Moğollar were not merely imitating aspects of global hippie-ism. They were full participants in the counterculture.¹⁴¹ As such, their original work contains resonances both global and local. It is fitting, for example, that this groundbreaking song is centered around the theme of being orphaned, for this has specific meaning in the Turkish context. “Mountain and Child” uncovers a certain liberation in being without father or mother, as the child is freed up to return to his beloved mountain. As literary critic Jale Parla demonstrated in her study *Babalar ve Oğullar* [Fathers and Sons], late Ottoman fiction centered around the theme of fatherlessness. For Parla the many orphaned protagonists of the Tanzimat period (1839-1876) represent the breakdown of political authority. The lack of fathers in these novels mirror the anxiety a new generation of elites felt over the lack of guiding precedents for the new and challenging historical conjuncture. The theme of fatherlessness regained relevance in 1970—and for good reason. While the long sixties is often reduced to the simplistic explanation of intergenerational agon, the self-understanding of countercultural and activist figures in Turkey and beyond was often expressed as a desire to leave behind the insufficient example of their parents. For Moğollar’s Cahit Berkay a primary motivation felt by his generation was to break the expectation that one should “be like one’s father or mother:” to dress, speak, and act like the

¹⁴¹ The question of imitation is a thorny one, especially when the sources of the ‘western’ counterculture were themselves ‘eastern.’ As with Mahzuni’s Alevi-inspired philosophy or Dick Dale’s “Misirlou,” the use of colorful outfits and ornate jewelry by Moğollar and other bands do not have a single influence. On the one hand, seeing the Beatles wearing outfits from India inspired Turkish bands to incorporate costume-pieces from Anatolia. At the same time, by using items discovered in the bazaars of their own country, Anadolu Rockers were making a claim for localness. Zolov describes a similar circular logic between hippy culture in the U.S. and the *jipiteca* movement in Mexico, particularly with regards to fashion and psychedelics (138-139).

paterfamilias (interview, 11/20/18). Rather than feeling anxious about being symbolically orphaned, those in their twenties in the sixties felt relief at abandoning these expectations. “Mountain and Child” celebrates the possibilities that come with leaving behind parental authority.

The ethos of this song is in sync with what Emin Alper calls the “romantic-Jacobin youth culture” of the Turkish sixties (34). In many countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America “a prevalent youth culture which saw the nationalist youth as the pure, uncorrupt, idealist and dynamic segment of the society was widespread.” This discourse of youth helped students develop “uncompromising and radical political identities. [They] tended to criticize their elders as comprising and corrupted bureaucrats and politicians” who had betrayed the national project through compromise with the global forces of capitalism and imperialism. The Turkish Left’s partial abandonment of Kemalism—especially after the trauma of the Kemalist military’s pronouncement of 1971 that targeted Leftists—or at least their embracing of more radical models like Maoism, also initiated a sense of new, parentless horizons.

The giddiness of the orphan can also be read in relation to Moğollar’s own musical project. Though the band would continue to use canonical folk songs in addition to composing to original works, they would increasingly reshape tradition in the furnace of their own aesthetic sensibility. They used a double method of calling upon on the authority of timeless anonymity associated with folk songs while using them as raw materials for fresh and unprecedented compositions. There were no real

precedents for the kind of musical reinvention in which Moğollar and their Anadolu Rock counterparts were engaged. It was unclear what the path ahead would bring. Having to make it up as they went along gave them a certain advantage. It is not for nothing that the child often appears in folklore and literature as a figure for wisdom: not yet knowing what is impossible gives one the freedom to see anything as possible. In this sense, by 1970 Moğollar, Anadolu Rock as a whole, and the Turkish Left shared the situation of the parentless child in the song. Unforeseen possibilities were on the horizon and the sun was rising.

If “Mountain and Child” is a manifesto, as critics suggest, what is the thrust of its argument? What kind of community is it trying to call into being? “Run,” [the mountain] said, “lay at my feet / Tear the sorrow out of your heart / [. . .] A happy home for you.” The song urges its listeners not just to go back to nature, but to know Anatolia specifically. Get to know the countryside. Discover its riches. Just as the mountain tells encourages the boy to seek solace at its feet, Moğollar were offering inspiration for its listeners to leave the city and discover their own country. Or that was their advice to other musicians, at least. In a fascinating formulation from a 1970 interview with Cahit Berkay, it is rural culture that will assist urban culture in its development:

[W]hat we want to prove is that our folk music has a polyphonic soul...and likewise that the dynamism of our folklore is close to the dynamism of popular music...that the coming together of our technically advanced and rich

folklore with our backward popular music will allow [the latter] to develop a real personality.”¹⁴²

In a clever reversal of official discourse here it is urban pop music that is underdeveloped [*geri kalmış*, literally “left behind”] and requires the investment of cultural wealth from the countryside. However, Berkay also suggests that if the city accepts fresh injections of life from the countryside, the split between them can be sublated into a new (musical) culture.

But this overcoming of the contradiction might not be possible forever. “Don’t be late, run to it” the mountain urges at the end of “Mountain and Child.” Wait too long and you’ll get lost finding this new home. Then, as if to prevent any simplistic optimism, these final lines are followed by another forty seconds of a meandering organ solo. The swirling psychedelia of the music belies the certainty of the lyrics. ‘Go to Anatolia,’ the song seems to suggest, ‘but don’t expect to end the journey the same way you began.’ The encounter just might transform you.

Cem Karaca: Rocking the Peasantry

Another important figure integrating artistic and political inspiration from Anatolia was Cem Karaca. He participated in the last two years of Golden Microphone with his band *Apaşlar* (a play on the name of the iconic 1960 song “Apache” by The Shadows). In 1967 Karaca won second place with “Emrah.” He had discovered this poem by the eastern Anatolian mystical poet Erzurumlu Emrah (1775-

¹⁴² ...ispatlamak istediğimiz halk müziğimizin çok sesli bir ruha sahip olması...ayrıca folklorumuzdaki dinamizmin pop müziğin dinamiğine yakın olması...geri kalmış popüler müziğimizin ileri teknik ve zengin folklorumuzla birleşmesiyle bir kişilik kazanması.

1854) on a calendar. The moody rock number that the band produced out of this more than two century-old folk poem propelled them to fame. “Emrah” was a love song, but in hindsight the dramatic flair of Karaca’s vocals, the deep wail which tears the words from his mouth, foreshadowed the rebellious turn Anadolu Rock would soon take as the lessons of the competition were applied in a revolutionary direction. For Karaca, Anatolia was not a source for ‘nature’ in the abstract but the location of the revolution’s motor force: the wretched of the earth. Within a few years he would go from playing the figure of the cajoling lover spinning riddles in perfect folk-rock synthesis in “Emrah” to dressing up as Che Guevara and singing revolutionary anthems alongside searing electric guitar and synthesizers.

Karaca embodies all the productive contradictions of Anadolu Rock. As much as he drew on a cocktail of Lenin, Mao, Fanon, and Che, he was also deeply intertwined with Kemalism and reproduced many of the counter-revolutionary assumptions of the state’s approach to the peasantry. Like the radical Left as a whole, Karaca tended to “unite Guevarist concepts of revolutionary immediacy and the tradition of left-Kemalism” in uneasy amalgamation (Samim 159). Yet this strong mixture of Third-Worldism and unexamined nationalism was chased down with a heady wash of progressive rock. His music exposes the antinomy within composing music focused on rural misery in the forgotten periphery of Turkey through a simultaneously global, cosmopolitan, and capitalist musical genre.

After their success with “Emrah” Karaca – Apaşlar continued to develop these folk themes while also spending time in Germany recording radio-friendly pop songs

with the lush orchestration of the Ferdy Klein Orchestra. Returning to Turkey, a shake-up in the Apaşlar cadre was reflected in a new name for the back-up group: Kardaşlar. Despite the rhyme, the new name signified a hard shift in affiliation. No longer The Apaches, the band used a particularly Anatolian pronunciation of the word to become 'The Brothers.' This change in name meant trading California-inspired surf music for the song of the steppe. Appropriately for Karaca's new image as a man of the people, the big hit from Kardaşlar's first single in late 1970 was a folk song about rural rebellion.

"Dadaloğlu" took its name from a nineteenth-century poet and warrior (died circa 1868) from a nomadic Turcoman tribe in Anatolia. He composed a folk poem describing a historical event: the attempt of the Ottoman sultan to forcibly settle the Afşaroğulları tribes (Aya 60). A common strategy for securing central authority in this period of Istanbul's weakening grip on the countryside, forced settlement was not accepted without a fight from the nomads. Written in the syllabic meter typical of folk poetry, the poem describes the tribe's armed struggle to protect their mountains:

The Avşarlar tribe rose up and migrated
This slow-moving mass is ours
Arab steeds make distance near
These paths over the great mountains are ours

The swords at our waists are Kermani
The head of my spear pierces the stone
The state has issued its imperial edict against us
The edict is the padishah's, the mountains are ours

Dadaloğlu, tomorrow there will be a battle
The rifles will sing and the drums will bang
Many a brave young man will fall to the ground

The dying will die, but the living are ours¹⁴³

The Cem Karaca - Kardeşlar arrangement of the folk song shows the whole ensemble at their best. After drums, guitar, and a cavernously deep bass echo martially through the first few notes, the band catches their breath. Karaca enters alone with his theatrical parlendo. He speak-sings the first two lines of each verse as *uzun hava*—a kind of non-rhythmic, free form vocal performance. But when he reaches the words “Arab steeds” the whole band comes in together in a galloping 2/4 rhythm, where the walloping down-beat pounds like horses’ hooves. The end of each verse speeds up, as if matching the shifting tempo of the battle itself. By the time the band reaches the final line and Karaca belts out “the living are ours” it is not hard to be convinced that history has made a mistake: Dadaloğlu and his rebellious nomads are still freely roaming the mountain passes.

With Karaca’s dramatic vocal delivery and the band’s complex interplay of cacophony and silence, “Dadaloğlu” was unlike anything then on the market in Turkey. Audiences responded. “Dadaloğlu” became one of the big hits of the year. In

¹⁴³ *Kalktı göç eyledi avşar illeri
Ağır ağır giden eller bizimdir
Arap atlar yakın eder ırağı
Yüce dağdan aşan yollar bizimdir*

*Belimizde kılıcımız kirmani
Taşı deler mızrağımın temreni
Hakkımızda devlet etmiş fermanı
Ferman padişahın dağlar bizimdir*

*Dadaloğlu yarın kavga kurulur
Öter tüfek davlumbazlar vurulur
Nice koçyiğitler yere serilir
Ölen ölüer kalan sağlar bizimdir*

January 1971 influential fan magazines were still scoring it a #1 song. “Dadaloğlu” sold fantastically, confirming Karaca’s position in the pantheon of Anadolu Rock stars. Along with “Mountain and Child” it is one of the most important songs in the development of the genre.

On the surface “Dadaloğlu” is a song about an obscure event in the late Ottoman Empire. However, as the example of “Bitter Vetch” revealed, the best way to get away with revolutionary music was to ground it in the seemingly harmless past. It was Ruhi Su who brought the song to Karaca’s attention. This is part of a larger pattern of Marxist intellectuals and village novelists reviving interest in the literature of Ottoman folk heroes. As historian Karen Barkey explains, mid-twentieth century radicals like Yaşar Kemal “studied the exploitation of the peasantry [. . . and] discussed social banditry as a type of peasant rebellion” (180). They re-signified historical rebellions against Ottoman authority as revolutionary inspiration for the present. Those in the know could read between the lines: it was not the Ottoman padishah who was being threatened with revolt when “Dadaloğlu” was re-purposed in 1970.

Perhaps better than any other Anadolu Rock song, “Dadaloğlu” reveals how the genre was intimately connected with the Turkish Left. It not only replicated but clarified many of its ideological assumptions and investments. The song thematizes one important figure of the world sixties: the rural guerrilla. When segments of the radical student milieu in Turkey decided to take up arms after 1968, they were inspired by Vietnamese resistance, the various experiments in guerrilla warfare

coming from South America, and the example of the Chinese Red Army (Ulus 124). Maoism was a particularly crucial touchstone in Turkey, as in other peasant-majority countries (Baydar and Ulagay 111). Karaömerlioğlu writes that what “many socialist groups in Turkey in the ‘60s and ‘70s supported in the name of socialism was actually a form of radical peasantism” [*Türkiye sosyalist solundaki borçok grubun sosyalizm adına aslında bir çeşit radikal köycülüğü savunmuş...*] (226). Karaca followed his comrades in thinking that the peasantry would support the formation of a revolutionary army in the mountains and wilds of Anatolia (Yayla 252). Yet the reality proved different.

In 1971 famous student-activist-*cum*-guerrilla Deniz Gezmiş and his brothers-in-arms Yusuf Aslan and Hüseyin İnan from the People's Liberation Army of Turkey [*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu*] were captured in Central Anatolia thanks to peasant informants. The three young men were put on trial. By chance, “Dadaloğlu” came on the radio right after it was announced that the three young men were to be put to death (Aya 69). Despite vigorous attempts to forestall the execution, on 6 May 1972 Gezmiş, Aslan, and İnan were hanged in Ankara Central Prison. “The edict is the padishah’s, the mountains are ours”: these words resonated freshly in this context of rebellion and repression. “Many a brave young man will fall to the ground / The dying will die, but the living are ours.” Karaca’s song will forever be associated with the same mixture of quixotic optimism and tragedy that characterized this violent historical chapter.

Despite nominating himself spokesman of the revolutionary Left, Karaca came under fire from segments of the movement for corrupting folk music with what they saw as decadent rock. Like Selda, Karaca and his band Dervişan were booed on stage in the late 1970s by a group of militants shouting “Down with imperialist culture” [*Kahrolsun emperyalist kültür*] because they were playing rock music instead of folk (Aya 176).¹⁴⁴ In the 1970s, Karaca began describing his music as cultural ammunition in the battle to nationalize Turkish music and vanquish the foreign imposition of U.S. popular, i.e. ‘decadent,’ music.

Given the hostile reactions against Anadolu Rock, and the rockers’ doubling down on conservative nationalism to prove themselves, it is tempting to concur with Alper that the “narrow anti-authoritarian and libertarian stream reached its zenith in 1968” in Turkey and then “faded away as it was surpassed by a populist political radicalism which refused ‘western inspired’ culture on behalf of the people’s culture and lifestyles” (497-8). Yet despite his populist rhetoric and image, Karaca remained a rocker throughout this period. He explained this uncomfortable musical fact by positing rock not as imperialist mass culture but as the people’s art. In a 1978 album photograph he and his band stand against the ubiquitous concrete wall of rock records. Painted in graffiti on the reverse side of the record are the words “Down with decadent music” [*Kahrolsun yoz müzik*]. In positing rock as the anti-decadence, Karaca was participating in what Simon Firth calls the ideology of rock, “a view of

¹⁴⁴ Taner Öngür recalls similar responses: “The critiques we got! Some would even come up and say ‘You can’t make revolutionary music with drums, bass, and keyboard, friend; you can only make it with *baglama*’” [*Öyle eleştiriler alırdık ki! Bazıları gelip, ‘Davulla, bas gitarla, klavyeyle devrimci müzik yapılmaz arkadaş; ancak bağlamayla yapılır’ bile diyebilirdi*] (339).

art as rock and the rocker as *auteur* (53). That the album itself is full of rock tunes implies that rock is salubrious whereas it is pop that is foreign and corrupting. Karaca was attempting to shift the terms of the debate.

But like the two lines of an asymptote, rock authenticity and folk authenticity move closer and closer in the work of Karaca without ever finally merging. He tried to explain away this contradiction by stressing his revolutionary and artistic seriousness. Yet up until the time of the 1980 coup in Turkey, Karaca refused to compromise musically. And collaborating in turn with Moğollar, Dervişan, and Edirdahan as backing bands, his progressive rock sound—inspired by the likes of Deep Purple, Traffic, and Emerson, Lake & Palmer—became increasingly complex. Despite various attempts at self-justification, he proved unable to resolve the antinomy of rock and folk. Yet what made Anadolu Rock a revolutionary genre was its ability to inhabit that contradictory space between two competing claims for authenticity—thereby giving the lie to the very concept of the authentic.

In the end, Anadolu Rock remained an unstable vehicle for national-mindedness. It was inspired by folk and rock, anti-imperialism and the counterculture, but the genre was more than the sum of its parts. As much as its practitioners paid lip-service to “turning back to ourselves,” singing about Anatolian poverty accompanied by trippy synthesizers and searing electric guitars could not but signify something a bit more complex than simply acting “in accordance with the demands of one’s people” [*halkının talepleri doğrultusunda*], as Karaca claimed to do in his music. It is this complexity that makes Anadolu Rock neither purely national nor a foreign

imitation. Until the end of the Turkish long sixties the genre remained a stubborn holdout that was simultaneously anti-authoritarian/libertarian *and* populist/revolutionary, to re-use Alper's terms.

Yet Karaca and his colleagues sometimes had trouble grappling with this contradictory aspect of their musical project. The anti-imperialism Anadolu rockers expressed through their music was indeed shaped by a genre whose very arrival in Turkey was the product of uneven global power. Yet the process of self-discovery that rock inspired can be no more reduced to cultural imperialism than patriotic nationalism. Anadolu Rock bands were simultaneously engaging both in localization and internationalism. While Turkish rockers were busy going "back to themselves," all over the world musicians had the same idea. In this way, the seemingly most authentic cultural move is inseparable from worldwide cultural trends and fashions. It is not that local trends were rediscovered and combined with global ones in a grand synthesis, but that the inward gaze was itself conditioned from outside.

One response to this contradictory state of affairs, that not only the Left but especially the Right in Turkey has tried and continues to try today, is to double-down on authenticity and the national character (*yerli ve milli*) until any sign of foreignness is purged. A cultural revolutionary strategy, in contrast, begins with the realization that nothing is pure, not rock music and certainly not folk. There is no self to go back to. There is only a 'we'—yet to be formed.

Coda

The song is called, simply, “Türkü,” as if encompassing the elemental folk song. It begins with an earth-shattering crescendo. Out of the wreckage, a *bağlama* plucks through a hypnotic theme. Bass and drums enter, marking the off-center 9/8 rhythm characteristic of the music of the Middle East and the Balkans. As if confirming this regional identity, a screeching *zurna* then bursts through. It dominates the track in the manner only this shrill reed instrument—used for weddings or other outdoor celebrations and loved (or hated) for its ability to project across distance—can. Relief comes when the *zurna* gives way to Erkin Koray’s guitar, which lets out squawks and peals of distorted moodiness. Then the track quiets down and Koray, speaking the verses in a calm and unperturbed monotone that sounds as if it was coming through a megaphone not two feet from your head, begins to recite:

Galloping from Far Asia and jutting out
into the Mediterranean like a mare’s head
this country is ours

Wrists in blood, teeth clenched, feet bare
and this soil spreading like a silk carpet,
this hell, this paradise is ours

Shut the gates of servitude, don’t let them open again,
annihilate man’s servitude to man,
this invitation is ours

To live like a tree single and at liberty
and brotherly like the trees of a forest,
this yearning is ours¹⁴⁵ (translated by Fuat Engin, Ersoy et al. 473)

¹⁴⁵ *Dörtmala gelip Uzak Asya’dan
Akdeniz’e bir kısrak başı gibi uzanan
bu memleket bizim*

*Bilekler kan içinde, dişler kenetli, ayaklar çıplak
ve ipek bir halıya benziyen toprak,*

These are not the words of Erkin Koray but Nâzım Hikmet—Turkey’s famous communist poet who died in Soviet exile in 1963 after years of imprisonment and persecution in his home country. It had not even been legal to publish or read Nâzım’s works in Turkey for ten years by the time Koray transformed this poem into the powerful finale of his 1974 album *Elektronik Türküler* [Electronic *Türkü*s]. Nâzım’s communist “Davet” [Invitation] to fraternity and liberation became, in Koray’s hands, a nine-minute long lesson in the psychedelic derangement of the senses.

With Koray speak-singing the stanzas things start off simply enough. Yet the real action happens between the verses, as *bağlama*, *zurna*, *davul* and *def* percussion, and Koray’s Gibson guitar battle it out between 9/8 and 4/4, poetry and prose, Turkish folk and distorted, rough, deconstructed, unrepentant rock music. Content and form engage in a fight to the death. Koray’s sober reading of Nâzım’s poem contrasts with the chaos of the music. The band speeds up into an instrumental bridge at the song’s mid-way mark, but after the crashing and broken glass are heard, all bets are off.

bu cehennem, bu cennet bizim

*Kapansın el kapıları, bir daha açılmasın,
yok edin insanın insana kulluğunu,
bu dâvet bizim...*

*Yaşamak bir ağaç gibi tek ve hür
ve bir orman gibi kardeşesine,
bu hasret bizim...*

Zurna, bağlama, guitar, and percussion re-enter the track in their established order, but now the man at the megaphone is beginning to lose the thread. “Shut the gates of servitude!” he declares, following Nâzım’s denunciation of imperialist and capitalist exploitation. “This invitation is ours—it’s ours, friends, ours, ours” he extemporizes. And after offering the final verse—which uses the metaphor of the tree and the forest to concretize a philosophy uniting individual liberty and communalism, national sovereignty and international solidarity—Koray is focused less on the message “This yearning is ours, friends” [*Bu hasret bizim dostlar*] than on its constituent phonemes: *Bizim dostlar, bizim, biz-im, dostlar, dost-lar, dost-larr, lar, lar, la, la!* Whereas “Türkü” began with the confident declaration that “this country is ours,” Koray ends the song uncertain who this “we” is. He dissolves the language used to express identity in the steaming vat of this nine-minute song. Who are we? No one, or everyone. For that was the message of Nâzım’s poem: we are both trees and forests.

When famously asked in the hyper-polarized atmosphere of 1970s Turkey whether he supported the Right or Left, Koray responded with a psychedelic koan: the direction of my journey, he said, is neither to the right or left but upwards. Yet he also recognized his work as part of the larger structure of feeling of the long sixties. Looking back in a later interview he remarked:

That period had a certain electricity. In that period some kind of electricity must have manifested in outer-space. It covered the whole world and, by major twist of fate, our lives coincided with that electricity. . . It was

electricity, that's it. A magnetic field. It generated from the alignment of who-knows-which stars. That magnetic field is gone.¹⁴⁶

Koray was able to tap into this energy, as were German, Moğollar, Selda, and Karaca. But Koray was aware of the period's antinomies—he chose to dream while awake. Both musically and lyrically he was deeply experimental, passing back messages to earthlings from other states of consciousness and being. By stepping outside of accepted discourses, the only seemingly apolitical Erkin Koray was capable of intimating more thoroughgoing revolutionary imaginings, even if they were left necessarily implicit or vague. Koray's message may have been muddled, but his experimental songs and albums from the long sixties communicated one point very clearly: any revolution worthy of the name would not only transform the mode of production, it would have to alter the very fabric of human life on this planet.

¹⁴⁶ *O devirlerin bir elektriği vardı. O devirlerde herhalde uzayda bir elektrik hasıl oldu, bütün dünyayı kapladı, biz de büyük bir şans eseri o elektriğe denk geldik. Şimdi gitti o elektrik [. . .] Elektrik işte. Manyetik bir alan. Hangi yıldızların bir araya gelmesinden oluşur bilmiyorum. Ama o manyetik alan gitti* (143-4).

Chapter Five

Transforming Consciousness, Transforming Life: The Poetry of Diane di Prima and Sonia Sanchez

The previous three case studies in this dissertation revealed three distinct yet overlapping conceptualizations of cultural revolution. Hidden between the lines of the Second New's seemingly hermetic modernism we found a rebuke to more ascetic factions of the Left and a call for sexuality, everyday life, and psychic states to be incorporated into visions of revolutionary change. Yet within the specific political/cultural climate of Turkey, this vision of a more ludic and liberatory politics mostly remained on the page, unable to be translated into an actually existing movement. The discussion of Denise Levertov's poetry in Chapter Three detailed her working through of an internally consistent aesthetic vision capable of imaginatively dwelling with both the brutal reality of the Vietnam War and the necessity of a revolution (perhaps even a violent one) to stop it. Levertov found her poetic-political ideals partially confirmed in the community that sprang up around People's Park in Berkeley, but her overemphasis on personal conscience limited the poetry's capacity to mediate between individual and collective. Chapter Four's investigation of Anadolu Rock showed how a larger model of collectivity—the nation—animated a local genre of popular music in Turkey. The countercultural valence of psychedelic rock, however, posed an insoluble tension for musicians attempting to harness this international, urban musical form to the expression of nationalist and peasant-centered content.

This final chapter turns back to the U.S. to explore two of the period's most complex and thorough poetic attempts to unite culture and politics, psychology and collectivity, the particular and the coalitional, poetry and revolution: Sonia Sanchez—part of the Black Arts movement and connected to Black Power activism—and Diane di Prima—first associated with the Beat Generation and then the California hippie counterculture. Despite the many differences between them, both are far less wracked with self-contradictory impulses than the cultural figures explored so far, and, in the long sixties produced poetry consciously and explicitly dedicated to working out a concept of cultural revolution. That is, their poetry lays out surprisingly similar programs for a total revolution that would unite the aspects of life severed by capitalism—a split often unwittingly reproduced by social movements with a narrower conception of the political.

More than the cultural figures explored in the previous chapters, di Prima and Sanchez are attentive to the question of community and kinship. Their poetry explicitly addresses the dialectical relationship between individual and collective transformation. Both poets are interested in how collectivities are defined and sustained. Discovering these themes does not require the same interpretive unpacking as other chapters—they are explicitly foregrounded in what are here often didactic poems. Part I of this chapter describes the literary-historical factors that contextualize both the similarities and divergences between the work of these poets and explores how the poetry of Sanchez and di Prima address eminently practical concerns that affect collective existence: health, clothing, medicine, and addiction. This attention to

everyday needs is a central component of their vision of cultural revolution. Part II demonstrates that, precisely because of this attention to the quotidian, their poetry is also attentive to broader mystical questions. That is, for both poets the question of transforming consciousness—creating the internal transformations that must accompany external revolutionary strivings and passing this altered consciousness onto the next generation—is intimately connected to issues like sex, childrearing, and education.

In his 1969 stock-taking of *The New Black Poetry*, Clarence Major's description of the political aims of Black Arts writers like Sanchez is broadly applicable to a countercultural poet like di Prima: "black poets [. . .] are practically and magically involved in collecting efforts to trigger real social changes" (12). This chapter seeks to explain how this dual attention to the practical and the mystical, individual psychology and social being, shapes the work of both poets. Their work unites spiritual issues with the practical exigencies of political action. Writing at the height of what some scholars present as the "bad sixties" (see Chapter One), when militant factions like the Weather Underground and the Black Power movement began to formulate alternatives to the pacifism of the anti-war movement and the integrationism of mainstream civil rights, di Prima and Sanchez engaged both with revolutionary violence and self-defense as well as mysticism. Though invisible to more liberal accounts of the period, this strident and incendiary poetic rhetoric was intimately connected to the structure of feeling of the late and final stages of the long sixties.

In her *Revolutionary Letters*, first collected in 1968, di Prima describes the transmutations individuals must undergo in tandem with the more practical work of social revolution. “Revolutionary Letter # 12” ends with the explicit dictum: “every revolutionary must at last will his own destruction / rooted as he is in the past he sets out to destroy” (23). The imagery used to describe this violent transformation is fire: “flesh [. . .] in the fire” and “the smell of your burning hair.” While the trope of flames echoes both the Second New’s combustatory subjectivity (Chapter Two) and Levertov’s discussion of self-immolation (Chapter Three), di Prima’s description of the process is almost alchemical: the dross of an alienated past is transmuted into the prefigurative gold of revolutionary being. As later poems will show, for di Prima no aspect of life—from how people eat or dress to how they think to how they understand the cosmos—will be spared from this self-initiated transformative conflagration, which is not a distant revolutionary event located in the future but must be enacted each day.

For Sanchez the central images of cultural revolution revolve around blackness and love. In “change us,” from her 1970 collection *We a BaddDDD People*, she envisions a new form of revolutionary subjectivity:

an u got a
 re vol u tion
 goin’
 like. man. program
 us in blk/
 ness & u’ll
 have warrior
 sons & young
 sistuhs who will take
 what we just rapped

Despite their differences, comparing Sanchez and di Prima provides a fuller picture of cultural-political experimentation in the sixties. Their parallel lives and work better reveal the wider structure of feeling for their not having intersected or collaborated. Both poets were born in 1934, di Prima in an Italian-American neighborhood of Brooklyn, Sanchez in Birmingham, Alabama. At the age of nine Sanchez moved to Harlem. These two New Yorkers started writing poetry at a young age, di Prima first publishing her work in the late 1950s and Sanchez in the mid-1960s. Both women became prominent within artistic scenes mostly dominated by men. Despite short-lived marriages with other artists (from 1968 to 1970 Sanchez was married with fellow Black Arts movement poet Etheridge Knight), both raised many children mostly on their own while maintaining prolific writing careers and activist commitments. Both moved to San Francisco in the 1960s: Sanchez in 1966 Sanchez to help build Black Studies at San Francisco State College; di Prima in 1968, living in a communal house and working with the radical community-action group The Diggers in the Haight-Ashbury. Di Prima has remained on the West Coast for most of her life, whereas Sanchez taught all over the East Coast before finally settling in Philadelphia. She is currently Professor Emerita at Temple University.

The many overlaps between these two trajectories notwithstanding, di Prima's Beat and countercultural aesthetic and Sanchez's militant Black Arts poetry were cut off from each other. The numerous correspondences have implications far beyond just how we assess the writing of each individual poet. Comparative approaches that move across the divide the separates New American Poetry and the Black Arts

movements, or other factions of the sixties cultural-political Left, make it easier to grasp the period as a whole. Aspects of the aesthetic choices, thematic concerns, and uses of language visible in di Prima and Sanchez can be found in the work of other writers as well. However, these two poets attempt to distill a more diffuse structure of feeling. The correspondences and divergences between Sanchez and di Prima have ramifications for how we understand visions of cultural revolution as what distinguishes the sixties as a period.

It is no accident that it is two women poets who most clearly show the stakes of uniting politics and culture through simultaneous attention to everyday life, spiritual, and psychological concerns.¹⁴⁷ Both poets were working class, single mothers who were already in their mid-30s by 1968—a year of widespread political upheaval. Sanchez was vocally opposed to the masculinism characterizing certain factions of the larger Black Power movement. For her part, di Prima was an elder stateswoman of the trippy counterculture, but her acid ethos was combined with a sharply intellectual militancy that was suspicious of all institutions, including the university. The seemingly liminal positions of di Prima and Sanchez actually provide a more representative view of the sixties Left than the stereotypical men of the movement. For the mainstream that these two poets represent, the fusion of culture and politics was par for the course. For them, attention to culture was not an escape

¹⁴⁷ As Cynthia A. Young remarks of the long sixties:
the historiographic traditions [tend to] reify the divide between culture and politics, as if the culture of the period, symbolized by the so-called turn on, tune in, drop-out ethos, offered an escape from politics. If we primarily conceive of the period in phallogentric youth-oriented, and hypersexualized terms—the black jacketed Panther, the male white student—then we continue to mystify a historical moment rather than decode it. (6)

from more ‘real’ forms of politics but rather emerged from their practical involvement in movements struggling for survival.

Yet though both Sanchez and di Prima address issues pertaining to women in their poetry, they also share a certain aloofness from the women’s organizations; neither of them was directly aligned with Women’s Liberation or the feminist poetry movements.¹⁴⁸ For this reason too they fall outside of much of the scholarship on poetry written by women in the sixties. One notable exception that informs this chapter is an unpublished dissertation entitled “Include Everything: Contemporary American Poetry and the Feminist Everyday” (2015). Because Rachel Klaver studies poetry by women *across* established literary movements (feminist poetry, the Beats, the New York School, the Black Arts movement, and Language writing) she also is able to uncover similarities in the work of di Prima and Sanchez (as well as Lyn Hejinian, Bernadette Mayer, and Alice Notley). Klaver’s concept of the “feminist everyday” reveals how

everyday conditions both help and hinder poetic production. Women’s everyday lives supply poetic subject matter while, at the same time, the gendered circumstances of those lives act as aesthetic constraints that affect formal structures and the writing process. These life circumstances are often related to the temporalities of gendered labor, especially routine and interruption. As the poets simultaneously reclaim so-called trivial aspects of women’s lives and expose the forces that have required women to serve as custodians of the banal, they create poems of double-edged feminist reevaluation and critique that reveal women’s ambivalent, overdetermined relationship to the everyday. (2)

¹⁴⁸ Both poets had their poetry included in two key anthologies, both published in 1973: *No More Masks: An Anthology of Poems by Women* and *Rising Tides: 20th Century American Women Poets*.

The problematic of a “feminist everyday” sheds light on the quotidian dimensions of Sanchez and di Prima’s approach to cultural. Their theoretical attention to issues of food, clothing, health, childrearing, and education cannot be separated from the lived reality of “gendered labor.” Quoting Henri Lefebvre, Klaver lists in this category activities like “childcare, housework, and money managing, but also issues such as ‘health, desire, spontaneity, vitality’” (29). Besides attention to these forms of work, the readings contained in the final two sections of this chapter will show how Sanchez and di Prima frequently engage in more outré speculations on the transformation of consciousness. It is this dual quality of their work, both practical and mystical, that the concept of cultural revolution seeks to explain.

Part I

Shared Origins, Parallel Movements

Both Diane di Prima and Sonia Sanchez write poems that can swerve without warning from everyday life to mythology and magic. But because they are associated with divergent literary movements, they are seldom considered together. The Black Arts movement (BAM)—emphasizing autonomy, its cultural institutions explicitly separatist—has been compared to other forms of 1960s literary nationalisms (by Asian Americans, Chicanos, Nuyoricans, and others) but not to other contemporary movements trying to think through the relationship between culture and politics. Yet BAM grows out of the same soil as the Beats and other literary movements. The scholar James E. Smethurst has insisted on situating BAM within this wider context, particularly its origins within the same 1950s literary counterculture where di Prima

got her start. “One has to be careful about setting up rigid dichotomies between black artists and ‘white’ bohemia in the 1950s and 1960s,” Smethurst cautions, while also not collapsing the distinctions between them (62). Politics, race, and conceptualizations of aesthetics are the source of important convergences and divergences between the Beat generation and the Black Arts movement.

Di Prima is most often associated with the Beat poets, though she took part in the “three major cultural revolutions of the century”:

modernism, through her association with Pound, the Beat movement of the fifties and early sixties, and then the explosion for LSD and protests of the sixties and early seventies, when romanticism hit the streets. (Libby 45)

Carrying on the legacy of Pound, Williams, and other modernist poets, di Prima began her poetic career in the bohemian milieu of early-1950s Manhattan. By the end of the decade she was collaborating with William Burroughs, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, Michael McClure, Gary Snyder, and others. Few individual Beats had organic ties to existing social movements. The movement began as a mostly (though, as we will see below, not exclusively) white bohemian counterculture opposed to Cold War conformity and ‘straight’ life (Charters 583). Under the pressure of the sixties counterculture and anti-war movements, Ginsberg and others became visible as supporters of Left causes. Yet in the simmering conflict between “politicos” (committed activists in the New Left) and “hippies” (flower children and other fauna of the counterculture) that often divided the broader anti-war milieu, the Beats fit more comfortably in the second category. Di Prima, this chapter shows, went

the furthest in bridging the divide. Her work is equal parts anti-capitalist, new age, feminist, queer, primitivist, and militant.

Sanchez, on the other hand, was a central figure of the Black Arts movement, one of the most important politically committed artistic movements to appear in the twentieth-century U.S. BAM writers saw art as central to revolutionary strategy: “Like the Futurists and Surrealists before them, Black Arts thinkers held that culture determines consciousness, and that only an art unifying politics and aesthetics could create the ‘new world’” (Frost 71). Starting around 1965 BAM coalesced into a loose movement encouraging African American self-determination by creating autonomous cultural institutions and championing a specifically black aesthetic—predominantly in poetry and drama but inspired by jazz and the visual arts as well. As Larry Neal wrote in a 1968 manifesto, this “movement is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept” (Bracey Jr. et al. 29). It was a movement which included Amiri Baraka [formerly LeRoi Jones], Ed Bullins, Askia M. Touré [Roland Snelling], Nikki Giovanni, Haki R. Madhubuti [Don Lee], and Marvin X.¹⁴⁹ Beginning in New York and spreading from there to the West Coast, the South, and the Midwest, BAM figures created their own cultural infrastructure of black theaters, venues, writing workshops, magazines, and anthologies. Participants declared their independence not only from mostly white literary movements, but from the idea of Western culture itself. As Neal wrote in the same 1968 manifesto: “[T]he Western aesthetic has run its

¹⁴⁹ Like Malcolm X and other prominent nationalists, many BAM writers changed their names. When quoting from contemporary material or citing the name under which a text was first published, I refer to all writers by their chosen names, even while discussing earlier periods. Citations will follow the name used at the time of publication.

course: it is impossible to construct anything meaningful within its decaying structure. We advocate a cultural revolution in art and ideas” (Bracey Jr. 55). BAM writers actively theorized the relationship between culture and politics, seeing art and militancy as part of the same struggle. As Lorenzo Thomas writes: “The Black Arts movement embraced many divergent tendencies. Perhaps the one thing that all of its participants agreed on was that art was—and should be—a political act” (201).

Despite the easy blurring between aesthetics and politics in BAM, there was often disagreement within the broader Black Power movement over the status of culture: by 1968 the specifically West Coast enmity between “revolutionary nationalists,” like the Black Panther Party, and “cultural nationalists,” which included BAM writers and organizations like Us that advocated Afrocentric choices in clothing and comportment, had spread across the country. However, just as scholarly emphasis on the politico-hippie split of the mostly white counterculture has made it harder to see the figures who straddle the divide, African American revolutionary nationalists and cultural nationalists often had more in common than not. As Smethurst clarifies, the conflict was often centered on what should be emphasized more strongly, but “the common thread [. . .] was a belief that African Americans were a people, a nation, entitled to (needing, really) self-determination of its own destiny” (15). Like di Prima, Sanchez’s equally militant and tender poetry crossed conceptualizations of political and cultural revolution.

For both poets, politics took the form of a direct, didactic aesthetic, responses to them varied. But the stakes of writing poetry in this bald manner were not the same for African American and white writers.¹⁵⁰ As Sanchez wrote in 1999:

In my pieces about Vietnam, in my pieces about being black, in my pieces about drugs in the black community, in pieces about ‘let us organize and unite,’ critics were concerned about that content, and they could say simply, ‘Well, it’s not poetic.’ But at the same time, there were other poets, Beat poets, writing the same way, and no one accused them of being didactic. (Joyce 86)

However, the starting point for both movements was challenging the separation of politics and art that was promoted by New Critics that by midcentury were at the height of their influence and academic poets who established themselves in opposition to the earlier political art of the 1930s Popular Front (Smethurst 30).

Descriptions of BAM’s approach to culture often apply just as well to di Prima’s:

Black Arts theorists believed, like their radical predecessors, that innovative art has the potential to draw cultural and political battle lines, to transform consciousness, and ultimately to play a role in revolutionizing the world. (Frost 65)

Both Sanchez and di Prima’s poetry of the sixties draws on a similar legacy of committed avant-garde aesthetics.

¹⁵⁰ For decades after the Black Arts movement’s heyday of the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was presented as a cautionary tale, if studied at all. BAM was written off for being immature, its members as misogynistic and homophobic, and as its poetry shrill and propagandistic (Ongiri 89; Smethurst 4). Lines such as

We must make our own
World, man, our own world, and we can not do this unless the white man
is dead. Let’s get together and killhim my man (Baraka, *Black Magic* 225)

were presented as the sum total of the Black Arts message. Similarly, *Revolutionary Letters* has been described as “an almost involuntary reaction to the events of the sixties” (Libby 57).

The shared origins of the New American Poetry and the Black Arts movement help partially to explain the similarities that appear otherwise unexpectedly in the work of di Prima and Sanchez. As Lorenzo Thomas remarks, “there is a direct line between the Beat poets and the Black Arts movement” (200). At the same time, it must be remembered that black culture and political struggle in the US was a pivotal influence on mid-twentieth-century bohemia and the New Left.

Many central BAM writers began their careers as part of the post-1945 current of poetry that Donald Allen, in his 1960 anthology, called the “New American Poetry”: Black Mountain poetry, the New York school, and the San Francisco Renaissance. Prominent black poets in the literary bohemia of the late 1950s and first half of the 1960s included Ted Joans, A.B. Spellman, Ishmael Reed, and Lorenzo Thomas on the East Coast, and the San Francisco Beat poet Bob Kaufman (Smethurst 44). The writers collaborated and published each other. For example, di Prima published the work of Spellman and the black lesbian poet Audre Lorde with her Poets Press in the mid-1960s. Similarly, Amiri Baraka’s Corinth-Totem Press imprint published important early works by di Prima, O’Hara, Snyder, and Kerouac. Despite the richness of these earlier connections, there was a subsequent “bleaching of the literary counterculture” (Smethurst 43). The public rancor with which some black writers publicly renounced their former bohemian ties have made it harder to see the many points of connection—even after 1965.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Even after Baraka moved to Harlem he and di Prima collaborated, as when he arrived at her studio with a “battalion of young men” to print the newsletter for the early BAM organization *In-Formation* on her printing press (*Recollections* 419).

Baraka is a particularly helpful barometer of the shared origins of the New American Poetry and BAM and his close collaborations with both di Prima and, later, Sanchez provide a helpful example of the relationship between these movements. Baraka was partly responsible for creating the New American Poetry as a concept (Smethurst 62). He connected otherwise isolated writers across the country through the ‘little magazines’ *Kulchur*, *Yugen*, and *The Floating Bear* (this last edited with di Prima). The two of them were romantically involved from 1960 to 1962.¹⁵² Yet in 1965 fissures deepened between black and white bohemian poets. After the assassination of Malcolm X, Baraka publicly broke with the Lower East Side scene and moved to Harlem (and then to Newark) to start the organizations that would pull many writers, including Sanchez, into the orbit of the Black Arts movement.

In the early 1960s, when di Prima and Baraka were still working side by side in Manhattan, Sanchez was taking poetry classes with Louise Bogan at New York University as a graduate student. Sanchez would also participate in poetry workshops in Greenwich Village, though she found these mostly white groups were not supportive of her turn to an explicitly black poetry (Joyce 4). It was, however, in the bohemian atmosphere of Greenwich Village, at the famous Five Spot Café, that Sanchez met Baraka (Smethurst 137). He asked her to contribute to a special issue of the Paris-based, Third Worldist magazine *Revolution* that he was editing. Later, Sanchez would return the favor by inviting Baraka out to San Francisco to help

¹⁵² In 1962 di Prima had a daughter, her second child, by Baraka. Partly because Baraka was already married (to writer Hettie Jones, née Cohen), and partly because he was soon to renounce ties with the white bohemian world, the artistic collaborations between Baraka and di Prima was mostly over by 1965.

develop Black Studies courses at San Francisco State College. The two would collaborate on projects at the San Francisco Black House on Broderick Street, which served as the center of West Coast Black Arts activity and the residence of Baraka, Ed Bullins, Marvin X, and Eldrige Cleaver. Even after the two of them moved back east, Baraka and Sanchez would remain friends and collaborators.

As much as BAM partly emerged out of the New American Poetry, African American culture and activism was itself a major influence on the New American Poetry—especially on the Beats and, later, sixties countercultural and Left-wing circles. As Ted Joans remarked in a letter to André Breton: “The white poets of the Beat Generation have borrowed the hipster attitude from black Americans. They have adopted their argot, comportment, and jazz music” (Thomas 31). Beat writers were quite explicit about this influence. Ginsberg’s “Howl” (1956) famously described white hipsters “dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn.” Di Prima’s oeuvre is full of references to the be-bop and “new thing” experimental jazz musicians (Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus, Ornette Coleman) that became ideologically central to BAM’s take on contemporary black culture. As numerous critics have pointed out, in the hands of Kerouac and others, celebrations of the spontaneity of jazz improvisation often involved describing black musicians, and black Americans more broadly, as racialized Rousseauian noble savages representing a more primitive and emotionally authentic state of being (Kane 86-9).

A more politicized form of this view of African American culture and politics as the vanguard can be seen in the influence of the civil rights movement and Black Power on the development of the New Left. Many anti-war figures had their first taste of activism in the Freedom Summer or CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] actions. Later, when Kwame Ture [Stokely Carmichael] and others split with pacifist and pro-integrationist mainstream civil rights in the mid-1960s, some more militant figures of the white Left followed their lead. For example, after the Weather Underground emerged from the ashes of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), they argued that African Americans and people in the ‘Third World’ were leaders of the global anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist revolution and that the job of white revolutionaries was to follow their example (Rossinow 101). This discourse of a vanguard spanning the ghettos of the U.S. and the jungles of Vietnam is a good reminder that even before civil rights and Black Power influenced the New Left, the African American freedom struggle was inspired by decolonization and Global South liberation struggles.

For example, in *Revolutionary Letters* di Prima frequently makes references to civil rights, Black Power, revolutionary Cuba, Mao Zedong’s China and ‘Third World’ figures. Huey Newton, Angela Davis, Dick Gregory, Fred Hampton, George Jackson, and Robert Williams make appearances in the poems. The African revolution unexpectedly informs some of di Prima’s most moving poems.¹⁵³ Her 1966’s “Goodbye Nkrumah” reflects on the US-supported coup against the Ghanaian

¹⁵³ African heroes like Guinea’s Ahmed Sékou Touré, Tanzania’s Julius Nyerere, and Kenya’s Jomo Kenyatta were crucial figures for BAM writers, and Frantz Fanon appears in Sanchez’s poetry.

revolutionary leader in that year and looks back on the 1961 assassination of Patrice Lumumba, first Prime Minister of an independent Congo:

When the radio told me there was dancing in the streets,
I knew we had engineered another coup
[. . .]
a few of us tried it, we tried to stop it with printing
we tried to protect you with mimeograph machines
green posters LUMUMBA LIVES flooded Harlem in those days
well, the best thing to do with a mimeograph is to drop it
from a five-story window, on the head of a cop (145-6)

The assassination of Lumumba was a crucial politicizing event for artists and revolutionaries associated with Black Power. Baraka and others were arrested in February 1961 at the protests at the United Nations headquarters after he and other protesters interrupted the speech of U.S. representative Adlai Stevenson with shouts of “Killers! Murderers!” Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Sanchez and other BAM writers made frequent mention both Lumumba and Nkrumah, yet these figures appear frequently in di Prima as well.

In 1971 poem “Rant from a Cool Place,” di Prima imagines a possible future wherein the ‘Third World’ is victorious and calls the U.S. to reckoning for imperialist crimes in Africa and Southeast Asia:

they’re waiting to get Tim Leary
Bob Dylan
Allen Ginsberg
LeRoi Jones — as, who killed Malcolm X? They give themselves away
with TV programs on the Third Reich, and I wonder if I’ll live to sit in Peking
or Hanoi
see TV programs of LBJ’s Reich: our great SS analysed, our money exposed,
the plot to keep Africa
genocide in Southeast Asia now in progress Laos Vietnam Thailand
Cambodia O soft-spoken Sukarno (149)

While Fredric Jameson has discussed the “third world origins” of the Euro-American New Left, and it is generally recognized that Third Worldism and anti-colonialism were key influences on BAM (257 Smethurst), di Prima’s poems show how the Beat/hippie/countercultural aesthetic often drew on the same sources. Di Prima links Lyndon B. Johnson’s presidency to Hitler’s rule and imagines war tribunals in China or Vietnam. She also links LSD guru Leary and Bob Dylan to Amiri Baraka, suggesting that “they” seek to assassinate both hippie figures and BAM poets just as they did Malcolm X. The wealth of references in poems like this show that, despite frequent tensions among various artistic and political movements of the sixties, all were breathing the same air.

Physical Health as Revolutionary Survival in Sonia Sanchez’s *We a BaddDDD*

People

Understanding a little more about the artistic infrastructure that supported the Black Arts Movement and its linguistic and formal innovations is necessary for understanding Sanchez’s central themes. The focus on issues like health, addiction, and physical presentation are directly connected to BAM’s self-definition as a mass literature with the pedagogical intention of organizing black masses into a militant political formation.

Though Sanchez’s first poems were published in the early 1960s in journals like the *Minnesota Review*, she gained visibility once her work was included in the three epoch-making anthologies: *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* (LeRoi Jones [Baraka] and Larry Neal, 1968), *For Malcolm* (Dudley Randall, 1968),

and *The New Black Poetry* (Clarence Major, 1969). Anthologies were crucial in consolidating movement literatures in the long sixties. Between 1967 and 1973 more than 30 anthologies were published in the U.S., ranging in focus from the poetry of women's liberation movement to Nuyorican poetry (Onigri 24).¹⁵⁴ Connected to this flourishing of anthologies, a number of magazines featured BAM writers, including *SoulBook*, *Black Dialogue*, and *Negro Digest/Black World*. At the same time, a number of influential new published houses appeared that focused on writing by African American poets: Third World Press, Lance Press, Lotus Press, and others.

Broadside Press, started in Detroit in 1965 by local poet Dudley Randall, was an earlier publisher of Sanchez's works. He began with the intention of printing broadsides (large single-sided fliers usually containing a single poem or message that could be cheaply printed and widely distributed), but quickly moved into poetry chapbooks. Broadside published Sanchez's first book *Homecoming* in 1969. Amiri Baraka, Haki R. Madhubuti, Carolyn Rodgers, and even older and more established poets like Gwendolyn Brooks began publishing with Broadside. Often these books of poetry sold tens of thousands of copies—sometimes more than more canonical figures of U.S. poetry.¹⁵⁵ The success of ventures like Broadside was based in their selling volumes as cheaply as possible. Randall was inspired by the “popular Soviet editions of poetry produced and priced to be accessible to a mass audience” (Smethurst 210). BAM writers reached a mass audience, a rare feat for poetry in the

¹⁵⁴ Sanchez herself edited two anthologies in the period: *We Be Word Sorcerers* (1973) and *Three Hundred and Sixty Degrees of Blackness Coming at You* (1973)

¹⁵⁵ Sanchez claims the most popular volumes sold as much as 100,000 copies (Joyce 232).

United States. Randall saw Broadside as, “in embryo, one of the institutions that black people are creating by trial and error and out of necessity in our reaching for self-determination and independence” (Smethurst 227). The health of the press showed the popularity of a US black nationalist politics and poetics.

Sanchez’s second book *We a BaddDDD People* (1970) propelled her. Randall’s introduction to the chapbook includes an anecdote about a bemused mainstream critic asking Sanchez why she does not publish with a professional publisher: “Sonia commented, “The critic don’t know that Broadside Press is the ba-a-a-dest motherfucken press today”” (10). The same tongue-in-cheek bravado and colloquial register is on display throughout the poems, perhaps the most famous of which is “blk/ rhetoric”:

who's gonna make all
that beautiful /rhetoric
mean something.
like
i mean
who's gonna take
the words
blk/is/beautiful
and make more of it
than blk/capitalism.
u dig?
i mean
like who's gonna
take all the young/long/haired/
natural/brothers and sisters
and let them
grow till
all that is
impt is them
selves
moving in straight /
revolutionary / lines

choice. She has remarked that she sees the public demythologization of “lies” as one of her primary tasks as a poet:

So when I decide to tell the truth about an event/happening, it must be clear and understandable for those who need to understand the lie/lies being told. . . I decided along with a number of other Black poets to tell the truth in poetry by using the language, dialect, idiom, of the folks we believed our audience to be. (16)

Sanchez’s use of language is linked to her desire to communicate with a mass readership through a poetry that aims to intervene in the world and educate other black people.

Yet the distinctiveness of this poetry cannot only be explained by Sanchez’s intended effect on people reading her words on the page, which are arranged as a kind of score meant to approximate oral performance. Certain phonetic aspects of this language are meant to seize the attention of listeners—a technique refined through attempts to keep audiences attentive to their work in public readings. She recalls that her first poetry readings in Harlem in the mid-1960s with Baraka and Askia Muhammad Touré [Ronald Snellings] were often in bars. Once they shut off the jukeboxes, they had to quickly draw people in before this unwitting audience grew ornery that the music had been turned off: “we started to go ‘pshom t-t-t-t,’ staccato-style, ‘d-d-d-d’—you know, like machine guns. And of course we used a couple curse words because we knew that would gather them” (Joyce 81-2). The same technique can be found in the name of the volume (*We a BaddDDD People*) and throughout the poems. In the case of “blk/ rhetoric” the tiered spacing out of the lines and other

sought to bring “advanced” poetry to African American communities in a familiar idiom that could move and delight them (Baraka quoted in Thomas 205). The poetic techniques of Sanchez were in line with this desire to unite an avant-garde aesthetic for mass popularity.

Now for the content of the poem. “blk/ rhetoric” is concerned with the potential disconnect between aesthetics and politics, style and action. Sanchez begins by asking:

who's gonna make all
that beautiful /rhetoric
mean something. (15)

If the slogan “Black is beautiful,” or popular expressions of the concept like James Brown’s 1968 song “Say It Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud” become mere advertising slogans, then for Sanchez the Black Power movement is in danger of being reduced to nothing but empty talk. Black capitalism is not the solution. Nor are “catch / phrases” of any help. To resist being “caught” by these binding delusions that make words lose their substance, one needs militant discipline:

moving in straight /
revolutionary / lines
toward the enemy

Having the ability to face down this enemy, and the knowledge to identify who this enemy is, will save words from losing their meaning.

Item by item the poem lays out what revolutionary discipline entails: eschewing hard drugs, alcohol (“a 35¢ bottle of ripple”), unhealthy or unclean foods (“chit / ter/ lings”), destructive role-models (“pimps” with their Cadillacs), and

Similarly, Sanchez, who eventually adopted a macrobiotic diet (Sesay 144), stresses nourishing food. A 1973 poem declares “we must preserve. prolong our / lives. we have to stop eating unhealthy foods” (*Blues Book* 13). Survival is a matter of physical health. Sanchez’s role as a poet is to instill new habits and healthier lifestyles within the Black community.

Finally, in “blk/chant” Sanchez further elaborates on the deleterious connection between addiction and revolutionary consciousness:

(as u reach
 for that scag
 reefers
 wine
 that send u spinnen into witeness
 forgotten yo / blackness.)) (33)

Sanchez plays on the white color of certain types of heroin (“scag”) to make a larger point. White and black stand for mental states in these poems, as they do in many conceptualizations of black cultural and revolutionary nationalism. In 1969 diplomat and scholar Mercer Cook argued that:

A profound revolution is occurring in the minds of black people and [. . .] when that revolution is complete (and there is nothing to stop it save sheer annihilation)—when it is complete, when these Negroes have been turned into black people, conscious and whole and powerful and proud, the revolution will have become externalized, and the United States as a country will either be transformed or destroyed.” (67)

For Sanchez as for Cook, “blackness” is another name for a cultural revolution.

Whiteness is a kind of fallen state, just as blackness is not merely given for African Americans but must be embodied through disciplined action. Whiteness is a form of psychic death—the addict comatose on the ground—while blackness symbolizes

health, both individual and collective. It is significant that both “blk/rhetoric” and “blk/chant” are in a section of Sanchez’s book titled “Survival Poems.” Health is the possibility of “blk/ tomorrows” for the entire community (27).

For Sanchez, the problem with heroin in particular is that it can cause the kind of psychic and physical “annihilation” that Cook describes—the “you” of the poem cannot transform or destroy the United States if are yourself destroyed by it.¹⁶⁰ In the second section of *We a BaddDDD People* (“Love/Songs/Chants”), Sanchez describes the effect of addiction on romantic relationships. One of the key poems in this section is titled “—answer to yo / question [/] of am i not yo / woman [/] even if u went on that shit again.” The speaker’s answer is, in short, no: ‘I wud not be yo / woman [/] & see u disappear [/] each day” (38). Sanchez divorced husband and fellow poet Etheridge Knight because he refused to stop using heroin; at the height of the conflict between them, Knight even tore up Sanchez’s manuscript of *We a BaddDDD People* (Joyce 75).¹⁶¹ Beyond this biographical detail, it is clear that the consequences of “disappearance” go far beyond the particular relationship depicted:

no man.

¹⁶⁰ Sanchez’s description of the negative affect drug addiction has on revolutionary organizing precedes speculations that the CIA began intentionally flooding African American communities with crack cocaine and other drugs in order to crush militancy. Scholarly opinion on journalist Gary Webb’s 1998 *Dark Alliance: The CIA, the Contras, and the Crack Cocaine Explosion* remain divided. However, already in the early 1970s Sanchez and others recognized the demobilizing potential of certain drugs. For more solidly established accounts of COINTELPRO’s efforts to destroy the Black Power movement see David Cuninghame’s *There’s Something Happening Here: The New Left, the Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence*

¹⁶¹ In her many plays Sanchez works through similar themes. In *Uh, Uh; But How Do It Free Us?* (174) a man disappoints his pregnant partner through his drug use. Though he abandons his responsibilities as a husband and revolutionary she convinces herself that he will give up drugs: “He’ll change. He’ll stop drinking. And smoking. . . . He just needs time. I Just got to rock myself in Blackness, insulate my soul with righteousness and that will sustain us both” (97). The man goes on to disappoint her again.

live to come back again into
our neighborhoods.

Sanchez envisions community self-defense and -determination as strategically essential. In her reversal, it is white people who become “negroes” while black people achieve self-realization and become “BAADDD” (52). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, lines about killing white people occurred with some frequency in the poetry of Sanchez and other BAM writers.¹⁶² As Sanchez recalls in a 1990 interview,

This was a period when we called white people a lot of names and cussed them out a lot. But it was also a period when we began to say that we had to move beyond cussing out white folk, and start to do the work that we needed to do for our survival. (22 Highsmith-Taylor).

She describes this period of militancy as a necessary part of the movement’s development. She and other black artists began to write at a time when even the word “black...was a hard word for many of us to say” because of its negative connotations (21). In such a context, writing this word openly had a liberating function, allowing her to see herself and her community in new ways. In an interview she explains the purpose of her BAM-aligned books from 1969 to 1974:

Let me tell now what it means to be black, let me tell you now what this has meant to us, let me tell you now how we must survive, let me tell you some history, some herstory, and that was what it was about. The first, second, third, and fourth books were all directed toward that, because you had to say to people, who did not believe it, that they were human” (Junlien et al. 122)

¹⁶² Before Amiri Baraka departed the Greenwich Village scene for Harlem in 1965, leaving behind his given name LeRoi Jones, he was close with Frank O’Hara and other white bohemian artists and poets. One anecdote captures the varied reactions of Baraka’s former collaborators:

“Ted Berrigan recalled an afternoon that he spent at Frank O’Hara’s apartment talking poetry and ‘art world’ gossip. Suddenly another friend of O’Hara’s bounded up the stairs and bust into the room [. . .]. ‘Amiri Baraka’s on the radio,’ the man gasped, red with alarm, ‘and he’s talking about killing white people!’

‘Well,’ said Frank consolingly, ‘I don’t think he will begin with you or me. Now sit down and have some wine’

Not everyone is blessed with Frank’s gift for nonchalance.” (201)

Despite Sanchez’s description of this work as a necessary phase, is already clear in Sanchez’s 1970 poem that “off those white mothafuckers” cannot be reduced only to literalism or symbolism. Within this poetry’s economy of images, whiteness is a multivalent concept standing for corruption as opposed to survival, rhetoric as opposed to truth, and unfreedom as opposed to nationhood.

If the “actions” of Sanchez’s of “thots and actions” formula has to do as much with consciousness and militancy, so her understanding of “thots” also unites the physical with the metaphysical. Later in the same poem Sanchez writes:

and we be gittin into a
 like discipline

of the mind
 soul. body. no drinken cept to celebrate
 our victories / births.
 no smoken. no shooten
 needles into our blk / veins
 full of potential blk/
 gold cuz our
 high must come from
 thinking working
 planning fighting loving
 our blk / selves
 into nationhood. (53)

Sanchez’s description of “blk/ | gold” harkens back to the original etymological meaning of “alchemy” from the ancient Egyptian name *kēme* meaning “black earth,” from which we get Greek *khēmeía* (having to do with metals) and Arabic *al-kīmiyā*, whence “alchemy” (OED). In Sanchez’s reversal blackness is not the first stage of the alchemical process (*nigredo* or blackening) but both the original state and the final outcome. This “black magic,” as Baraka called it, is directly related to the concept of

black nationhood. Alchemy, or magic, arises out of an engagement with practical concerns, not an escape from them. The road to nationhood leads through health. Similarly, aesthetics is not opposed to everyday life; rather, the purpose of art is to bring one deeper into the practices needed for individual and collective survival. This philosophy brought with it a new conceptualization of the function of art. William L. Van Deburg writes that one goal of cultural nationalist movements like BAM was to abolish “white” understanding of art’s separateness: “Considered as a whole, white culture was said to reveal an unfortunate separation of art from life; artists from their audience” (183). Sanchez’s *We a BaddDDD People* enacts a new aesthetic.

Recipes for Revolution in di Prima’s *Revolutionary Letters*

Like Sanchez, Di Prima’s poetry is invested in physical health and survival. Many of the *Revolutionary Letters* give practical advice for how to survive in some unidentified situation of urban insurrection or counter-insurrection. Starting the *Revolutionary Letters* in 1967 and adding occasionally to the first sixty-eight of them written during the long sixties, to date di Prima has produced nearly one hundred letters. These poems often read like instruction manuals for extreme situations. Joshua Clover describe the *Letters* as a type of georgics; like Virgil giving farming advice in verse, di Prima provide instructions for how to elude FBI surveillance (#18), stay safe from tear gas or stampedes during street protests (#8), hide fugitives or heal “torn or half-cooked flesh” (#14, 26). The pedagogical content of the poems affects their form, which address a mass audience. Yet as with Sanchez, these prosaic, clearly written prescriptions quickly edge into more spiritual territory.

“Revolutionary Letter #5” teaches the reader how to stock a home apothecary:

at some point
you may be called upon
to keep going for several days without sleep:
keep some ups around, to be
clearheaded, avoid ‘comedown’ as much as possible,
take vitamin B along with amphetamines, try
powdered guarana root, available
at herb drugstores, it is an up
used by Peruvian mountainfolk, tastes
like mocha (bitter) can be put in tea
will clear your head, increase oxygen supply
keep you going past amphetamine wooziness

at some point
you may have to crash, under tension, keep some downs
on hand, you may have to cool out
sickness, or freak-out, or sorrow, keep some downs
on hand, I don’t mean
tranquillizers, ye olde fashioned SLEEPING PILL
(sleep heals heads, heals souls) chloryll hydrate
(Mickey Finn) one of the best, but
nembotal, etc. OK in a pinch, remember
no liquor with barbiturates

at some point
you will need painkillers, darvon
is glorified shit, stash some codeine & remember
it’s about five times more effective
if taken with aspirin

ups, downs & painkillers are
the essence: antibiotics
for extreme infections, any good
wide-spectrum one will do, avoid penicillin
too many allergies, speaking of which
cortisone is good for really bad attacks
(someone who freaks out asthma-style, or with hives)

USE ALL THESE AS LITTLE
as possible, side effects multifarious
and they cloud the brain
tend to weaken the body and obscure

judgment

ginseng tea, ginger compresses, sea salt,
prayer and love
are better healers, easier come by, save the others
for life and death trips, you will know
when you see one (12-13)

The repetition of “at some point” at the beginning of each stanza suggests a certain inevitability (12): this is information one needs to know. The unspoken eventuality is a situation of revolutionary violence, in which “you may be called upon” to act. And in a sense, this call to action is evident through the genre of these poems as letters.

They are being directed at a specific audience who will heed the advice.

“Revolutionary Letter #5” reflects skepticism of certain substances for the way they “cloud the brain / tend to weaken the body and obscure / judgment.” Unlike Sanchez, Di Prima does not address the issue of addiction in these poems, though she had a lifelong suspicion of heroin (*Recollections* 204). She is referring instead to heavy pharmaceuticals and their both living-saving and dangerous (“no liquor with barbiturates”) potential.¹⁶³ Even so, both poets put a premium on clear-headedness. Di Prima exhibits a certain wariness of certain substances even as she assesses all the options. When it comes to “life and death trips,” suggests, you use whatever is at

¹⁶³ Elsewhere Di Prima writes positively of LSD (“tripping together [. . .] / at home, or in the park” [#13, p.24]) and marijuana (“O my brothers / busted for pot, for looting, for loving” [#28, p. 41]). Though both Sanchez and di Prima were based in San Francisco at this time, the attitude towards psychoactive drugs could be quite different in the post-Summer of Love hippie-adjacent scene compared to sections of black cultural nationalism. Di Prima joined others in the counterculture in seeing LSD as a way of moving “from alienation to the total embrace of mankind” (John Sinclair quoted in Farber 27).

hand. Even so, herbal remedies, and seemingly spiritual remedies (“prayers and love”), are preferable.

Similarly, “Revolutionary Letter #3” provides what Klaver calls “an actual pantry list for the revolution” that stresses health and clear vision. (104). In case the streets are unsafe or supplies are cut off, here’s what one needs:

you can cool it indefinitely
with 20 lb brown rice
20 lb whole wheat flour
10 lb cornmeal
10 lb good beans — kidney or soy
5 lb sea salt
2 qts good oil
dried fruit and nuts
add nutrients and a sense of luxury
to this diet, a squash or coconut
in a cool place in your pad will keep six months (9)

Di Prima’s food recommendations are macrobiotic—like Sanchez’s own diet. In the mid-1960s the macrobiotic food movement was small yet treated by authorities as subversive. In New York, di Prima recalls, that stores specializing in products like seaweed and ginseng tea were often raided by police. There were “wholesale rampages where FDA agents tore open bags of organic grain, poured them on the floor, and then sprayed them with pesticide” (419).¹⁶⁴ In “Revolutionary Letter #55” she elaborates on this choice through tropes of the fledgling health food movement of the late 1960s:

No to canned corn & instant
mashed potatoes. No to rice krispies.
No to special K. No to margarine

¹⁶⁴ For more on sixties health food movements, and their eventual commercialization, see Belasco’s *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry*.

mono & di-glycerides, NSDA
for coloring, causing cancer.

[. . .]

All I can say
is what my daughter age six once said to me:
*“if I can’t pronounce it
maybe I shouldn’t eat it.”*

or, Dick Gregory
coming out of a 20-day fast:
*“the people of America are controlled
by the food they eat”* (71)

Naturalness is for di Prima connected to the ability to intervene in and survive any situation. The civil rights activist and comedian Dick Gregory that di Prima mentions here famously stated that: “If they took all the drugs, nicotine, alcohol and caffeine off the market for six days, they'd have to bring out the tanks to control you.” Similarly, di Prima posits a link between healthy bodies, minds, and movements. Her later comments about macrobiotics illuminate the surprising commingling of discourses associated with the lifestyle-centered sixties hippie counterculture and the revolutionary Left that is so often reflected in her poems:

for me the most important part of macrobiotics was the idea of a ‘unifying principle’ or worldview (for macros it was, of course, yin/yang polarity). The notion that a unifying principle in culture, art, history, was not only possible but *necessary*, deepened and changed the nature of my journey [. . .]. I began to look for the structure(s) on which I could hang my own experience, my knowledge. (*Recollections* 421)

The *Letters* represents this search for unifying structure. It offers readers a total philosophy of living, from food choices and tactics of sabotage to spirituality.

This combination of approaches is reflected in the linguistic choices of *Revolutionary Letters*. The use of the second person is notable throughout the poems, where the words “you” or “your” recur nearly 200 times. This form of direct address, combined with imperative verbs (“avoid,” “try,” “remember”), give the poems a sense of urgency. They address themselves to each reader directly while also hailing a political formation into being.¹⁶⁵ Will you be ready for anything? And do you have the knowledge, discipline, and clarity needed to help others survive? The letters also have a characteristically conversational tone, with self-correcting or -interrupting phrases (“I don’t mean,” “speaking of which,” “all I can say is”) as if the speaker is in the thick of the action. The inclusion of slang (“your pad,” “to crash,” “freak-out,” “glorified shit”) brings the language down to earth, making what could otherwise be an overly pedantic tone surprisingly intimate.

Di Prima uses many of the same telegraphic abbreviations¹⁶⁶ and typographical habits as Black Arts writers. This is particularly true of her poems from the late 1950s, one of which contains lines with sideways slashes and uncapitalized proper nouns, as in Sanchez’s later poetry: “brooklyn/ the sunset/ ships” (*Earthsongs* np.). Other early poems are packed with bohemian colloquialisms:

Like man don’t flip, I’m hip you
cooled this scene. But you can hock
the jazz guitar, in limbo they play
ballads (*This Kind* 10).

¹⁶⁵ Di Prima’s use of the second-person pronoun can be productively compared with Harper’s analysis of the same technique in BAM. See “Nationalism and Social Division in Black Arts Poetry of the 1960s” (249-250).

¹⁶⁶ Di Prima was not only influenced by Pound, she spent two weeks visiting him in 1956 at St. Elizabeth’s mental hospital in Washington, D.C. (*Recollections* 141-3).

As di Prima wrote in 1969, even before any poets were being called “Beats” her generation of bohemian New Yorkers “raced about in Levis and work shirts, made art, smoked dope, dug the new jazz, and spoke a bastardization of the black argot” (MB, 126). Contemporary commentators from Norman Mailer to Tom Wolfe have problematically celebrated or otherwise harshly lampooned this influence of African American culture on white segments of the Left and counterculture.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, di Prima was told by friends and fellow writers that this “bastardized” street vernacular would be incomprehensible to the wider public. Indeed, she insists that these linguistic choices marginalized herself and other poets: “if we chose to write the language and speech of the blue-collar family or street folks we had grown up around, we were automatically invisible to a large part of the literary world” (Calonne 125). Even so, the political import of such a choice could not be the same as for the BAM poets, for whom the use of a black vernacular was “tied to BAM principles of affirming African American culture and speaking to and for Black people” (Klaver 166).

Revolutionary Letters represents a more thoroughly digested synthesis of di Prima’s earlier poetic experiments. In the mid-1960s she began producing more dense and experimental work that combined street language with learned references to Hinduism, mathematics, the *I Ching*, gnosticism, and psychedelics—as in the poems of *The Calculus of Variation*, written between 1961 and 1965 (and finally published

¹⁶⁷ See Mailer’s “The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster” (1957) and Wolfe’s “Radical Chic: That Party at Lenny’s” (1970).

in 1972). It was once she began reading her poetry publicly that she realized this work was “too intellectual” (Calonne 119). In 1967 di Prima traveled around the country in a VW bus giving readings everywhere from Taos to Seattle, not to mention “a Black Arts gallery in Pittsburgh” (Gray 161). Once settled in San Francisco she refined the aesthetic that would go into *Revolutionary Letters* by reading her poems on the back of a flat-bed truck or

on the steps of City Hall, while my comrades handed out the Digger Papers, and tried to persuade startled office workers on their way to lunch that they should drop out and join the revolution. (Callone 119)

She envisioned these poems/performances “almost as [. . .] street theatre” (1). Her time with the guerrilla theater and activist group the Diggers in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood influenced her style in the *Letters*. With their aggressive and creative re-uses of public space, the group “attempted to remove all boundaries between art and life, between spectator and performer, and between public and private” (Doyle 80). Developments in the Black Arts movement were a direct influence on these countercultural antics. After the Greenwich Village culture of public readings in the 1950s and early 1960s, Lorenzo Thomas writes, “Black Arts poets extended the venues for the performances beyond storefront theaters to neighborhood community centers, church basements, taverns, and the streets” (202). As with Sanchez and Baraka trying out their poems on bewildered and then enchanted patrons of Harlem’s bars, the distinctive mixing of high and low in the *Revolutionary Letters* emerged out of trial and error with oral performance.

The *Revolutionary Letters* were also designed for mass readership. Starting in 1967 di Prima sent individual poems to an underground press organization, the Liberation News Service, that would include the poems alongside photographs and other news items collected in bi-weekly packets that were sent off to more than 500 radical and alternative local newspapers across North America.¹⁶⁸ The recipes and philosophies laid out in *Revolutionary Letters* enjoyed widespread circulation and immediate consumption. As with Broadside Press, di Prima participated in a non-proprietary culture of publication. The first book edition of *Revolutionary Letters* in 1968 was printed at the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in New York with a note declaring "Free poems. No copyright. May be reprinted by anyone" and "Power to the people's mimeo machines!" (Calonne 119). "Revolutionary Letter #21" and other of di Prima's poems were printed as easily and cheaply distributable broadsides.

These poems are indeed structured as "letters"—texts that have a clear recipient and that are intended for a user. (It is worth recalling that Sanchez's "blk/rhetoric" is also described a telegraph or an SOS sent off to the black community.) Di Prima similarly creates her letter-poems to act upon the world, contrasting them with mere rhetoric. "Revolutionary Letter #9" thematizes this tension:

advocating
the overthrow of government is a crime
overthrowing it is something else
altogether, it is sometimes called
revolution
but don't kid yourself: government
is not where it's at: it's only

¹⁶⁸ For more see Slonecker's *A New Dawn for the New Left: Liberation News Service, Montague Farm, and the Long Sixties*.

a good place to start:

1. kill head of Dow Chemical
2. destroy plant
3. MAKE IT UNPROFITABLE FOR THEM to build again. (18)

The passage suggests that merely saying words can be more of a liability than acting on them, if the act is decisive enough. In her revolutionary to-do list suggests, di Prima does not shy from stating that action might even require activists to become assassins. She adds an ecological dimension by suggesting that the movement should not stop at transforming the political structure but must take on an earth-despoiling capitalism.¹⁶⁹

These poems easily move from care (for the earth and one's community) to violence, or violence as a kind of care. "Revolutionary Letter #7" addresses the theme of violence directly, but moves quickly from physical combat to metaphysics:

there are those who can tell you
how to make molotov cocktails, flamethrowers,
bombs whatever
you might be needing
find them and learn, define
your aim clearly, choose your ammo
with that in mind

it is not a good idea to tote a gun
or knife
unless you are proficient in its use
all swords are two-edged, can be used against you
by anyone who can get 'em away from you

it is
possible even on the east coast
to find an isolated place for target practice
success

¹⁶⁹ For the ecological dimensions of di Prima's *Revolutionary Letters* see Margaret Ronda's *Reminders: American Poetry at Nature's End*.

will depend mostly on your state of mind:
meditate, pray, make love, be prepared
at any time, to die

but don't get uptight: the guns
will not win this one, they are
an incidental part of the action
which we better damn well be good at,

what will win
is mantras, the sustenance we give each other,
the energy we plug into
 (the fact that we touch
 share food)
the buddha nature
of everyone, friend and foe, like a million earthworms
tunneling under this structure
till it falls (16-17)

Still aware that advocating revolution is a potential crime, di Prima tactfully leaves out the details of where one actually acquires weapons; that knowledge must be gathered outside the poem. The poem instead offers didactic aphorisms that can be understood both literally and metaphorically: “all swords are two-edged.” It also characteristically combines practical and spiritual advice. Twice di Prima states that one’s mental discipline is more important than the weapons in one’s hands. Still, when the final stanza matter-of-factly pronounces that “what will win / is mantras” the sudden switch in discourses comes as a surprise. The poem has moved from “target practice” to our shared “buddha nature”—that is, the seed of enlightenment in every sentient being, including the “foe[s]” against which the molotov cocktails or flamethrowers are presumably to be used.

This combination of seemingly contradictory languages was not atypical in di Prima’s Bay Area milieu. The artist-activists around the San Francisco Mime Troupe

and the Diggers espoused “an eclectic Marxism glimpsed through the prism of the Summer of Love” (Doyle 76). These groups sought to unite New Left activism with attitudes of the hippie counterculture. This mix of militancy and meditation is palpable in di Prima’s work. In the same breath she can discuss the communalistic sharing of food and the selecting of ammunition, and out of these practical considerations moves to “mantras” and “energy.” She rejects automatic non-violence, but also refuses to fetishize any particular set of tactics over others. As with her earthworm metaphor in #7, elsewhere she writes:

NO ONE WAY WORKS, it will take all of us
shoving at the thing from all sides
to bring it down. (#8, 17)

Like Sanchez, what di Prima offers is a total philosophy for individual and community survival, physical and psychic health, political and spiritual revolution, that is communicated through an immediately understandable and community-directed aesthetic practice.

Part II

Individual and Collective Consciousness in di Prima

Both di Prima and Sanchez saw transformations in everyday habits and health as an essential component of the larger project of cultural revolution. However, their interest in the quotidian often merged into more spiritual and psychological investigations. In these concerns, Sanchez and di Prima were not alone:

In their collective attempt to overturn or transcend dominant American values, cultural revolutionaries ranging from Timothy Leary to Robin Morgan believed that the key to societal transformation lay first and foremost in personal transformation. (Braunstein and Doyle 14)

In this section I explore how di Prima envisions the process by which consciousness itself was to be transformed and how this fits into the more literal work of social revolution. How does one free one's mind and can it be done alone? For di Prima as for Sanchez, the question of consciousness is both an individual and a collective one.

“Revolutionary Letter #49” shows di Prima's characteristic refusal of separation between the psychological and the social, the cultural and the political, even the so-called ‘First World’ and ‘Third World’:

Free Julian Beck
Free Timothy Leary
Free seven million starving in Pakistan
Free all political prisoners
Free Angela Davis
Free Soledad brothers [. . .] (62)

The poem begins in the straightforward manner of a political slogan. The structure of this repeated demand for liberation evokes the massive “Free Huey” campaign. After Black Panther leader Huey Newton was accused of shooting an Oakland police officer in 1967, he became an international cause célèbre. His incarceration galvanized support for the BPP and raised awareness of police brutality. Newton's image appeared on shirts and flags at protests and concerts, spanning Black Power, hippie, and New Left scenes. Free Huey! buttons became “as popular among white radicals as antiwar buttons with peace signs” (Pearson 30). After di Prima's charge to “Free Angela Davis” and the Soledad brothers¹⁷⁰ the poem extends itself to quite

¹⁷⁰ George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Clutchette were charged with the murder of a white prison guard at Soledad Prison in 1970

different figures. For example, the appearance of Julian Beck—actor and director of the experimental Living Theatre (and personal friend of di Prima)—suggests an expansion of what it means to be a “political prisoner.” Throughout the sixties Beck was indicted for tax evasion, indecent exposure, disorderly conduct, and possession of narcotics, among other charges. Similarly, former Harvard researcher Timothy Leary was imprisoned numerous times in the long sixties for his LSD advocacy. Finally, the inclusion of the “seven million starving in Pakistan” moves beyond famous individuals in the U.S. to suggest that no suffering anywhere is non-political.

Next the poem moves backwards in time to describe historical figures ranging from Sacco & Vanzetti and Crazy Horse to Joan of Arc and Galileo as “political prisoners.” Then di Prima breaks open the category even wider:

All prisoners are political prisoners
Every pot smoker a political prisoner
Every holdup man a political prisoner
Every forger a political prisoner
Every angry kid who smashed a window a political prisoner (63)

No crime can be considered merely ‘anti-social.’ Even seemingly personal transgressions are expressions of rage stemming from social discontent. The poem then moves on to ecological topics: “Polar bear at San Francisco zoo, political prisoner” and “Elk in Wyoming grazing behind barbed wire, political prisoners.” At the poem’s climax the category again morphs to include even those who are ostensibly free:

Every kid in school a political prisoner
Every lawyer in his cubicle a political prisoner
Every doctor brainwashed by AMA a political prisoner
Every housewife a political prisoner

Every teacher lying thru sad teeth a political prisoner
Every Indian on reservation a political prisoner
Every black man a political prisoner
Every faggot hiding in bar a political prisoner
Every junkie shooting up in John a political prisoner
Every woman a political prisoner
Every woman a political prisoner (63)

The poem calls a collectivity into being across difference: the schoolchild, doctor, and teacher share something with the Native American, black man, LGBTQ person, and heroin-user. Some are trapped in dishonesty or “brainwashing” while others are more physically trapped in poverty, racism, isolation, or violence. The inclusion of “Every woman a political prisoner” suggests that patriarchy and the institution of the family function as a prison just as white supremacy and heteronormativity¹⁷¹ do. In the poem’s denouement di Prima turns her focus on the reader and then finally on herself:

You are political prisoner locked in tense body
You are political prisoner locked in stiff mind
You are political prisoner locked to your parents
You are political prisoner locked to your past
Free yourself
Free yourself
I am political prisoner locked in anger habit
I am political prisoner locked in greed habit
I am political prisoner locked in fear habit
I am political prisoner locked in dull senses
I am political prisoner locked in numb flesh

The poem moves into a chant-like repetition as “you” and “I” are also identified as political prisoners. Bodily comportment, family trauma, mental habits, and memory take the place of the literal jail cells, bars, and fences that started the poem. Di Prima

¹⁷¹ Di Prima had relationships with both men and women, like many of her friends. She organized against homophobia as an advisory committee member of the New York City League for Sexual Freedom alongside Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, and others (Calonne 90).

draws on her study of Buddhism in an allusion to the Three Defilements of Greed, Hate, and Delusion that cut one off from both mind and body.¹⁷² Finally, the poem mingles first, second, and third person in its call for liberation:

Free me
Free me
Help to free me
Free yourself
[. . .]
Free Barry Goldwater
Help to free me
Free Governor Wallace
Free President Nixon.
Free J Edgar Hoover
Free them;
Free yourself
Free them
Free yourself
Free yourself
[. . .]
Free us (62-64)

The poem extends compassion even to its erstwhile enemies, suggesting that even those politicians responsible for the plight of the housewife, the black man, the gay person are trapped. To free oneself will also require freeing them, or at least recognizing that they are in some way also buried alive in this edifice.

“Revolutionary Letter #49” activates a number of common sixties tropes. To “free” someone whose prison bars are not necessarily tangible suggests that liberation requires a tremendous alteration in consciousness. The underlying assumption is that

¹⁷² Di Prima spent long periods studying under Shunryu Suzuki Roshi at the San Francisco Zen Center and Rinpoche Chögyam Trungpa. For more on uses of Buddhism and ideas of Asia in the work of Beat poets see Park’s “Beatific Orientalism”(57-90) in *Apparitions of Asia: Modernist Form and Asian American Poetics* and Yu’s “Auto Poesy: Allen Ginsberg and the Politics of Poetry” (19-37) in *Race and the Avant-garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965*.

one learns or is socially “programmed” into habits of obedience and inauthenticity but that through a process of unlearning or “deprogramming” the authentic self within can be released. Leary, who appears at the beginning of di Prima’s poem, was one of many prominent theoreticians of consciousness. He thought that the tool for liberating consciousness was LSD. Similarly, feminist consciousness raising (CR) groups involved women discussing seemingly personal problems in support groups so they could begin noticing patterns in the injustices they experienced in order to see them as social in nature. This was also a kind of unlearning: “CR worked by enabling the individual within a group setting to uncover the authentic self, the person—or the essence of the person—beneath the programming” (Michals 46). In the same way, “Revolutionary Letter #49” radically links personal unfreedom (the “housewife”) to more obvious political persecution (the Soledad brothers). To be free one must see the connection between ostensibly disconnected phenomena. In this way, the poem envisions the revolutionary process itself as a kind of universal consciousness raising group, one that encompasses not only the entirety of humanity but endangered animals and polluted streams. Not even past generations are excluded, as the naming of Billy the Kid, Sitting Bull, Christ, and Socrates in the poem reveals. For di Prima, nothing less than inter-species, planetary, time-traveling consciousness raising can bring freedom.

“Revolutionary Letter #4” also engages with the concept of deprogramming. What does human society look like when you pull back layers of conditioning? It looks quite a bit like the hippie counterculture, it turns out:

Left to themselves people
grow their hair.
Left to themselves they
take off their shoes.
Left to themselves they make love
sleep easily
share blankets, dope & children
they are not lazy or afraid
they plant seeds, they smile, they
speak to one another. The word
coming into its own: touch of love;
on the brain, the ear.

We return with the sea, the tides
we return as often as leaves, as numerous
as grass, gentle, insistent, we remember
the way,
our babes toddle barefoot thru the cities of the universe. (11)

The repeated phrase “left to themselves” is ambiguous. It could describe what happens if you free people from outside meddling and let them settle their own affairs, or else it could mean leaving each person to their in-built inclinations of their own nature. In both senses, “left to themselves” suggests the Daoist concept of *wu wei*: inaction or nonaction. Like the sea and the tides, the poem suggests, people can move in harmony by letting things run their course with as little interference as possible. As with the more general sixties emphasis on ‘naturalness,’ the community described here lets their hair grow long and walks barefoot. They work to define a new standard of spontaneous beauty.

This community is also non-proprietary—sharing lovers, drugs, and children. In this way, the poem elaborates on what it would mean to free the political prisoners previously mentioned: “Every kid in school,” “housewife,” “faggot,” and “woman” (#39, 63). What di Prima presents here and throughout her work is a bisexual, non-

monogamous, voluntary conception of human relationships. As Blossom Kirschenbaum writes, di Prima's project has long been "to separate sex from marriage and marriage from childrearing, and to improvise a quasi-familial supportive network" (37). In her pseudo-memoir *Memoirs of a Beatnik* di Prima offers a tongue-in-cheek presentation of this same philosophy of the erotic and reproductive community described more lyrically in the poetry:

I have [. . .] found that it is usually a good thing to be the woman of many men at once, or to be one of many women on one man's scene, or to be one of many women in a household with many men, and the scene between all of you shifting and ambiguous [. . .]. The real horror, the nightmare in which most of us are spending our adult lives, is the deep-rooted insidious belief in the one-to-one world. The world of 'this is my old man.' Live with one man, and you begin to have a claim on him. Live with five, and you have the same claim, but it is spread out, ambiguous, undefined. What is unfilled by one will be filled by another easily, no one hung up guilty and inadequate, no one pushed to the wall by demands that he/she can't 'meet.' (78)

The "real horror," as di Prima puts it, is the privatization of sexuality and emotion. To deprogram means abandoning possessiveness. Just as no lover owns another, the "babes" belong to all, are free to "toddle barefoot thru the cities of the universe." Whereas Walter Benjamin once stated that the working class's desire for revolution is "nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren," di Prima's poems try to imagine both: Crazy Horse should be freed, and so should the generations to come (260).

Just as the utopian community described in "Revolutionary Letter #4" transcends the model of the proprietary family, its members are non-possessive with their own selves. The poem is radically anti-individualistic, imagining successive generations as a collective "we" that "return[s] as often as the leaves, as numerous /

as grass.” Di Prima, who studied Ancient Greek, alludes here to Homer’s *Iliad*, which declares:

As is the generation of leaves, so is that of humanity.
The wind scatters the leaves on the ground, but the live timber
burgeons again with leaves again in the season of spring returning.
So one generation of men will grow while another dies. (Lattimore *Ii.* 6.145-49)

Lack of anxiety around both birth and death is a foundational aspect of the ethos of *Revolutionary Letters*. Early in the series di Prima declared that “the value of an individual life [is] a credo they taught us / to instill fear, and inaction, ‘you only live once’” (#2, 8). The repetition of collective pronouns in “Revolutionary Letter #4” (“We return,” “we remember”) suggests that clear vision reveals the “I” as an illusion. What is real is community.

Unsurprisingly, connected to the concepts of unlearning and deconditioning in *Revolutionary Letters*, an alternative form of pedagogy figures heavily. The letters train their recipients in how to see and understand. Each clause in “Revolutionary Letter #19,” for example, establishes the insufficient grasp of the social-psychic totality that makes “you” the “enemy.” The community does not include those who are unable to transform themselves:

if what you want is jobs
for everyone, you are still the enemy
you have not thought thru, clearly
what that means

[. . .]

if what you want
still is, or can be, schools

where all our kids are pushed into one shape, are taught
it's better to be 'American' than black
or Indian, or Jap, or PR, where Dick
and Jane become and are the dream, do you
look like Dick's father, don't you think your kid
secretly wishes you did

if what you want
is [. . .]

degrees from universities which are nothing
more than slum landlords, festering sinks
of lies, so you too can go forth
and lie to others on some greeny campus

THEN YOU ARE STILL
THE ENEMY, you are selling
yourself short, remember
you can have what you ask for, ask for
everything (31-32)

As much as these poems search out what is common or shared, they reject impartial solutions. More jobs cannot fix capitalism. Education is essential, di Prima critiques standardized forms of education for their tendency to homogenize students. Both elementary school—with its classically 'American' (read: "white") textbooks—and university education—with its "festering sinks of lies"—are the "enemy" for di Prima. A deep current of anti-reformism runs through these poems. The suggestion is that education should harness, stimulate, and expand one's understanding of what is possible rather than curtailing it. Ronda describes di Prima's "impatience with the half-measures and incremental changes of liberal politics" (88). The line "remember / you can have what you ask for" echoes wider sixties slogans with a focus on consciousness, such as "All power to the imagination" and "Be realistic, demand the impossible" from May 1968 in Paris and "We want everything" from Italy's 1970s

Operaismo currents. For di Prima, developing one's imagination means learning to think into new potentialities. In contrast, to settle for more jobs, better schools, and upward mobility through university education is a failure of imagination. This naming of "enemies" also separates di Prima's work from more pacifist tendencies in the counterculture. Barry Goldwater or Nixon may be, in the language of the earlier poems, political prisoners, but compassion should not allow a slackening of vision. Learning to see also means learning to see who and what stands in the way and being willing to physically remove them if they will not be psychologically and spiritually moved.

Di Prima's emphasis on authenticity, unlearning, returning to nature, clear vision, anti-reformism, and imagination pushes her work into a certain primitivism at moments. For example, "Revolutionary Letter #22" clarifies her thinking on education, reductively contrasting intellectual with practical pursuit: "[W]hat do you want / your kids to learn," she asks, "factoring, chemical formulae, theory / of numbers, equations, philosophy, semantics"? Or else how "to eat off the woods, deliver / a calf or baby," how "to trap a rabbit, build a raft, / to navigate by stars" (35)? Knowing that as an adult di Prima pursued serious studies in Latin and theoretical mathematics even after dropping out of Swarthmore College after one year may help contextualize this sentiment as more self-critique than anti-intellectualism, often rampant in the sixties counterculture (Calonne 30).¹⁷³ However, within the

¹⁷³ Ronda writes that di Prima's "pastoral themes—simplistic, innocence, being-in-common, the nonmodern, primitivism" are difficult to access in our contemporary structure of feeling because they suggest "the possibility of a radical break from capitalist realism." (88)

space of the poem itself a strong binary is set up between theoretical and applied knowledge. The main substance of the poem's attack on traditional education is that it both denies physicality ("how will [your kid] learn these things [. . .] / cut off in a plaster box, [. . .] called 'school' dealing with paper / from morning till night, grinding no clay or mortar") and is hopelessly Eurocentric: "history, so-called, which is / merely history of mind of western man, least interesting / of numberless manifestations on this planet." However, this and other poems suggests that the solution to the limitation of a life-denying or parochial education is a return to a prelapsarian state of tribal wholeness. Rather than overcoming the division between mental and manual labor, they valorize the second at the expense of the first.

"Revolutionary Letter #32" continues the diatribe against alienation of mind from body, and the 'west' from the 'rest,' while also revealing more of how these poems understand the procedure of deprogramming consciousness:

not western civilization, but civilization itself
is the disease which is eating us
not the last five thousand years, but the last twenty thousand
are the cancer
not modern cities, but the city, not
capitalism, but ism, art, religion, once they are
separate enough to be seen and named, named art named
religion, once they are not
simply the daily acts of life which bring the rain, bring bread, heal, bring

the herds close enough to hunt, birth the children
simply the acts of song, the acts of power, now lost
to us these many years, not killing a few white men will bring
back power, not killing all the white men, but killing
the white man in each of us, killing the desire
for brocade, for gold, for champagne brandy, which sends
people out of the sun and out of their lives to create
COMMODITY for our pleasure [. . .] (45)

The anti-aesthetic position taken up here echoes the Black Arts movement's critique of bourgeois "white" art. Art and religion, di Prima implies, should be reunited. Similarly, drawing on anthropological theories of 'primitive communism' that link the development of hierarchical societies to the development of an agricultural surplus, di Prima suggests that civilization itself is the problem. For example, in the following *Letter* di Prima's further elaborates her position:

how far back
are we willing to go? that seems to be
the question. the more we give up
the more we will be blessed (#33, 46)

Di Prima imagines "herds" in place of "the city," and hunting and birthing in place of alienated art or religion. Her description of people sent "out of their lives to create / COMMODITY" suggests an anti-capitalist critique, but the focus on the "*desire* / for brocade, for gold" (emphasis added) returns the poem to a moral anti-consumerism quite distant from Marxist analysis.

Most useful in "Revolutionary Letter #32" is the emphasis on power and how a community regains it:

[. . .] not killing a few white men will bring
back power, not killing all the white men, but killing
the white man in each of us

Given the thematic context, the proximity of "back" and "power" after the suspending enjambment following "bring" almost suggest "black power." Indeed, these lines draw on the play between the literal and figurative meaning of violence in Black Arts poems. Even in BAM, there is a recognition that as psychologically restorative as

calls for or even acts of real violence might be in the Fanonian sense (Van Deburg 283), Sanchez, Baraka, Brooks and others also recognized a “symbolic need on the part of the blacks to kill their own white values” (Evans 221). Di Prima builds on the same principle, arguing that the real work of unlearning must also require white men and women to kill the “white man” inside of them.

The evocation of violence, however, raises an important question so far left unanswered in the *Letters* explored here. How does the transformation of consciousness fit in with the larger process of social revolution? For influential countercultural figures like Ken Kesey the internal work was the entire program. When he was once asked about the war in Vietnam he retorted: “Do you want to know how to stop the war? Just turn your back on it, fuck it!” (Michaels 50). The more moderate Timothy Leary did not see consciousness transformation as replacing revolution, but thought that one needed to get one’s own psyche in check before attempting to effect larger societal change. All this was of course anathema to the organized New Left such as SDS. Most committed activist or revolutionary groups held out some role for consciousness and culture but argued that it be complementary or secondary to the more practical, ascetic, and often dangerous work of organizing.

Di Prima did not turn her back on the war, as the Keseyes of the world suggested, but the *Revolutionary Letters* often seem to side with the more hippie side of the debate, as in “Revolutionary Letter #13”:

now let me tell you
what is a Brahmasastra
Brahmasastra, hindu weapon of war
near as I can make out

a flying wedge of mind energy
hurled at the foe by god or hero
or many heroes
hurled at a problem or enemy
cracking it

Brahmasastra can be made
by any or all
can be made by all of us
straight or tripping, thinking together
like: all of us stop the war
at nine o'clock tomorrow, each take one soldier
see him clearly, love him, take the gun
out of his hand, lead him to a quiet spot
sit him down, sit with him as he takes a joint
of viet cong grass from his pocket . . .

Brahmasastra can be made
by all of us, tripping together
winter solstice
at home, or in park, or wandering
sitting with friends
blinds closed, or on porch, no be-in
no need
to gather publicly
just gather spirit [. . .] (24-5)

In this poem di Prima references a phenomenon described in the Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* where heroes, after performing great austerities, annihilate their enemy with a spiritual weapon granted by Lord Brahma. The theological accuracy or historical context of the *brahmastra*, as it should be spelled, is not of concern for di Prima, who opts to describe the phenomena as “near as [she] can make out.” What animates the poem is the idea of concentrated mental energy towards a shared goal. The idea of stopping U.S. atrocities in Vietnam through visualization techniques mirrors other anti-war but heavily countercultural antics of the period, like the attempt to levitate the Pentagon at a 1967 anti-war protest. Poet

Allen Ginsberg, who was also present for the attempted levitation, had written “Wichita Vortex Sutra” the previous year. Attempting to create a Buddhism- and Hinduism-inspired religious text, Ginsberg’s sutra was meant to function not merely as a piece of literature but as a speech-act. The poem becomes a spell. Similarly, the socialist feminist group WITCH (Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) formed on Halloween 1968 and hexed the New York stock exchange on Wall Street as their first public action.

“Revolutionary Letter #13” builds on these examples but trades the hippie or Yippie media spectacle for a more seemingly sincere troping on the concept of a mind weapon. Because “Brahmasastra [sic] can be made,” di Prima writes, “by any or all,” there is “no need / to gather publicly” (25). Though the more disciplined practice she imagines here has the same overestimation of consciousness as the plan to debilitate the U.S. Department of Defense, it functions as a thought experiment: what happens when one’s will and imagination become included in political struggle? Di Prima imagines what it would mean to coordinate the simultaneous intention of many individuals to stop soldiers in Vietnam. This mind-weapon is used as an anti-weapon, a care-weapon: “see him clearly, love him, take the gun / out of his hand.” With the description of the soldiers lighting up a “joint / of viet cong grass” both the G.I and the National Liberation Front are embraced as potential parts of the counterculture. Indeed, throughout the late 1960s NLF flags could be found flying in the Haight-Ashbury and other hippie neighborhoods of U.S. cities.) Finally, the poem turns this

weapon onto the North American continent itself. Di Prima envisions the collective “gather[ing] of spirit” as able to restore ecosystems and de-pollute water sources.

Does the transformation of consciousness in di Prima’s work take the place of more palpable forms of resistance and organization? Her collaborators in San Francisco certainly demonstrated the same overestimation of consciousness that marked other countercultural groups. As one scholar remarks, “the Diggers stood squarely on the side of the hippies in their ongoing philosophical debate with the *politicos*: if one wanted to change the world, it was necessary first to change one’s consciousness or point of view” (81). What close attention to the *Revolutionary Letters* reveals, however, is that for di Prima there was no contradiction between de-programming and revolution. Over and over these poems work to transcend the debate that divided hippies and “*politicos*.” However, her language can sometimes muddle the issue. When she writes in “Rant” that “THE ONLY WAR THAT MATTERS IS THE WAR AGAINST / THE IMAGINATION” she is not discounting the physical reality of war but suggesting that actual wars, and the inability to stop it, are manifestations of a failure of imagination, a limiting of horizons, a lack of awareness of collective strength (105). For di Prima it is not a matter of replacing politics with a transformed consciousness, or vice-versa, but of seeing these as intertwined processes.

She elaborates this holistic theory of revolution in “Letter #45”:

And it seems to me the struggle has to be waged
on a number of different levels:

[. . .]

it is a battle of energies, of force-fields, what the newspapers
call a battle of ideas

to take hold of the magic any way we can
and use it in total faith
to seek help in realms we have been taught to think of
as 'mythological'

to contact ALL LEVELS of one's own being.... (58)

Unlearning is also a process of regaining power. In writing of "magic" di Prima was drawing on the work of occultist Aleister Crowley, who defined it as "the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will" (Calonne 23). As we have seen, learning to clarify one's intention does not contradict external activity: both the physical and the metaphysical are included in "ALL LEVELS of one's being." Di Prima brings the discussion of magic to bear on the question of political (and other forms of) power in the poem "Letter #46":

And as you learn the magic, learn to believe it
Don't be 'surprised' when it works, you undercut
your power. (59)

"All power to the people!" the Black Panther Party declared. sixties militants also knew well Mao's dictum that "Political power comes out of the barrel of a gun." What makes di Prima's work so helpful in bridging sixties discourses is its comfort in switching back and forth between magic and Molotov cocktails.

Yet in other places, di Prima seems to equate transformed revolutionary consciousness with spontaneous individual actions. What Michals writes of the psychedelic scene is true for di Prima and the larger counterculture:

there were no practical suggestions at the time for transmuting the LSD experience into an active political vehicle for building a better society. Similarly, there was immense resistance within the drug culture to structural organization. (50)

As we have seen, di Prima rejects both quietism and pacifism. The war cannot just be ignored, but each aspect of the practical program alluded to in the poems falls under the rubric of what would have been called, in an earlier socialist discourse, adventurism: “kill head of Dow Chemical” or “BLOW UP THE PETROLEUM LINES.” Di Prima’s project to incorporate the work of unlearning and deprogramming, as needed for harnessing spiritual and political power, is not meant to precede or replace more practical action. However, the consciousness side of the equation repeatedly ends up overemphasized. Sonia Sanchez’s poetry offers a more thoroughgoing alternative.

Sanchez Between Cultural and Revolutionary Nationalism

Sanchez’s poetry also works to bridge practical and more metaphysical forms of transformation. This joining of different “spheres” of social activity was built into the ethos of the Black Arts movement, William L. Van Deburg argues, through its very definition of culture:

Since culture could be seen as a ‘whole way of life’ encompassing the economic, politically, social, and aesthetic aspects of a people’s existence, the work of black artists was capable of accomplishing liberation in the temporal as well as in the ‘spiritual’ realm. (189)

Notice that Van Deburg speaks of a “people’s existence.” As with di Prima, Sanchez has a radically anti-individualist approach to cultural revolution. Her poems shuttle between self and other, body and mind, practical and spiritual as if trying to prefigure

their eventual overcoming through revolution action. At the same time, her poetry also carries a tension about which side of the equation should be emphasized. Does culture automatically transform politics, or is it politics that transforms culture? Whereas di Prima staked out a third place between the hippies (who saw self-transformation as sufficiently revolutionary) and the politicians (who demanded more concrete action to transform shared conditions), Sanchez's work transcends the disagreements between cultural nationalism and revolutionary nationalism that sometimes split the Black Power movement into order to reach a more complex synthesis of inner and outer transformation.

In a helpful formulation, Elizabeth A. Frost argues that BAM drew upon and adapted a larger sixties structure of feeling. Black Arts, she argues, was similar to other avant-garde movements "for its focus was a social and political revolution that could be successful, its practitioners believed, only through a fundamental change in consciousness" (70). For Sanchez, the crucial first step in transforming the consciousness of a collectivity is defining its existence. Like di Prima's allusion to the trees and leaves of generations found in Homer, for Sanchez the black nation transcends the individual lifetime. In a poem dedicated to Etheridge Knight, then hospitalized, she writes that even if his body is to wither and pass

blk/
 mass can
 not die maaan.
 it regroup
 to move
 in to another
 space. a
 nother time. (29)

Much of the work of *We a BaddDDD People* is dedicated to teaching her readers to understand themselves as part of a self-generating collectivity. As Amy Abugo Ongiri writes, “the Black Arts Movement’s search to define and codify a Black aesthetic became a search for the trace elements of community as a necessary means to lay representation claims to that community” (97). These trace elements are found within both a shared culture and a struggle to survive. Central to both is the black community’s definition of itself, not as a coalitional community as in the *Revolutionary Letters*, but a separatist one. Defining and instilling Blackness is at the heart of Sanchez’s project to transform consciousness. Yet even within the “blk/mass” Sanchez will find divisions and inequalities that can only be healed through uncompromising truth-telling. In her poetry, gender is a crucial node of collective unity that complicates the unity defined by race. At times Sanchez’s poetry anticipates the work of Black feminists who would challenge the subordination of gender to race and calls for unity that rejected the raising of women’s specific grievances as “divisive” (Davidson 152).

As with feminist and countercultural groups, seeing oneself as a part of a community with common experiences and interests first requires a process of unlearning. Throughout *We a BaddDDD People*, Sanchez draws on the familiar discourse of “deprogramming.” In her poetry this work of peeling away the dross is often focused on sex, romantic relationships, and families. GerShun Avilez notes that “Modern Black Nationalism [was] an especially fertile ground for questioning

normative expressions of Black gender and sexuality” (8). The following poem works to define the community exactly through these categories:

indianapolis / summer / 1969 / poem

like.

i mean.

don't it all come down
to e / co / no / mics.

like. it is fo
money that those young brothas on
illinois &

ohio sts

allow they selves to
be picked up

cruised around

till they

asses open in tune

to holy rec/ tum /

dom.

& like. ain't it

fo coins

fo coins

that those blond /

wigged / tight / pants /

wearen / sistuhs

open they legs / mouth / asses

for wite / dicks

to come

in tune to

there ain't no

asses

like blk/ asses.

u dig?

and i mean.

like if brothas

programmed sistuhs fo love

instead of

fucken / hood

and i mean

if mothas programmed

sistuhs fo

good feelings bout they blk/ men
 and i
 mean if blk / fathas proved
 they man / hood by
 fighten the enemy
 instead of fucken every available sistuh.
 and i mean
 if we programmed /
 loved / each
 other in com / mun / al ways
 so that no
 blk / person starved
 or killed
 each other on
 a sat / ur / day nite corner.
 then may
 be it wud all
 come down to some
 thing else
 like RE VO LU TION.
 i mean if.
 like. yeh. (22-23)

The poem condemns conditions that require young African Americans being pushed into sex work to survive. However, her description of “young brothas” in Indianapolis or any black neighborhood in a major city being “cruised around” centers on homophobic images of gay sex. As Phillip Brian Harper’s *Are We Not Men?: Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African American Identity* and other works have shown, in BAM and black nationalist circles more generally homosexuality is often presented as a product of whiteness that threatens to corrupt the virility of black men as symbols of the health of the race. In this poem Sanchez “engages in the same homophobic rhetoric that Jones [Baraka] and others exploited” (Frost 77). The other major problem Sanchez identifies in these scenes of urban life is black women having

sex with white men for money. This interracial exploitation also harms the health and standing of the community for Sanchez and thus must be unlearned.

Finally, the poem moves towards what it presents, within a heteronormative frame, as a healthier form of sexuality. However, Sanchez discovers the need for overhaul there too. She expresses her critique hesitantly, as if the community is not prepared to listen and see:

and i mean.
 like if brothas
programmed sistuhs fo love
instead of
 fucken / hood

Contrasting sex with love, the poem suggests that black men also exploit black women through masculinist behavior. Sanchez discusses the effect of the sexual revolution on the black community (Clarke 77). Because there is great permissiveness regarding matters of sex, respect must be “programmed” from a young age:

 and i mean
if mothas programmed
 sistuhs fo
good feelings bout they blk/ men

It is up to mothers to teach young girls to see men in the community positively. However, fathers also have a responsibility to embody a healthier (though still normative) form of masculinity as a model for young men:

and i
 mean if blk / fathas proved
they man / hood by
 fighten the enemy
instead of fucken every available sistuh.

Here the poem again suggests black men often see black women only as sex objects. These lines walk an interesting line between the critique “the masculinist politics of black nationalism” (Shockley 60) and the reinforcement of patriarchal gender roles. These lines suggest that “women must be protected while men must be reinstated in their roles as heroes, warriors, and leaders” (Davidson 146).

Finally, the unlearning the poem seeks to encourage is replaced with more explicit values:

and i mean
if we programmed /
loved / each
other in com / mun / al ways

Being “programmed” to “love” would not only improve interpersonal relationships but transform the community. From the microcosm of what Sanchez presents as legitimate “(hetero)sexual love” between black people (Frost 79) to the possibility of a wider community that lets “no [/] blk / person starve,” the poem calls this “RE VO LU TION” to come “love”. However, the self-effacing persona ends the poem with a gesture of doubt: “i mean if. [/] like. yeh.” This new programming is shown to be as unlikely as it is essential.

Sanchez’s work from this period has been described as a form of “politico/cultural consciousness-raising” (Wood xii). Indeed, the poem above shares much with the feminist CR groups in its model of speaking bitterness and politicizing seemingly private woes. However, its content sometimes diverges from that expressed by concurrent second-wave feminist or countercultural movements. For example, in Sanchez’s “blk / woowoomen / chant” she makes a plea to black men:

structured social tie” (Calonne 143). Community is a central principle of di Prima’s work, but it is composed of constantly shifting and reconfiguring individuals who come together out of individual desire and shared goals, but who just as easily detach when fulfillment is not found. Sanchez does imagine abolishing the family but strengthening it and then extending principles of solidarity out to the entire (black) community.

In its own context, the sentiments Sanchez expresses must be seen as radical. BAM poetry by women “marked the first time black women poets opened a public discourse on sexuality” (Clarke 71). Sanchez’s many erotic passages in 1973’s *Love Poems*, dating from her black nationalist period, mark a bold departure by declaring the pleasure, happiness, and equality of black women to be political issues in a period when many cultural nationalists believed that women were not equal to but “complementary” to men (Smethurst 87). In his 1970 essay “Black Woman,” for example, Baraka, inspired by the thinking of Maulana Karenga, argued that “We cannot understand what devils and the devilishly influenced mean when they say equality for women” (8).¹⁷⁵ In other words, feminism is a white ‘thing.’ bell hooks argues that Baraka’s “rhetoric was typical of the language [of] black male leaders” who disguised sexism under questions of power.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ See White’s *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability* for a discussion of how ideas of Africa “constructed and reconstructed” in the Black Power movement often carried in conservative ideas of gender and sexuality.

¹⁷⁶ It must be mentioned that some BAM figures, in particular Haki Madhubuti, were quick to engage in auto-critique on the issue of “male chauvinism” in the movement and women involved with Black Power were able to publish on the topic even in prominent journals [Smethurst 87; Dawson 89].

Sanchez both attempts to “program” young people in the model of the family while also critiquing sexism from within the discourse of black nationalism. Her description of men needing to be “fighten the enemy / instead of fucken every available sistuh” shows what she sees as the limits of Black Power masculinism. As Frost writes:

even within the rhetoric of Black Arts, in the battle cries of *We a BaddDDD People*, Sanchez begins to make oppositional gestures that voice a black feminist agenda divergent from that of the movement she endorses. (69)

Already in her 1968 play *The Bronx is Next*, Sanchez exposed the weakness of a nationalism that lacked any critique of sexism. An African American sex worker known only as “Black Bitch” gets into an altercation with some young militants who have come to her housing project. After they insult her with predictable epithets for sleeping with white clients she responds:

Yeah. I know what I am. But all you revolutionists or nationalists or whatever you call yourselves—do you know where you at? I am a black woman, and I’ve had black men who could not love me or my black boys—where you gonna find black women to love you when all this is over-when you need them? (32)

As in her poems, the solution to misogyny is presented as heterosexual, monogamous pairing (“programm[ing] sistuhs fo love”), but the critique itself is damning, coming from within the movement. Throughout the militant 1970s Sanchez took public stands against patriarchy even though men in the movement denounced these concerns as

divisive (just as it was before many white feminists split from SDS and anti-war organizations to develop women's liberation).¹⁷⁷

Sanchez's literary and public critiques of sexism began before black feminism coalesced into a visible movement (Frost 68) around 1970, when Toni Cade [Bambara] published the pioneering anthology *The Black Woman*, giving voice to the struggle that Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, and others had been waging from their position between movements. Kay Lindsey's essay in the anthology described this difficulty:

As the movement toward the liberation of women grows, the Black woman will find herself, if she is at all sensitive to the issues of feminism, in a serious dilemma. For the Black movement is primarily concerned with the liberation of Blacks as a class and does not promote women's liberation as a priority. Indeed, the movement is for the most part spearheaded by males. The feminis movement, on the other hand, is concerned with the oppression of women as a class, but is almost totally composed of white females. Thus the Black woman finds herself on the outside of both political entities, in spite of the fact that she is the object of both forms of oppression. (Bambara 85)

Sanchez's open engagement with what Francis Beal calls the "double jeopardy" of being both black and a woman is all the more powerful for the way she attempts to negotiate between the conflicting demands of black nationalism and black feminism (Bambara 109). The cultural revolution her work demanded needed to challenge both white supremacy and sexism.

¹⁷⁷ For example, after the release of Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver's 1968 *Soul on Ice* in 1968 she was asked to review the memoir for the magazine *Negro World*. Her response to the book was typical her uncompromising approach. She thought, "any man who would write a book that talked about practicing rape on black women in order to rape white women was problematic" (81). When it came time to write the review, she started it like this: "Eldridge Cleaver is not a revolutionary; he's a hustler. I come from New York, and I've seen quite enough of hustlers in my time." The review was never published, but the enmity between her and the Panthers only increased.

As in “blk/ rhetoric” Sanchez worries that the revolution has not yet moved beyond aesthetics: hairstyles have changed yet behavior that undermines the movement continues. She seeks to establish a new form of sisterhood that promotes monogamy. As Sanchez has commented, this new ethos meant “I don’t take your husband. You don’t take my husband (Joyce 73). The “fo / [/] real / revolution” needs to go deeper and program men to not see women as “enemies.” The new generations have “to be taught to love they blk/selves.” Only out of self-love can a new “blk/culture” emerge. As Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford remark, BAM poets often centered self-love: “The aesthetic warfare of this movement was often the conscious attempt to deprogram the hypnotic effects of anti-black ideology” (10). In her 1974 poem “Queens of the Universe,” Sanchez elaborated on this self-hatred as a form of colonization:

for this crackerized country has dealt
on us and colonized us body and soul and
the job of Black/woooomen is to deal with this
under the direction of Black men. (*Blues Book* 12)

At this point in the 1970s Sanchez was a member of the Nation of Islam and her dual commitment towards black feminism and conservative black nationalist gender politics come into conflict even more aggressively in her poetry. In “so this is our revolution” these tensions were more implicit, as the “blk/culture” and “sun inspired life” that she seeks to establish is opposed more open-endedly to a “wite / assed / universe” (64). The most essential task, she suggests, is for black people to learn to

love themselves and each other.¹⁷⁸ What people do outside of the community is of no concern. Let white people “go to the moon / where they belong.”¹⁷⁹

Sanchez makes a turn to pedagogy, describing education of children as essential to the instilling of oppositional values like self-love. As with di Prima, she critiques traditional forms of schooling. In her own public education and studies at Hunter College and New York University Sanchez found that she “never, ever, ever [heard] anything about [blacks] that was positive” (Keita 282). She describes the “Black is beautiful” ethos of the sixties, which built on the work of Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam, as an intense process of re-education:

To have discovered oneself in the 1960s—probably the late fifties but definitely manifesting itself in the early 1960s—was almost like being reborn, I would say. It was like waking up each morning and discovering a new part of yourself. For the first time in your life, you did not have to be concerned about your nose, or your lips, or your hair. (Joyce 21).

This transformative nature of this experience pushed Sanchez to come to San Francisco to teach some of the first Black Studies classes in the country, so that black students would not have to go through the same arduous and individualized process of re-learning. In the early 1970s Sanchez was also involved in writing children’s literature, hoping to circumvent bad programming with a pedagogy centered in black culture.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Simultaneously with the more militant poems of *We a BaddDDD People*, Sanchez was writing the poems that would go into 1973’s more lyrical volume *Love Poems*.

¹⁷⁹ Sanchez’s mention of the moon is likely inspired by Gil Scott-Heron’s poem “Whitey on the Moon” (1970).

¹⁸⁰ In 1971 she published *It’s a New Day* and *The Adventures of Fat Head, Small Head, and Square Head* in 1973.

let us take back our children from
 vista/
 workers. ywca/s
 sunday/schools
 boy/
 girl/scouts of wite/amurica.
 let us begin the work of
 centuries. untold
 let us teach our
 children
 what is to be learnnnnned
 bout themselves.
 us. let us
 honestlee begin
 nation/hood
 builden.
 for our children.
 with our
 minds/hands/souls.
 with our blk/visions
 for blk/lives.
 let us begin
 the begin/en work now.
 while our
 children still
 remember us & loooooove. (65)

Before black “nation/hood” can built, whiteness must be unlearned. Consciousness is central to Sanchez’s understanding of revolution. As Frost writes, Sanchez’s poetry works to “advance a political vision that can be realized fully only if the public psyche is transformed” (77) For her, revolution “means cultural and physical warfare” that is also an act of care.

Warfare, in its multivalent meanings, is a frequent figure for collectively transformed consciousness in her poetry. As with di Prima’s neo-primitive hippie tribes, Sanchez imagines

spread[ing] ourselves thin over our

land and see[ing] our young / warriors /
sistuh moven / runnen on blk /
hills of freedom (53)

As Smethurst notes, BAM poetry made “persistent use of the figure of the African warrior to embody an essential African identity to which African Americans should aspire, representing a reconstructing of an integral wholeness shattered by slavery, racism, and colonialism” (81). For Sanchez, culture marked an important index of this wholeness and health. She followed others in giving her own children Swahili names. In the poem above, liberated children move freely across the American landscape, transforming it into something new. The training of each individual will create a tribal collectivity with the clarity of sight needed to win a revolution.

As we have seen, culture and consciousness play a central role in Sanchez’s understanding of nationhood. Similarly, these psychic transformations are to be instilled through a new kind of pedagogy and manifested in a warrior ethos. But do these transformations precede, accompany, or rather replace the more literal work of revolution? Sanchez’s poems combine the focus on the psyche characteristic of cultural nationalists with the more practical and organizational work of revolutionary nationalists.

Sanchez was, like many of her contemporaries, partly influenced by the ideas of Maulana Karenga of the Los Angeles-based cultural nationalist organization Us. Karenga’s movement/philosophy of Kawaiida inspired Sanchez, Baraka, Neal, Touré, and other BAM writers with the practical vision summed up in its seven principles of unity (*umojja*), self-determination (*kujichagulia*), collective work and responsibility

(*ujima*), cooperative economics (*ujamaa*), purpose (*nia*), creativity (*kuumba*), and faith (*imani*). Karenga wrote: “We stress culture because it gives identity, purpose, and direction. It tells you who you are, what you must do, and how you can do it” (Collins 276). As Van Deburg explains, for followers of Kawaia

black liberation was impossible, by definition unthinkable, without breaking the white culture’s domination of black minds. It was imperative that Afro-Americans ‘overturn’ themselves, rejecting the values of the dominant society while beginning to ‘redefine and reshape reality’ in their own image, according to their needs. (173)

The Us approach to culture (including the arts but also food, clothing, names, and the learning of African languages all as a decolonization of the mind) clearly appealed to Sanchez with its pedagogic focus and attention to agency.

Elsewhere in *We a BaddDDD People* Sanchez expresses doubts about an approach to nationalism that makes culture alone the center of the movement. The following poem has an attributed quotation as its title:

“To Fanon, culture meant only one thing – an environment shaped to help us & our children grow, shaped by ourselves in action against the system that enslaves us.”

the cracker is not to be played with.
he is the
enslaver/
 master. we the slaves
the evillllll he does is not new
cannot be resolved
 thru rhetoric
 hate/
 poems/
 loooooooven more than one
 wooooooovoman.
the cracker is deep
 deeper than the
400 yrs of our slavery.

Just as “Black is beautiful” can become a mere advertising slogan, even “warrior” culture can descend into costume play.

Sanchez’s sense of the limitations of culture to transform consciousness echoes revolutionary nationalist Huey Newton’s famous 1968 dismissal of ‘merely’ cultural phenomena:

Cultural nationalism, or pork-chop nationalism as I sometimes call it, is basically a problem of having the wrong political perspective. It seems to be a reaction to, instead of an action against, political oppression. The cultural nationalists are concerned with returning to the old African culture and thereby regaining their identity and freedom. In other words, they feel that assuming the African culture is enough to bring political freedom. Many cultural nationalists fall into line as reactionary nationalists.

Though Sanchez and other BAM writers in San Francisco received death threats from Black Panthers for cultural nationalist activities, her poem actually performs a quite similar critique (Smethurst 282). She contrasts the necessity of “WAR.

DISCIPLINE.LEARNEN. | LAND. PLANNEN. LOVE. AND | POWER” to the insufficiency of cuisine, fashion, and language. She goes even one step further in this auto-critique by adding “poems” to the list of things that cannot destroy the enemy.

This echoes Newton’s oft-repeated line about cultural nationalism: “culture itself will not liberate us. We’re going to need some stronger stuff” (49). But she also includes a jab at the Black Panthers by adding “leather jackets” to the list, suggesting the revolutionary nationalist faction is also in danger of substituting symbol for substance, the trappings of the new black person for real nationalist thoughts and behavior.

Though both Newton and Sanchez were drawing on the work of Frantz Fanon, they extracted different lessons from it. The appearance of English-language translations of works like *Studies in a Dying Colonialism* and *The Wretched of the Earth* in the 1960s had an electrifying effect on African American activists in the U.S. (112). Though Fanon himself was ambivalent about how much of the lessons of the African revolution could be applied wholesale to the American context, his works became handbooks for U.S. revolutionaries. The chapter “On National Culture” in the latter work was particularly relevant for artists like Sanchez because it explored various stages in the awakening of “native intellectuals” as they dedicate themselves to the nationalist revolution.

According to Fanon, in the early phase anti-colonial artists and intellectuals are prone to draw on anthropological or even archaeological research that disproves colonialism’s claim that the “natives” have no culture. This valorization of what has been hidden or dismissed are a crucial first step in the colonized person’s liberation from cultural domination (209). This first phase of withdrawal sets a “high value on . . . customs, traditions, and appearances” but risks devolving into a “banal search for exoticism” (221). It is exactly this phase that both Sanchez and Newton critique—though Sanchez, like Fanon, is more sympathetic to the salutary “psycho-affective” effect of cultural realignment (210). In the second phase, the “native intellectual” tries to connect with the people, but is painfully aware of the distance between them, especially because the intellectual was often educated in the colonizer’s language and culture (222). These must be unlearned. Finally, there comes a “fighting phase,” when

the intellectual goes from chasing after the people trying to emulate them to “shak[ing] the people” (222). Fanon speaks specifically of a “fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature” that arises when even non-intellectuals begin writing and new voices are encouraged to speak, often discovering radically new styles that can speak to the masses (223).

What Newton finds in Fanon is the idea that culture on its own is not enough. Fanon writes: “you do not show proof of your nation from its culture but that you substantiate its existence in the fight which the people wage against the forces of occupation” (223). What Sanchez finds is a notion of literature that ceases to be just literature but becomes another weapon in the struggle: a “literature of combat” (24). Sanchez’s Fanon is the one who argues that “the national Algerian culture” takes shape in “every French outpost which is captured or destroyed,” suggesting that armed conflict or martyrdom are also like poems or novels (233). However, he also insists that “culture is not put into cold storage during the conflict” (245). This is what is behind Sanchez’s notion that the enemy “cannot be resolved [/] thru [. . .] poems/” (50)—even while she engaged in the writing of poems. Just as the discipline represented by new forms of food or clothes are not enough on their own, the work of self-love, internal transformation, and unlearning must not be abandoned. What Sanchez envisions is a fusion of revolutionary nationalism and cultural nationalism, physical and psychic liberation, politics and poetry. As she writes in *It’s a New Day (Poems for Young Brothas and Situhs)* in 1971, if there are to be poems they must all be embodied in the youth themselves:

you are our poems
a cascading sound of rhyme and meter.
and when you enter into the streets
and walk yo earthquake walk
we live.” (10)

Coda

The poetry of Sonia Sanchez and Diane di Prima represents two parallel attempts to conceptualize a dialectic of culture and politics that both politicizes cultural objects and directs cultural energy into how the origins and ends of political action are imagined in order to create a fuller vision of social transformation. For both, this vision moves effortlessly from attention to medicine and cuisine to utopian speculation and active psychic reprogramming. *We a BaddDDD People* and *Revolutionary Letters* go furthest among many sixties texts in giving conscious expression to this project of cultural revolution. While Sanchez’s work of this period can fall into reinforcing the patriarchal family and di Prima at times puts forward a simplistic primitive communism as the solution, they both see culture and consciousness as a terrain of political struggle. In the 1970s their work continued to move in similar directions. Sanchez’s *A Blues Book for a Blue Black Magic Woman* (1974) attempted to create a feminist mythology of womanhood from within the male-dominated Nation of Islam.¹⁸¹ Similarly, di Prima moved into more explicitly spiritual territory with *Loba*, her epic of a shapeshifting female wolf archetype (Parts 1-8 of the serial poem was published in 1978).

¹⁸¹ See Kalver’s reading of Sanchez’s poem “Queens of the Universe” for the way it “seems to toe the nationalist party line when it comes to gender politics, [while] also addresses specific concerns that Black feminists were tackling at the time, especially regarding African American gender roles and relationship dynamics” (118-119).

Yet for all their commonalities, little dialogue was possible across these movements once the Black Arts movement coalesced. The efficacy of forming coalitions with white people became a divisive issue as civil rights morphed into Black Power. While segments of the Black Panthers encouraged alliances, many BAM writers and cultural nationalists in general were unequivocally opposed to working with white people. The project of “nationhood” meant prioritizing autonomous institutions and community power. If allies were to be found, it would be among the ranks of African and other ‘Third World’ revolutionaries.

Though Sanchez never names di Prima, in her poetry and plays the white woman frequently became a corrupting influence on Black men and an obstacle to Black self-love.. In 1969 Sanchez described the “white woman [as] always sucking after blk/ness (*Home Coming* 27). Ever since Sanchez had stopped attending poetry workshops in Greenwich Village in the mid-1960s she had cut ties with white bohemia. Even though di Prima and Sanchez were both in San Francisco in 1968 and 1969, there are few indications of collaborations between BAM writers and the counterculture.¹⁸²

Within this personal and political silence, di Prima’s poems become an index for understanding how the split between these once overlapping movements was felt and what possibilities, if any, existed for its overcoming. While di Prima and Sanchez never refer to each other in their poetry, di Prima occasionally references to other

¹⁸² Starting in the late 1970s, Sanchez softened her separatist stance. Out of her earlier interest in Latin American and Japanese literature and culture, she moved to a more coalitional perspective. This was also a product of her work as a teacher, where she engaged with students who were Latinx, Asian American, Native American, white, etc.

BAM writers. In “Goodbye Nkrumah,” di Prima’s 1966 poem dedicated to the deposed Ghanaian revolutionary and written just after Amiri Baraka’s move to Harlem, di Prima thinks of her ex-lover and others at the Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School (BARTS) just uptown:

And I wondered
what the boys at the Black Arts Theatre were saying
and sent them my love, and my help, which they would not accept

Why should they? It’s their war, all I can do is wait
Is not put detergents in the washingmachine, so the soil will still
be productive
when the black men, or the Chinese, come to cultivate it.

These references to Baraka and BARTS (Sanchez was also involved there) mingle expressions of reproach and acceptance. Di Prima admits that, whatever hurt feelings are present, the nationalist struggle is not for or about her. All she can do is not block the way for an alliance of African Americans and “Third World” revolutionaries to create a new world. Earlier di Prima had sought to support the black struggle: in the early 1960s di Prima transported and carried hand grenade shells and other weapons for Baraka, just as she stored weapons and hid out fugitives later in San Francisco (*Recollections* 243). During the urban uprisings of the Long Hot Summer of 1967, the year after “Goodbye Nkrumah,” di Prima and other friends in Manhattan ended up “aiding Newark’s insurgents, shipping them supplies via back roads after the National Guard blocked major highways” (Gray 163). It is perhaps this experience that informs many of the practical suggestions of *Revolutionary Letters*. And afterward “di Prima and sixteen other poets including Ashbery, Duncan, Corso, Creeley, Koch, Ginsberg, and Olson composed a letter to protest [Baraka’s] sentencing to prison or possessing

firearms” (Calonne 112). However, regarding her old friends di Prima’s poetry preserves its attitude of wounded acceptance. “It’s their war,” she admits.

When it comes to another friend, Audre Lorde, di Prima rankles at the estrangement and her poetry remains committed to bridging the distance. Di Prima’s references to Lorde provide a different perspective on the possibilities for intersection that existed across unique struggles of the period. Lorde and di Prima, both born in 1934, entered Hunter High School together in 1948. The two remained lifelong friends. In 1968 di Prima published Lorde’s first book, *The First Cities*, with her Poets Press imprint. In her preface to the book, di Prima describes how Lorde helped her deliver her second child in her Greenwich Village apartment the previous Christmas. In the 1970s and 1980s Lorde became a prominent black feminist and lesbian intellectual who was critical of masculinism and heteronormativity in the Black Arts movement and beyond. Yet with BAM writers she shared an investment in recovering Afrocentric cultural resources in order to strengthen contemporary struggles.

In 1974 Lorde left her home in Staten Island to explore the site of the former West African kingdom of Dahomey (in present-day Benin). She studied the fourteenth-century women warriors of that civilization, a theme that would form an important background to her poems in *The Black Unicorn* (1978). Di Prima responded with a poem of her own that both acknowledged the necessity of Lorde’s investigations and tried to develop the basis for continued solidarity between them based in a concept of womanhood:

Narrow Path into the Back Country
for Audre Lorde

1

You are flying to Dahomey, going back
to some dream, or never-never land
more forbidding & perfect
than Oz. [. . .]

2

we endure: this we are certain of. no more.
we endure: famine, depression, earthquake,
 pestilence, war, flood, police state,
 inflation
ersatz food. burning cities. you endure
 I endure. It is written
on the faces of our children. Pliant, persistent
 joy; Will like mountains, hope
that batters yr heart & mine. (Hear them shout)
And I will not bow out, cannot see
your war as different. Turf stolen from
 yours & mine; clandestine magics
we practice, all of us, for their protection.
That they have fruit to eat & rice & fish
till they grow strong.

(Remember the octopus we did not cook
Sicilian style/West African style—it fills
your daughter's dream) I refuse
to leave you to yr battles, me to mine (*Pieces* 111-2)

Di Prima begins by admitting her distance from the content Lorde's specific explorations, though the form echoes the goal of her own *Loba*: "look[ing] around for / the Goddess." In the second section, di Prima moves to a "we" that includes both herself and Lorde as well as a larger collectivity of women. These women work to survive despite natural disasters like famines and modern ones like the "police state." They seek health, for themselves and their children. Their struggles are parallel, di Prima insists: "I will not bow out, cannot see / your way as different." Both are

seeking to regain “[t]urf stolen” and lost “magics.” Even their cooking becomes a spell for survival—she presents Southern Italian and West African practices as a continuum of women’s folk knowledge. The specific strategies may differ, but their aims are the same, she argues in Part 3: “how to get food on the table / how to heal [. . .] to have the right herb drying in the kitchen” (112). The poem ends by imagining Lorde’s journey being multiplied and repeated, across the earth and even beyond:

And more, we fly to light, fly into
pure-land paradise, New York
Dahomey, Mars, Djakarta, Wales
The willfull, stubborn children carrying seed
all races; hurtling time & space & stars
to find container large & find enough
fine-wrought enough for our joy.
For all our joy.

Di Prima suggests that both struggle and the joy can be collective, based in what is shared across difference. Such a joining will not take place immediately, she avers, but might require “hurtling time & space & stars.” In this futuristic imagination of solidarity, which links Indonesia to the planet Mars, the only “container large [. . .] enough” is not the nation-state or even earth, but the universe. There is much psychic ground to cover before a true “we” can be formed.

As much as this dissertation has focused on the question of transformation—how politics transform culture, how culture transforms politics, how both cultural and political change are both routed through subjectivity—it has also been centered on questions of collectivity. The sixties allowed for the flourishing of new collectivities. Yet this period also exposed the fault lines between them. U.S. struggles often swung between questions of separatism and homogenizing collectivity. Similarly,

revolutionary groups in Turkey often bracketed issues of gender, ethnicity, and religion in the name of unity, while in the meantime Left-wing factions defined by often trivial ideological disagreements often clashed while each group separately faced the common onslaught of Right-wing and state violence. Finally, while both U.S. and Turkish activists sought to ally themselves with “Third World” movements, articulating what was mostly a metaphorical—though not, for all that, any less meaningful—conception of shared struggle, the silence between U.S. and Turkish struggles was deafening. Perhaps it could not have been different. While Cold War political and cultural meddling in Turkey and throughout the world made Turkish activists painfully aware of the U.S.’s every move, Turkey remained off the radar for even potentially sympathetic activists in the U.S.

Forging a “we” into a collectivity requires enemies. Yet turning to Lorde’s own reflections, which link the question of consciousness back to the concept of solidarity, we can say that “By seeing who the *we* is, we learn to use our energies with greater precision against our enemies rather than against ourselves” (emphasis added, 139). Growing awareness of the commonality of struggles in Turkey and the U.S., as well as in India, Israel, Hungary, Poland, Brazil, and beyond suggest that this clarity of sight is more necessary than ever. Lorde’s 1982 speech “Learning from the 60s” contains lessons about the meaning of cultural revolution that remain relevant in our all too anti-sixties world of 2019:

Within each one of us there is some piece of humanness that knows we are not being served by the machine which orchestrates crisis after crisis and is grinding all our futures into dust. If we are to keep the enormity of the forces aligned against us from establishing a false hierarchy of oppression, we must

school ourselves to recognize that any attack against Blacks, any attack against women, is an attack against all of us who recognize that our interests are not being served by the systems we support. Each one of us here is a link in the connection between anti-poor legislation, gay shootings, the burning of synagogues, street harassment, attacks against women, and resurgent violence against Black people. I ask myself as well as each one of you, exactly what alteration in the particular fabric of my everyday life does this connection call for? [. . .]

We share a common interest, survival, and it cannot be pursued in isolation from others simply because their differences make us uncomfortable. We know what it is to be lied to. The 60s should teach us how important it is not to lie to ourselves. Not to believe that revolution is a one-time event, or something that happens around us rather than inside of us. Not to believe that freedom can belong to anyone group of us without the others also being free. (139-40)

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