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Kindred by Chance: Spontaneous Art and Neoliberal Order

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To Megan

Fashion this, from the irony of the world

Amiri Baraka

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
VITA	v
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: Neo-Hoodoo Economicus: A Genealogy of Jes Grew	7
CHAPTER 2: The Sound and the Theory: Jacques Attali and the Cunning of Spontaneous Aesthetics	100
CHAPTER 3: "Aesthetic of Chance": *Easy Rider* and the Road to Neoliberal Order	138
BIBLIOGRAPHY	190

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Kindred by Chance: Spontaneous Art and Neoliberal Order

by

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This dissertation explores the literary and intellectual history of "spontaneity" in twentieth-century art and social theory. It argues that there is an underappreciated formal "kinship" between the ideal of freedom embodied by avant-garde artistic experiments in spontaneous self-creation and the neoliberal intellectual project that simultaneously grew up in response to the rationalized structures of the "organized society." Each chapter draws out this underlying kinship by reading the artistic valorization of spontaneous freedom in cultural works from the late 1960s and 1970s across different media forms alongside the elevation of *kosmos* or "spontaneous order" in the writings of F. A. Hayek, the leading theorist of the neoliberal intellectual project. Chapter 1, "Neo-HooDoo Economicus: A Genealogy of Jes Grew," turns to fiction, exploring the valorization of spontaneous order in Ishmael Reed's novel *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972). Chapter 2, "The Sound and the Theory: Jacques Attali and the Cunning of Spontaneous Aesthetics," turns to music by reexamining Jacques Attali's poststructuralist work of musicology, *Noise* (1977), in light of its author's political involvement in the neoliberal policy shift in the early 1980s. Chapter 3, "'Aesthetic of Chance': *Easy Rider* and the Road to Neoliberal Order," turns to New Hollywood cinema,

exploring the spontaneous vision of freedom embodied by *Easy Rider* (1969; dir. Dennis Hopper), the film that signaled the death of the Hollywood studio system. Together, these chapters suggest the (often unwitting) role played by artists across different mediums in modeling the kind of open-ended freedom that would come to characterize social life in the neoliberal age, where the purposively constructed structures of the postwar order give way to the spontaneous order of the market.

INTRODUCTION

The history of Western modernity, as F. A. Hayek saw it, was the history of an intellectual and political struggle for preeminence between two visions of order: *taxis* (rational or *made* order) and *kosmos* (spontaneous or *grown* order). A leading figure of the intellectual project that would come to shape the neoliberal policy turn toward market *kosmos* in the 1970s, Hayek spent much of his life engaged in a critique of "constructivist rationalism": the worldview he took to be behind the spread of *taxis* (i.e., purposively designed social structures) across the social lifeworld in the twentieth century. For Hayek, the key to this distinctly modern worldview was the assumption that all human institutions, all products of culture generally, either result from consciously willed design or are amenable to it through political means. Had Hayek read Antonio Gramsci, he might have been tempted to turn the Marxist philosopher on his head by describing the ideas that permeated the politics and culture of much of the twentieth century (the "socialist century," as Hayek termed it) as the *hegemony* of "constructivist rationalism." So thoroughly did this constructivist worldview dominate intellectual culture in the twentieth century, F. A. Hayek once lamented, that even the leading writers and artists of his time remained under its spell.

The truth, "Kindred by Chance" argues, is more interesting. Were Hayek's assessment of writers and artists correct, we might expect a more Apollonian vision of cultural production to have carried the day in the twentieth century, with writers and artists constructing works, like Poe, "step by step" "with the precision and rigid

consequence of a mathematical problem," leaving "no one point" up to "accident or intuition" ("The Philosophy of Composition"). Yet far from this—far from echoing or consolidating intellectual and political conviction in conscious design and purposive order—leading aesthetic currents in the twentieth century were marked by an embrace of chance, spontaneity, and improvisation. From bebop improvisers to the spontaneous writing of the Beat Generation, from John Cage's experiments with indeterminacy to the participatory spirit of Happenings, from Fluxus performance art to New Hollywood independent films, postwar American artists—often tracing their projects to the European avant-garde—used their work to model and explore alternatives to the consciously constructed routines of the postwar "organized society." Yet in a kind of "tragic" twist, the freedom modeled by avant-garde experiments in spontaneous self-creation converged with the neoliberal project that would begin shaping policy in the late 1970s.

Locating these currents within an aesthetic and intellectual tradition going back to German Romanticism, "Kindred by Chance" offers a new account of the postwar U.S. avant-garde by drawing out the underappreciated affinity between artistic experiments in spontaneous self-creation and the neoliberal vision of freedom that contemporaneously developed in the twentieth century. Each chapter of my project offers a medium-specific case study of this formal affinity—in fiction, music, and cinema, respectively. In the process of closely attending to exemplary works from the late 1960s and 1970s, I attempt to reveal how experiments of spontaneous self-creation prefigured the triumph of market *kosmos* in the neoliberal era. Concisely put: Fluxus performance begets flexible accumulation.

Turning first to fiction in Chapter 1, "Neo-Hoodoo Economicus: A Genealogy of Jes Grew" tests my argument against Ishmael Reed's fabulist historical novel *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972). Set during the Harlem Renaissance, Reed's novel is narratively framed around the conflict between the spontaneous eruption of a social contagion known as "Jes Grew," a figure for the creative force behind the jazz age, and the rational designs of the "Atonist Path," the organizations of which dedicate themselves to containing Jes Grew. This core conflict has often been read in racial and culturalist terms—and for good reason, given that Jes Grew is clearly linked to Black cultural transmission in the novel. But beyond figuring racial or cultural difference, I argue, Jes Grew and the Atonist Path also embody two competing models of social order. Here, after positioning Reed among other avant-garde champions of verbal spontaneity, I show how *Mumbo Jumbo*'s valorization of Jes Grew's spontaneous genesis and growth, over against the rational organization of the Atonist Path, gives imaginative and narrative shape to the horizon of freedom that comes to theoretical expression in Hayek's concept of *kosmos*. Much as jazz "Jes Grew," Hayekian *kosmos* (grown order) emerges spontaneously from activity beyond the rationally constructed social structures. In fact, as I show, neoliberal thinkers (both Hayek and Milton Friedman) made use of the very idiom echoed in Reed's "Jes Grew" (drawn from Harriet Beecher Stowe's widely read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) to evoke the spontaneous order of the market in their writings.

Chapter 2, "The Sound and the Theory: Jacques Attali and the Cunning of Spontaneous Aesthetics," delves further into the freedom of sonic spontaneity by turning to Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1977). An influential work of poststructuralist musicology, *Noise* lays out a kind of sonic revision of Hegelian Marxism in

which the eruption of "noise" within successive codes of music overtakes the self-movement of the concept (Hegel) or class conflict from productive forces outpacing relations of production (Marx) as the key to the social dialectic. On this sonic interpretation of history, changes within the dominant code of music provide privileged access to historical shifts by anticipating broader changes in social transformation. This conceit—that music is a herald of the future—allows Attali to advance from interpreting history to prophecy as he argues that the eruption of noise in his time within the regime of "repetition," the musical code corresponding to the postwar social order, heralds a future in which vertical social structures give way to social relations modeled after spontaneous aesthetic freedom, or "composing." While the one concrete example of "composing" that Attali gives is the improvisational sociality modeled by free jazz, his account of "composing" echoes the broader spirit of aesthetic revolt modeled by avant-garde experiments in spontaneous self-creation which had come to theoretical expression in the work of contemporary French poststructuralists. With *Noise*, however, the stakes are considerably raised by its author's relation to political power. By the late 1970s, Attali was a leading intellectual in the newly formed French Socialist Party that would bring François Mitterrand to power a few years later. As Mitterrand's primary economic advisor in the early 1980s, Attali himself went on to oversee the shift to neoliberal economic policy in France. Already in *Noise*—which I argue must be read as a political agenda-setting text—this future policy shift is telegraphed by the use to which Attali puts spontaneous aesthetic freedom as an alternative to the rationalized structures of the postwar social order.

In Chapter 3, "*Easy Rider* and the Road to Neoliberal Order," I turn to the embrace of chance, improvisation, and spontaneity in the film *Easy Rider* (1969; dir. Dennis Hopper). A

defining film in the initial era of New Hollywood cinema that lasted from the late 1960s to the late 1970s, *Easy Rider* is often held to have marked a turning point in American commercial cinema for the way that its success as an independent production coincided with the collapse of the studio system of classical Hollywood. While echoing the received view of *Easy Rider*'s importance in modeling an alternative to Hollywood's rigidly bureaucratic studio system, this chapter explores the film's genesis in what Dennis Hopper once described as the "aesthetic of chance." *Easy Rider,* I argue, not only "represented" the sixties counterculture; more importantly, it embodied, in its very making, the spontaneous artistic currents that came to a head in the late 1960s. Here, though, *Easy Rider* complicates what might be called the usual auteur theory of New Hollywood because of the way that its making incorporated an avant-garde vision of aesthetic freedom in which the conscious design of an intending author gives way to a horizon of spontaneous creative activity marked by chance and improvisation. In doing so, I argue, *Easy Rider* not only embodies spontaneous aesthetic currents and models a new era of independent cinema in Hollywood; it also looks forward, more generally, to the spontaneous order characteristic of the neoliberal era.

The title of my project, "Kindred by Chance," plays on the literary inspiration for Max Weber's use of the phrase "elective affinities."[1] Weber's term is borrowed from Goethe's novel *Elective Affinities* (*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*), also published under the alternatively translated title *Kindred by Choice.* In his effort to modify a strictly materialist interpretation of history, Weber introduces "elective affinities" into his sociological

[1] I thank Michael Szalay for drawing my attention to Weber's phrase.

writings to explain the convergence or adequacy of spiritual/cultural forms to economic conduct—most famously, the "elective affinity" between Calvinism (the "Protestant work ethic") and the development of capitalism. Broadly, my project joins a growing body of research that has raised this question anew by looking at the contributions of modern artistic culture to what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have called the "new spirit of capitalism." But more so than existing literature, my project stresses the formal affinity between the freedom modeled in spontaneous aesthetic experiments and the neoliberal elevation of the spontaneous order of the market. The two are "kindred by chance": not only in the sense that the suspension of conscious construction invites chance, but also in the sense the convergence of avant-garde art and neoliberal order is often enough itself the result of chance.

CHAPTER 1

Neo-Hoodoo Economicus: A Genealogy of Jes Grew

Introduction

Like the plague of "Jes Grew" it narrativizes, Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) is difficult to "bring into focus or categorize."[1] A fabulist historical novel set during the Harlem Renaissance, Reed's noisy major work contains multitudes: Vodou meets Surrealism; pulp meets bricolage; jazz improvisation meets grail quest; paranoid fantasy meets intertextual parody; novel of ideas meets Vaudeville variety show; automatic writing meets scholarly sourced diatribe; gothic antiquarianism meets social satire; political polemic meets ironic play; exposé meets hoax; "epic collage" meets "rebellious farce"[2]; until finally, modern mystery meets ancient mystery in a marriage of detective fiction and Egyptian mythology that leaves the novel with something of the "secret nature" to which Clarence Major once attributed works of literature that "always elude the reader—just as the nature of life does."[3]

While sharing in the experimental-cum-conspiratorial spirit of William S. Burroughs and Thomas Pynchon's novels from the 1960s, Reed's bombastic tendency to "mix" "poetry

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[1] Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 40. Cited parenthetically hereafter.
[2] To cite two genres being experimented with in Reed's literary milieu in the late 1960s. See Clarence Major, *The Dark & Feeling: Reflections on Black American Writers and Their Works* (New York: The Third Press, 1974), 16 and Ronald Sukenick, *UP* (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 38.
[3] Clarence Major, *The Dark & Feeling: Reflections on Black American Writers and Their Works* (New York: The Third Press, 1974), 16.

with concrete events" (Reed 26)—less historical fiction than "history is fiction"[4]—quickly left its mark on novels ranging from E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975) to Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea's *Illuminatus! Trilogy* (1975).[5] The echoes of *Mumbo Jumbo* in the latter are in fact so pronounced that when the first book of the trilogy incorporates a scathing review of itself, the joke overshoots self-reference. Equally legible as a mock takedown of *Mumbo Jumbo,* the review describes a "formless" amalgamation that merges modernist nonlinear narrative with sensationalist genre fiction, which "starts as a detective story" only to later launch "into the supernatural," all while having "the supreme bad taste to introduce real political figures into this mishmash and pretend to be exposing a real conspiracy."[6]

Joining these and other ingredients in a verbal gumbo—one of Reed's favored metaphors—*Mumbo Jumbo* is at once a singular fulfillment of Reed's one-man "Neo-HooDoo" aesthetic and a product of the zeitgeist glimpsed at outset of a timely lecture given by Clement Greenberg in May of 1968, in which

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[4] William Burroughs, *Nova Express* (New York: Grove Press, 2014), 3. While Reed's propensity to "mix" "poetry with concrete events" is at its peak in *Mumbo Jumbo* (26), the aestheticist conviction that undergirds it is stated still more explicitly by Quickill in his novel *Flight to Canada*: "Who is to say what is fact and what is fiction?"—for history, he goes on, "will always be a mystery" (7, 8).
[5] The post-yippie prank political program described in *The Illuminatus Trilogy*, "Operation Mindfuck," has come into the spotlight recently in Adam Curtis's documentary series *Can't Get You Out of My Head* (2021).
[6] Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea, *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1975), 238-239. When asked directly about whether *Mumbo Jumbo* inspired *Illuminatus!*, Wilson (implausibly) claimed to have not read it until "3 years after *Illuminatus!* was finished," chalking the "astonishing resemblances" up to "synchronicity" (Robert Anton Wilson, *The Illuminati Papers* (Oakland: Ronin Publishing, 1997), 44). Synchronicity is of course a reference to the Carl Jung's concept of meaningful coincidence—a favored habit of conspiratorial (and literary) minds everywhere. But the echoes of Reed—beginning with the trilogy's inaugural epigraph, which literally cites *Mumbo Jumbo*—are too numerous to make this believable.

> Everything conspires ... in the interests of confusion. ... Not only the boundaries between the different arts, but the boundaries between art and everything that is not art, are being obliterated. ... And to add to the confusion, high art is on the way to becoming popular art, and vice versa.[7]

By now we are long accustomed to calling the resulting cultural hodgepodge "postmodernism." In Fredric Jameson's well known account, postmodernist artists—among the "most significant" of whom he lists one Ishmael Reed—are said to assemble a "virtual grab gab" "of disjoined subsystems and random raw materials and impulses of all kinds."[8] Abandoning any remnant of aesthetic unity or mimetic fidelity, the schizoid flows of the postmodern sublime seem to betoken a world "lost," in Pynchon's revision of the Joycean nightmare of history, "to any sense of a continuous tradition": history having been replaced by the "false memory" of popular culture.[9] For Jameson, Doctorow's *Ragtime* is an exemplary postmodernist work, a historical novel that "can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only 'represent' our ideas and stereotypes about that past (which thereby at once becomes 'pop history')."[10]

While much the same might be said of *Mumbo Jumbo,* Reed's novel also emphatically lays claim to a continuous tradition—one that includes such "popular manifestations" as ragtime and jazz (Reed 139). Imaginatively tracing this Black cultural horizon back to

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[7] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde Attitudes: New Art in the Sixties," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 4, 292. This is not Greenberg's view but a "prevalent notion" that had gained traction—a view (perhaps to the formalist a nightmare scenario) which he argues against.
[8] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003), 26, 31. Incidentally, Jameson's formulation resonates with *Mumbo Jumbo* to the point of echoing it: "A grab bag with a few novelties tossed in" (Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo,* 156).
[9] Thomas Pynchon, *V.* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2005), 165.
[10] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism,* 25.

antiquity through the figure of Jes Grew, the mysterious power whose effects are at once embodied, recollected, and given narrative life through the novel's recursive collage technique, *Mumbo Jumbo* achieves an effect analogous to the way in which T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) constructs a tradition for itself through its own vertiginous intertextuality (not the only parallel, incidentally).[11] This dimension of the novel figures

[11] Fascinated by *The Waste Land*'s "hidden system of organization," Ralph Ellison once reflected on how "There was nothing to do but look up the references in the footnotes to the poem, and thus began my conscious education in literature" (*Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), 159-60). This response was by no means idiosyncratic: it was surely the reaction of a generation literary scholars. The fascination that *Mumbo Jumbo*'s intertextuality incites is no doubt constructed to produce the same effect, now with a view toward a Black tradition: one cannot closely read *Mumbo Jumbo* without being driven to follow up on its references, for instance, to Papa Legba from Haitian vodou, Bert Williams, Black Herman, and the early Black modernist literature collected in the *Fire!!* anthology edited by Wallace Thurman (which broke with the more genteel character of much of the Harlem Renaissance), among many others. Additional parallels between *The Waste Land* and *Mumbo Jumbo* abound, beginning with the fact that both draw on "references to vegetation ceremonies," as Eliot describes his use of Adonis, Attis, and Osiris from *The Golden Bough* (T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1952), 50). Reed, too, quotes Frazer in connection with the agricultural rites of Osiris. "The theater accompanying these rites," he says while rewriting the myth of Osiris, "was a theater of fecundation generation and proliferation, a theater that Victorian Sir James Frazer of *The Golden Bough* calls 'lewd and profligate'" (161). Here, Reed is creating new meaning through juxtaposition (or misrepresenting Frazer through decontextualization, as a stuffy Atonist might say). In context, Frazer makes the opposite, precisely anti-Victorian point (a habit that contributed to his influence on the modernists): "It would be to misjudge ancient religion to denounce as lewd and profligate the emblems and the ceremonies which the Egyptians employed for the purpose of giving effect to this conception of the divine power" (James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion* (London: Macmillan Press, 1983 [1922]), 502). To return to the parallels: there is also their composite and disjunctive character (Burroughs, incidentally, venerated *The Waste Land* as a collage poem which anticipated the cut-up method), the fascination and mystery that their intertextuality and temporal leaps incite, the fragmentary insertions punctuating their various episodes, and the feeling that each takes places halfway between the visionary and the mundane, halfway between the modern world and a legendary or indeed mythical past. Both are of course set in the 1920s—one contemporary, one historical. Unlike the sterility that haunts Eliot's contemporary London, however, the 1920s that Reed imaginatively reconstructs is a fertile period of Black creative outpouring. Finally, there is the peculiar scholarly citations with which each ends. Reed may very well be parodying Eliot here. It should be noted, however, that an element of parody is perceptible in the original: like Reed's bibliography entries, many of Eliot's notes are not only pointless but also seem calculated to create mystery rather than offer clarification; Eliot himself later referred to them as "bogus scholarship" in *On Poetry and Poets* (1957). In the end, it should perhaps not surprise us that a novel which sets out to capture the spirit of jazz should in some ways resemble a poem regarding which Ralph Ellison commented (in the same passage quoted above) that "Somehow its rhythms were often closer to those of jazz than

prominently in Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s theory of Black "Signifyin(g)." Reading the novel as "the great black intertext," Reed argues that *Mumbo Jumbo* not only "Signifies upon" its predecessors, and in this way embodies the vernacular idiom of parodic revision that Gates takes to define the Black literary tradition—it also figures and embraces the indeterminacy or "aesthetic play" on which this practice is predicated.[12] For Gates, the Black tradition he

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were those of the Negro poets … [with a] range of allusion … as mixed and as varied as that of Louis Armstrong" (*Shadow and Act*, 159-60). As for the tradition that each one constructs for itself in this way, one might read each as devising means to assuage distinctively American anxieties about being part of what Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly once described as a "solitary literature, without tradition and without ancestors." Barbey d'Aurevilly's characterization was part of his response to his friend Baudelaire's French translations of stories by Edgar Allen Poe, whom he denounced as the "King of Bohemia," by which he meant an author who, as an American, lacks a cultural tradition (the U.S., "this inn of nations," being the world's "Bohemia") ("Edgar Poe," in *Les Œuvres et les Hommes* (4 Partie, Les Romanciers, Amyot: Paris, 1865), 339-351, 340; my translation). Incidentally, this did not prevent Barbey from going on to write mystery stories. In any case, his denunciation of Poe anticipated an anxiety felt among many twentieth-century American writers and artists. As Matthew Josephson once noted, "Edgar Poe's writings must first help form a Baudelaire, a Mallarmé, a Rimbaud, before they could really stir his own people. … The test of a great American artist … is whether he is *a good boomerang*" (*Portrait of the Artist as American,* New York: Octagon Books, 1964 [1930], 293). One can see the same boomerang dynamic at play in the history of jazz. As Nathan Irvin Huggins points out in *Harlem Renaissance* (1971), the leading writers of the Harlem Renaissance subscribed to an elite view of culture that did not take jazz seriously as high art. By contrast, *Mumbo Jumbo* presents jazz as the primary aesthetic achievement of the period. (As for Poe, he is among the authors whom Reed riffs on.)

[12] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 223, 220, 227. Gates explicitly states that his theory of the black literary tradition "began with (and at most was shaped by) my explication of" *Mumbo Jumbo*—the novel from which his "theory arose" (218). Rather than following Reed's lead and imaginatively tracing this tradition back to Egypt, however, Gates develops his own "myth of origins" in his difficult first chapter. Central to Gates's origin myth are two trickster figures—Esu-Elegbara and the Signifyin(g) Monkey—drawn from Yoruba and African-American folklore, respectively. For Gates, Esu's hermeneutical openness and the Signifyin(g) Monkey's rhetorical hijinx hold the key to "the logic of the tradition." When Gates venerates Esu as a figure of "uncertainty or indeterminacy" who "endlessly displaces meaning, deferring it by the play of signification," one wonders what comes first: the African American literary tradition for which Esu is said to speak or the Derridian theory through which Esu's message is being read (Gates, The Signifying Monkey, 32, 42). In my view, what comes first is clearly the avant-garde view of language that animates *Mumbo Jumbo,* which poststructuralists brought to theoretical expression. As for Gates's theory, it runs into a number of methodological quandaries, not least of which is the fact that the link between Esu-Elegbara and the Signifyin(g) Monkey can only be established imaginatively (hence "origin myth") in the absence of historical or archival evidence. Reed, by contrast, runs into no such problems in rendering his origin myth because he does so in element of fiction; what, for Reed, ultimately defines the tradition of "Jes Grew" is its creative power, which of

theorizes is compatible with poststructuralist indeterminacy because the practice of Signifiyin(g) that he takes to define that tradition, figured as Jes Grew in *Mumbo Jumbo*, is itself characterized by the flux, contingency, mutability of creative revision. Accordingly, Gates reads Jes Grew's struggle with the Atonist Path as a poststructuralist allegory of writing in which Jes Grew plays the part of wily, pluralist signifier to the Atonist insistence on a determinate signified.

Standard readings of *Mumbo Jumbo* tend to either echo or offer culturalist variations on Gates's allegorical reading of the conflict that structures the novel. Most commonly, the Atonist Path is viewed as a figure of Western rationality, Logocentrism, or else one of the generalities to which the novel itself gestures: "Western Civilization" (136), "Judeo-Christian culture" (114). Jes Grew is then often read in aesthetic terms recalling what we might call the "spontaneous overflow"[13] conception of art: a force of "spontaneous indeterminacy," of "spontaneous and freeing art," and so on.[14] This chapter attempts to resituate the struggle between Jes Grew and the Atonist Path within aesthetic and intellectual currents from which it is generally isolated. Stated the other way around: I read *Mumbo Jumbo* as a prism in which to bring into view the connection between broader aesthetic and political currents in twentieth-century intellectual culture. By the end, I hope to have illuminated in detail how it is that *Mumbo Jumbo*—not unlike other experimental

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course includes the ability to create one's own origin story. Or as Reed puts it, "We will make our own Text." For a critique of Gates's theory of the Black literary tradition as, among other things, highly selective and continuous to the point of being transhistorical, see Adolph Reed Jr., *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997), 138-162, especially 141-142.

[13] William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 98.

[14] John G. Parks, "Mining and Undermining and Old Plots: Ishmael Reed's 'Mumbo Jumbo,'" *The Centennial Review* 39, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 163-170, 164; Jonathan P. Lewis, "Set and Osiris in Ishmael Reed's Neo-HooDoo Aesthetic," *Pacific Coast Philology* 49, no. 1 (2014): 78-98, 86.

aesthetics that came to a head in the 1960s—models the horizon of freedom that simultaneously developed in the neoliberal intellectual project. On route to this conclusion, I also take on a challenge I take to be invited by the novel's composite construction by teasing out and interpreting some of Reed's intertexts, particularly those I take to be overlooked within existing criticism—"deep cuts," as we might call them, playing on the Burroughsian "cut-up method" that Reed's bricolage technique resembles.

Exodus from Exodus

In addition to inciting "Dance manias" (64), Jes Grew figures in *Mumbo Jumbo* as "the delight of the gods" (6) and the "the manic in the artist" (211). Given the echoes of Plato's account of "divine madness" (*theia mania*) in the *Phaedrus* (244a), we might begin by saying that the novel restages Plato's "ancient quarrel" between the poets and the philosophers, inspiration and techne, divine madness and rational knowing. Writing at the tail-end of the long 1960s, Reed was hardly alone on this front. Within a decade of Norman O. Brown's oracular "Apocalypse" speech (1960), which drew on the *Phaedrus* to proclaim the imminent return to the world of Dionysian "holy madness,"[15] the eruption of the counterculture in news headlines was prompting the likes of Ayn Rand to dust off her copy of *The Birth of Tragedy* to give a lecture titled "Apollo and Dionysus" (1969) on "the fundamental conflict of our age."[16] In *Mumbo Jumbo,* Reed offers this conflict an Egyptian

[15] Norman O. Brown, *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 1-2.
[16] Ayn Rand, "Apollo and Dionysus" (1969). Accessed at courses.aynrand.org/works/apollo-and-dionysus/.

origin, rewriting Dionysus as a vector of the Osirian ecstasy from which Jes Grew is born. A member of the Egyptian fertility god's "fabled entourage" (172), Reed's Dionysus is said to have spread the songs and dancing of the Osiris cult to Greece.[17] This revision notwithstanding, critics routinely note the parallels between the two forces that drive Nietzsche's first book and the conflict between Jes Grew and the Atonist Path. Here I would only add that the impact of Nietzsche's later work on Reed, legible especially in his writings on "Neo-HooDoo" that build toward *Mumbo Jumbo,* remains to be recognized. Consider, for instance, Reed's call in this period for a "transvaluation of Afro-American values," so as to move beyond the historically "mass-oriented" tendency of "Black politics" to be based on "exodus"[18]—an allusion to the longstanding place of the Biblical Exodus story in the Black political and religious tradition as a model of collective liberation and law-bound freedom. Reed's alternative to the collective politics of Exodus is neo-Hoodoo, which he frames in likewise Nietzschean terms as a "church of free spirits" in which the Law gives way to the Aesthetic Imperative: "DO YR ART D WAY U WANT."[19]

In championing aesthetic self-creation as an alternative to the Exodus model, Reed plays the Anti-Moses to Nietzsche's Anti-Christ. Better yet, he plays the Ishmael (to stick with Biblical references): the outcast from the Book of Genesis who is prophesied to be "wild" (Gen. 16:12) and who is thrown into the desert for his indeterminate play (Gen.

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[17] Reed, incidentally, is in good company here. The parallels between the two were sufficiently strong for Herodotus to simply identify Dionysus with the Egyptian god Osiris. (Herodotus, *Histories,* Vol. I, Book 2, Sec. 42, trans. A. D. Godley (London: The Loeb Classical Library, 1975), 327).
[18] Ishmael Reed, "Music: Black, White and Blue," *Shrovetide in Old New Orleans* (New York: Atheneum, 1989), 103, 104.
[19] Reed, "Catechism of d Neoamerican Hoodoo Church," *New and Collected Poems, 1964-2006* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006), 46-53, 53.

21:9).[20] Like the narrator of Melville's *Moby Dick*, Reed of course shares his first name with the Biblical Ishmael. Beyond making Reed one of those aptly named writers, one wonders whether Ishmael's story might not have served as an anti-Exodus model for him. The biographical resonances are clear enough. While Reed was involved in the Umbra group of writers that gathered on the Lower East Side in the early 1960s, he would later reflect on himself as an outcast who never felt like he was "really part of" that "New York group."[21] Moreover, when the Black Arts Movement emerged a few years later, Reed had his own solution to the "tension" that erupted among Black artists over whether one should be downtown, in the Village or the Lower East Side, or head "uptown with the black people," as Larry Neal later put it.[22] Amiri Baraka's move to Harlem in 1965 dramatized the stakes of this tension. Having been dubbed "king of the lower East Side" by the *New York Herald Tribune* after the success of *Blues People* (1963) and "Dutchman" (1964), Baraka—known then as LeRoj Jones—was a prominent fixture in the beat scene, a seasoned literary outlaw (literally, in his case).[23] This added to the force of his turn against the bohemianism of the

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[20] The firstborn son of the Biblcal patriarch Abraham, Ishmael's mother, Genesis tells us, was Harag, the Egyptian handmaiden of Abraham's wife Sarah. Following the birth of Sarah's first son Isaac, Sarah has Ishmael and Harag cast out after observing Ishmael at a celebration for Isaac (Gen. 21:9). The polysemous Hebrew word (מְצַחֵק) used to describe what Sarah sees is remarkably ambiguous, though the likeliest meanings include playing, dancing, laughing, and jesting (the KJV gives "mocking"). In any case, the irreverent act binds Ishmael to his fate as an outcast, an outcome anticipated by the angel-messenger's prophecy that Ishmael will be wild and live in defiance of the world (Gen. 16:12).

[21] Michael Oren, "A '60s Sage: The Life and Death of Umbra (Part II)," *Freedomways* 24, no. 4 (1984): 237-254, 247. It is, of course, possible that Reed protests too much. Among the poets to perform at the poetry readings held by the Black Arts Theater in Harlem, Larry Neal not only names Reed, but adds: "if you talk to Ishmael Reed today, he might try to give you the impression that he wasn't there. But, I know he was there. Sometimes he wanted to be separate from LeRoi [Amiri Baraka], but he was there" (Neal, "The Social Background of the Black Arts Movement," *The Black Scholar* 18, no. 1 (Jan. 1987), 11-22, 18).

[22] Larry Neal, "The Social Background of the Black Arts Movement," 14.

[23] Baraka (Jones) and Diane di Prima were charged by the FBI with obscenity for circulating William Burroughs' "Roosevelt after the Inauguration" (a routine from *Naked Lunch*) in the ninth issue of

beats in 1965 in favor of organizing a politically committed art movement in service to Black Nationalism uptown. (Upon hearing about his move to Harlem, Allen Ginsberg—by then averse to anything resembling "political rationalism"[24]—is said to have demanded of Hettie Jones, "Why didn't you *stop* him!"[25]) While a number of Black artists followed Baraka's lead, Reed might be said to have taken a page from the Biblical outcast in separating himself from the Black Arts Movement (BAM) both artistically, through his aesthetic play, and geographically, by literally setting forth into the desert on route to California (not unlike the beat odyssey, incidentally). Nor did Reed shy from his status as black sheep of the BAM. In a 1968 interview published after his departure from New York, he criticized the BAM as a "good squad aesthetic" attempting to dictate the work of Black artists.[26] In the same interview, though, we might detect a hint of irony in Reed's call for artists to create "new myths" rather than using models from "the Book of Genesis"—a book, he notes, written by "outcasts."[27] If anything, it was the Book of Exodus that Reed sought to bury, and the outcast from the Book of Genesis—an archetype for the solitary artist, those "Ishmaels of" "bourgeois society"[28]—offered an alternative, an exodus from Exodus. The two novels that followed Reed's move to California are replete with resonances to this effect. For instance, as if to amplify the subtle way in which the story of Ishmael flips the

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The Floating Bear, the avant-garde mimeographed newsletter they co-edited between 1961 and 1963.

[24] Later reflecting on the 1960s, Ginsberg would lament how the emergence of forms of political radicalism "attempted to make the cultural revolution we were involved in, which was a purely personal thing, into a lesser political, mere revolt against the temporary politicians, and to lead the energy away from a transformation of consciousness to the materialistic level of political rationalism" (Ginsberg, *Composed on the Tongue* (New York: Grey Fox Press, 2001), 75).

[25] Hettie Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones* (New York: Grove Press, 1990), 230.

[26] Walt Shepperd, "When State Magicians Fail: An Interview with Ishmael Reed," *Conversations with Ishmael Reed* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995), 3-13, 6, 12.

[27] Shepperd, "When State Magicians Fail: An Interview with Ishmael Reed," 10.

[28] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), 41.

script on the collective flight *from* Egyptian bondage in the Book of Exodus,[29] *Mumbo Jumbo* turns *to* Egypt for Jes Grew's origin story, which recasts Moses in a manner foreshadowed by Loop Garoo's apophatic swipe in *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (1969), the novel preceding *Mumbo Jumbo*: "I don't even want to go into how Moses sneaked around the Pharaoh's court abusing his hospitality."[30] There, in *Yellow Back,* we encounter perhaps the most frequently cited passage in all of Reed's fiction, an exchange staged in the middle of the desert between Loop, Reed's renegade protagonist and authorial mask, and one Bo Shmo. A stand-in for the BAM—which is to say, the most recent iteration of the Black politics of Exodus—Bo declares that "All art must be for the end," not of "individualism," but "of liberating the masses." To which Loop responds by proclaiming the aesthetic freedom to "write circuses"—"anything"—including "the mumblings of wild men saddled by demons."[31]

Biblical parallels aside, the rift between Bo and Loop—the rift, in other words, between political and aesthetic visions of freedom, between "radical" "in the political

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[29] Part of what makes the story of Ismael fascinating is the way that it reverses the coordinates of the Exodus story that follows it: here, in Genesis, the oppression of an *Egyptian* servant (Ishmael's mother Harag) and her son takes the form of *forced* exile to the wilderness.

[30] Reed, *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (New York: Dalkey Archive Press, 2000), 39. Incidentally, Reed's ongoing critique of Moses in writings on neo-hoodoo from this period requires him to overlook or revise the high regard for Moses among actual hoodoo practitioners. The prestige of Moses among hoodoo practitioners in the U.S. was amplified by *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, an 18th century grimoire (magic book) of German origin that billed itself as two lost books of the Bible: "Biblis arcanum arcanorum" (mystery of mysteries). This book circulated widely in the North before making its way to the American South, where it became a staple of hoodoo conjure. It features prominently in many of the hundreds of interviews that amateur folklorist Harry Middleton Hyatt conducted with hoodoo practitioners in the 1930s. As Hyatt reminds readers in brackets in the middle of one interview: "We must remember here as well as everywhere in hoodoo, the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* … is considered by believers to be a part of the Bible" (*Hoodoo-Conjuration-Witchcraft-Rootwork in Two Volumes* (Hannibal, MO: Western Publishing, 1970), 752).

[31] Ishmael Reed, *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down,* 36.

sense" and being a "cultural radical," as the narrator of Ronald Sukenick's novel *UP* (1968) candidly puts it[32]—was in the air in the 1960s, not only in New York around the Village and Harlem, but more broadly, and nowhere more so than in the Bay Area to which Reed relocated, which saw a similar polarity form between Haight-Ashbury and Berkeley in the "separate and antithetical" emergence of the "mind-blown bohemianism of the beats and hippies" and "the hard-headed political activism" of the New Left.[33] From a distance, one might say that the emergence of this rift is characteristic of transformative historical moments. Just as the Romantics, disillusioned with the French Revolution, turned to aesthetically conceived social transformation; just as Wagner, confronted with the revolutionary ferment of 1848, turned in its wake to cultural revolution; just as the Surrealists, drawn to communism in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, ultimately found their alliance with the Communist Party short-lived; so, too, would the aesthetic bent of much of the counterculture exist in tension with the organized forms of political radicalism that emerged in the 1960s.[34] On the other hand, the spirit of the late sixties could be said to differ from its precursors to the extent that political activity itself began to take on the form of aesthetic experiments in spontaneity, as in the famous levitation of the Pentagon in October of 1967.

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[32] Ronald Sukenick, *UP* (New York: The Dial Press, 1968), 52.
[33] C.f., Theodore Roszak's discussion of the "separate and antithetical" emergence of "the mind-blown bohemianism of the beats and hippies" and "the heard-headed political activism" of the New Left (*The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 56.
[34] As avant-garde theorist and historian Renato Poggioli noted in 1967, "the hypothesis … that aesthetic radicalism and social radicalism, revolutionaries in art and revolutionaries in politics, are allied, which empirically seems valid, is theoretically and historically erroneous" ("The Avant-Garde and Politics," *Yale French Studies* 39 (1967): 180-187, 181).

Whatever convergence might be said to have taken place, Reed, for his part—a self-described "bohemian until I die"[35]—enthusiastically embraced aesthetic radicalism while keeping his distance from political radicalism, whether Black Nationalist, New Left, Women's Liberationist, or otherwise.[36] As a co-cofounder of *The East Village Other* while still in New York in 1965, Reed was at the forefront of the growing underground press in which the sixties counterculture found its heterogeneous voice. While other underground publications at the time would tend toward New Left political radicalism, *The East Village Other* (*EVO*) emphatically positioned itself within the spirit of aesthetic revolt through its Dadaist collage format and by fashioning itself as a latter-day organ of "PATAREALISM," a tribute to the science of the imaginary made up by Alfred Jarry, patron saint of the avant-garde.[37] Grove Press, which operated as a bridge between the avant-garde and the counterculture, may have assisted here by publishing a cheap paperback translation of Jarry's selected works in the run-up to *EVO*'s founding in 1965.[38] In any event, similar avant-garde signals stand out in Reed's early work. In *Yellow Back,* for instance, Loop Garoo

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[35] Bob Callahan, et al., "Before Columbus Foundation Interview," *Conversations with Ishmael Reed* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995), 161-180, 164.

[36] Reed's antipathy for the political radicalisms of the sixties comes to full expression in his follow up to *Mumbo Jumbo, The Last Days of Louisiana Red* (1974).

[37] In the space of just five pages, the first issue alone manages to cram in: a "Patareal Manifesto" that traces Dada and Surrealism back to "patarealism" and calls for active revolt against the "New Deal" society of "Monster education and monster mass media"; a hoax news report that draws on Jarry's *Ubu Colonialist* for a statement from "Pa Ubu, mayor of Los Angeles" on the Watts riots; as well as a review of a new translation of Maurice Nadeau's *History of Surrealism* which credits it with distilling the elements of Surrealism that have not diminished in importance after forty years (see *The East Village Other* 1, no. 1 (October 1965), 2-3).

[38] Alfred Jarry, *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry,* eds and trans. Roger Shattuck and Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Grove Press). Translator Roger Shattuck had exposed American readers to the work of the early avant-garde ear in his first book, *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France* (1955), published on the eve of the beat revival of aesthetic revolt in the postwar U.S. (Ginsberg's *Howl* was published the following year), and then again in 1968.

is characterized as a "patarealist" maker of "do dads."[39] Likewise, Reed plays on Jarry's image of the effort by the State to lock up works of the imagination "in its prisons or the museum"[40] in *Mumbo Jumbo,* where the Museum of Modern Art becomes the Art Detention Center, an image which condenses and carries forward the revival of the avant-garde critique of autonomous art in the 1960s by artists "[i]nspired by—and fully conscious of—half a century of avant-garde activity."[41]

Dancing in the Streets

If, as Theodor W. Adorno once speculated, Greek tragedy gave birth to "the idea of aesthetic autonomy" as "an afterimage of cultic acts that were intended to have real effects," the avant-garde critique of autonomy is driven by nothing so much as the desire to undo tragic spectatorship by reviving a horizon of such "real effects" through participatory acts of creation.[42] Sworn enemy of "the idea of art for art's sake, with art on one side and life on the other"[43]—in short, the spectator's view of art enshrined in museums—the mission of the avant-garde had been to carry out a kind of Reformation of the modern religion of Art. To this end, the avant-garde set out to disrupt the separation between art and life, artist

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[39] Reed, Yellow, 38.
[40] Alfred Jarry, *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry,* eds and trans. Roger Shattuck and Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Grove Press), 112. In addition to the "Art Detention Center," there is also Reed's prelapsarian vision of art before the intervention of the political power of the state: "at the time of Osiris [in Egypt] every man was an artist and every artist a priest; it wasn't until later that Art became attached to the State to do with it what it pleased" (*Mumbo Jumbo* 164).
[41] Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993), 2.
[42] Theodore W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997), 6.
[43] Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double,* trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 77.

and recipient, performance and audience, by introducing chance and open-endedness into the creative process, such that the sovereign artist and artwork give way to an open process of spontaneous self-creation in which art and life merge. Emboldened by the extension of bureaucratic routines in the "organized society," this quest permeated what Daniel Belgrad has called the postwar "culture of spontaneity" in the U.S., from the improvisational techniques of bebop composer-musicians who inspired the beat writers to John Cage's *4'33"* and *Theater Piece No. 1* (1952)—the former a "silent" music composition, a blank score during performances of which the noise of the audience itself became the music; the latter an unscripted theatrical performance which prefigured the spread of Happenings, guerrilla theater, and otherwise framed experiments in spontaneous self-creation in the 1960s. As if indeed to fulfil the "future resolution" of "dream and reality"[44] by acting out the fantasy glimpsed—long before the Yippie call for a "festival of life in the streets and parks throughout the world"[45]—in Breton's "dream of the magnificent workings of chance in the streets, even in New York,"[46] or Antonin Artaud's vision of the eruption of theater on the street, beyond the fixed forms of the stage,[47] or William S. Burroughs' prophetic image in *Naked Lunch* of "Rock and Roll adolescent hoodlums storm[ing] the streets of all nations,"[48] the participatory spirit unleashed in the late 1960s brought aesthetic freedom to life, marking a moment in which, as Reed himself put it in

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[44] André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," *Manifestoes of Surrealism,* trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 1-48, 14.
[45] Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, "Yippie Manifesto" (1968). Accessed on dpya.org.
[46] Breton, "Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto," *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 283.
[47] Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double,* 76.
[48] William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text* (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 38.

1968, "the spirit and imagination enter the streets."[49] The catalyst for the largest demonstrations in the U.S. was of course opposition to the War in Vietnam. Yet for many participants in the counterculture, the war was symptomatic of an over-rationalized society to which experiments in spontaneity modeled an alternative. This broader struggle, suffice it to say, was very much in the spirit of the Surrealist revolt against reason as a "power … that falls victim to routine, that society is careful to channel in predefined directions where it can keep an eye on it" (Breton), itself a revival of the Romantic revolt against one and the same "Reasoning Power" that, "when / separated / From Imagination, and closing itself as in steel … frames Laws … To destroy Imagination!" (Blake).[50] As one of Diane di Prima's *Revolutionary Letters* enthusiastically chants: "THE ONLY WAR THAT MATTERS IS THE WAR AGAINST THE IMAGINATION" (#75*).* Like others, di Prima responded to this war by imagining utopia in Dionysian terms, as a world of spontaneous self-creation in which we "all have homemade flutes" and "make our own music" (*#31*).[51]

Not all imaginary quarters embraced the prospect of a "Dionysiac revival," as the fictional scholar of Romanticism wearily registers the murmur of the counterculture in Saul Bellow's novel *Herzog* (1964).[52] By the late 1960s, though—thanks, in part, to Norman O.

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[49] Walt Shepperd, "When State Magicians Fail: An Interview with Ishmael Reed," *Conversations with Ishmael Reed* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995), 3-13, 13. For good measure, incidentally, the Yippies made the point clear by showing up outside the MoMA at the opening of its 1968 retrospective on "Dada, Surrealism, and their Heritage" to proclaim the heirs of Dada and Surrealism alive in the streets.

[50] André Breton, "Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto," *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1972), 283; William Blake, "Jerusalem," *The Complete Poems,* ed. Alicia Ostriker (London: Penguin, 1977), 635-847, 793.

[51] The choice of "flutes" here quietly references the instrument used for dithyrambs, the rapturous songs that accompanied the dancing in Dionysian rites. By contrast, the poetry and music associated with the worship of Apollo, the paean, used the lyre.

[52] Saul Bellow, *Herzog: Text and Criticism*, ed. Irving Howe (New York: Viking), 1976), 186.

Brown's theoretical dithyrambs—invocations of the god of Bacchic frenzy had become common, both as a way to interpret the times and as a sign under which to actively pursue the dissolution of limits where art and artist give way to the "primordial unity" of rapturous "singing and dancing" in which life itself "become[s] a work of art."[53] As Richard Schechner remarked in 1968, "It seems quite clear that [Dionysus] is present in today's America."[54] And as the iconoclastic artistic director of The Performance Group, one of a number of experimental troupes to form after the manner of the Living Theater, Schechner played a graceful host with *Dionysus in '69,* a restaging of Euripides's *The Bacchae* in which audiences underwent initiation rites collapsing the barrier between spectator and actor. After opening in June of 1968, the play—which, like other experimental aesthetics at the time, "thrived on spontaneity and improvisation and continued to evolve as it went on"[55]—closed in July of 1969, just as millions of spectators sat in front of their television sets to watch the triumph of the Apollonian spirit of scientific modernity in the launch of an aptly named spacecraft that would carry the human species to the moon. A month later, the Dionysian spirit of the counterculture came to its own noisy crescendo in the "spontaneous community" created at the Woodstock Festival, where a generation "suspicious of institutions and wary of organization," as *TIME* put it, elevated "freedom above system" in "history's biggest happening."[56] It was in response to these latter two events, these

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[53] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings,* 18.
[54] Quoted in Froma I. Zeitlin, "Dionysus in 69," *Dionysus since 69: Greek Tragedy at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, ed. Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh, and Amanda Wrigley (New York: Oxford UP, 2004), 49-76, 52.
[55] Froma I. Zeitlin, "Dionysus in 69," *Dionysus since 69: Greek Tragedy at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, ed. Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh, and Amanda Wrigley (New York: Oxford UP, 2004), 49-76, 50.
[56] "Woodstock - The Message of History's Biggest Happening," *TIME* (Aug. 29, 1969). Accessed online at content.time.com.

"concretized" "dramatizations" of Apollo and Dionysus, that Ayn Rand offered her own thoughts on the era's "fundamental conflict" in a 1969 lecture. By focusing on the clash between reason and *emotion*, however, Rand—who compared those who traveled to Cape Kennedy "to *witness* the launching of Apollo 11" to those who traveled to Woodstock (nearby Bethel, actually) "to *witness* a rock music festival"[57]—missed the latter's participatory spirit, the desire for spontaneous *activity,* in short, the "revolt of the audience"[58] in view of which the era could be said to have "put the myth of Dionysus into action."[59] Seen this way, a single event from the prior year perhaps better illustrated the "fundamental conflict," at least as the counterculture saw it. When the Democratic National Convention took place in 1968, there were those, on one side, content to *witness* the tightly scripted political spectacle on television, and then there were those, prompted by the Yippies, who showed up in Chicago to spontaneously *create* a spectacle that, as news cameras assured, "the whole world is watching."

It was not always with great subtlety that this theme found its way into countercultural novels. In Michael McClure's *The Adept* (1969), for instance, the Dionysian protagonist (he is said to "look like Dionysus") has an epiphany while attending a play that inspires contempt for the "silent spectators" in the audience, all of them "dutifully and culturally partaking in the event in zomboidal rigidity of attention."[60] But while some

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[57] Ayn Rand, "Apollo and Dionysus" (1969). Accessed at courses.aynrand.org/works/apollo-and-dionysus/.
[58] Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 210.
[59] Camille Paglia, "Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders," *Arion* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 139-212, 178.
[60] Michael McClure, *The Adept* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1971), 26, 14. McClure's protagonist offers a window into the rift between countercultural aesthetic revolt and the New Left: "To be a revolutionary is to be totally differentiated from politics . . . I despise the radical and social Left which would poison me and put me in a prison of Society—leaving me no pleasures but those of

incorporated the theme into their fiction, still others questioned the relation of the written word itself to the participatory spirit of the times. What defined the "new sensibility" of the 1960s, declared Susan Sontag, is "that its model product is not the literary work."[61] And indeed, was not the key to John Cage's experiments in spontaneity the withdrawal of the vertical authority of the script or the score—in other words, the eclipse of the written word or notation by chance activity? In this context, even "words about art" (like Sontag's) came under fire as "infinitely inferior to the art itself."[62] Media prophecies of the time seemed to confirm this shift, from the technological determinism of Marshall McCluhan's media theory, according to which the world of print was on its way out, to Norman O. Brown's more occult vision of having entered a history-making period of "holy madness" in which "civilization has to be renewed" through creative acts freed from "bondage to the authority of books."[63] All of which contributed to what Clarence Major later described as the "crisis of sorts regarding the written word" by which some writers were affected.[64] Perhaps most famously, novelist Ken Kesey abandoned writing altogether to pursue experiments in spontaneous self-creation on the electronic frontier: why be "a seismograph," he resolved, when you can be "a lightning rod."[65]

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happy work, and marriage, and perhaps finally automation so that there would be nothing for me to do but watch state-owned television and pursue crafts and cultural events until the utopia breaks up in the sheer boredom of existence" (8).

[61] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 2001), 298.

[62] George Brecht, *Chance-Imagery* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), 2

[63] Norman O. Brown, *Apocolaypse and/or Metamorphosis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 4-5. Citing Plato, Nietzsche, and Emerson to arrive at this conclusion, Brown—not unlike McCluhan, who spent his life publishing books about the eclipse of print—was evidently an exception.

[64] Clarence Major, *The Dark & Feeling: Reflections on Black American Writers and Their Works* (New York: The Third Press, 1974), 13.

[65] Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 8.

In *The Theater and Its Double* (1938; published in translation by Grove Press in 1958), Antonin Artaud anticipated this position in his rebuke of "texts and *written* poetry." Like Moses abhorred at the sight of his people's reversion from the instinctual renunciation commanded by the Word of God to the ecstatic dancing of pagan rites but in reverse, Artaud criticized the residual "literary admiration" within the avant-garde for the work of Jarry, Rimbaud, and Lautreamont (among others) as complicit in the institution of autonomous or "detached art" which "creates nothing and produces nothing."[66] But then, this point was hardly lost on Artaud's forerunners in the literary avant-garde, for whom the point was above all to "*practice* poetry."[67] And it was often experiments in writing that best modeled the spontaneous conception of aesthetic freedom to which the avant-garde directed its efforts, from Tristan Tzara's typically Dadaist gesture of composing poems by pulling words at random from a hat to the Surrealists' *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse) experiments in collaborative composition, which brought into view a horizon of dispersed creation, at once spontaneous and anonymous, beyond the confines of single authorship. Declaring themselves *modestes appareils enregistreurs* (modest recording devices)—a conceit later echoed in Burroughs' description of the writer in *Naked Lunch* as a mere "recording instrument"[68]—the Surrealists underscored the position in which they sought to relocate themselves in the creative process as transmitters of the word not as willed, not as consciously directed by an individual author, but as it spontaneously writes itself.[69]

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[66] Artraud, *the Theater and Its Double,* 78.
[67] Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 18.
[68] William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch,* 184. Critics routinely overlook the Surrealist echo in this "famous line from *Naked Lunch*" (Ann Douglas, "'Punching a Hole in the Big Lie': The Achievement of William S. Burroughs," *Word Virus: The William S. Burroughs Reader,* ed. by James Grauerholz and Ira Silverberg (New York: Grove Press, 1998), xv-xxviii, xx).
[69] Pierre Schneider, "A Note on the Equisite Corpse," *Yale French Studies* 2 (1948): 85-92, 86.

Moreover, Tristan Tzara and André Breton famously crafted their texts on writing Dadaist or automatic texts as *recipes*—that is, texts that call upon readers to advance beyond detached reception to acts of creation.[70] Poetry, in this way, is to be reclaimed from the morgues and pedestals of the world to become a living practice in which the separation between poet, poem, and reader dissolves. Another way of putting this is to say that avant-garde writers wanted their texts to be less Literature and more grimoire: what, after all, is a book of magic if not a recipe book of the spirit? In this connection, we glimpse part of Hoodoo's allure for Reed, who offers his own spin on avant-garde recipe-writing in "The Neo-HooDoo Aesthetic," a free verse poem that consists of two gumbo recipes, the second a minor variation on the first.[71] Gumbo operates here as a metaphor for Reed's composite aesthetic. Like Hoodoo—or early jazz, for that matter—gumbo is an inextricably hybrid product of New Orleans culture, a veritable art in its own right that is known for having "as many recipes as there are cooks."[72] Beyond the metaphor, the poem uses a literal recipe to model the process of creative revision it seeks to incite. In *Mumbo Jumbo,* a similar gesture accompanies Reed's characterization of the Book of Toth, the sacred book for which Jes Grew searches in the novel. Where other holy books lay down the Truth or the (Mosaic) Law, this book is said to operate as a spur to creative activity, a "Book of Litanies to which people" "add their own variations" (Reed 164). This contrasts with the one-sided rigidity of the Atonist Path traced through Moses, who is said to have organized the first non-

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[70] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, translated by Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 2007 [1984]), 53.
[71] Reed, "The Neo-HooDoo Aesthetic," *New and Collected Poems, 1964-2006* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006), 34.
[72] Marcelle Bienvenu, Carl A. Brasseaux, and Ryan A. Brasseaux, *Stir the Pot: A History of Cajun Cuisine* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 2005), 135.

participatory art in the form of a concert at which "no 1 in the audience [was] allowed to play." When, after all, the sacred book for which Jes Grew searches is not recovered, this too is in keeping with the aesthetic spirit in which the novel casts Jes Grew's origins in the collective revelry of the Osiris cult, where everyone is an "artist and every artist a priest" (Reed 182).[73] If anyone can "make up stories from Egypt" (*Phaedrus* 275b), Reed's fabulist tale turns this risk into an imperative in the end with its call—like di Prima's call to "make our own music"—to "make our own future Text" (Reed 204). In this way, *Mumbo Jumbo* is itself a fulfillment of the text for which Jes Grew seeks, a text which calls forth the creation of further texts, further "variations."

Similar such calls to literary self-creation abounded in the 1960s—"crisis" of the written word notwithstanding. Channeling the Surrealist injunction to "*practice* poetry," writers experimented with creative prompts and aesthetic recipes of various sorts. In one characteristic bid at dissolving the separation between writer and reader, Yoko Ono's book *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings* (1964; 1970) opened with a hand-drawn "Synopsis" page that instructs readers to "write your own" in the blank space provided (Figure 1). This creative invitation sets the stage for the litany of Fluxus pieces that follow in the book. Modeled after the "event scores" of George Brecht, one of John Cage's students and a member of the Fluxus movement, these pieces instruct readers to perform activities ranging from poignant to whimsical, as in Ono's one-line "MAP PIECE": "Draw a map to get

[73] Reed first articulates this notion in his "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," where he writes that in the church of Neo-HooDoo "every man is an artist and every artist a priest" (Reed, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," *New and Collected Poems* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006), 25-33, 26.

lost."[74] In the wake of the political unrest unleashed in the following years, instructional books of a less aesthetic variety began to emerge too, among them *Steal This Book* (1971), Abbie Hoffman's countercultural how-to guide, as well as William Powell's *The Anarchist Cookbook* (1971), which included recipes for everything from explosives to LSD. Somewhere between Ono's whimsy and the insurrectionary ethos of the latter were the writings comprising William S. Burroughs' *The Revised Boy Scout Manual.* Published in fragments in the early 1970s, Burroughs outlined an "electronic revolution" to be carried out, not through organized political or armed conflict, but by hijacking the "reality studio" in which events (or "pseudo-events," following Daniel Boorstin[75]) were constructed in the age of mass media. Fascinated by the potential of increasingly portable electronic recording and playback equipment to ally with new avenues of transmission to dismantle the imaginary of consensus projected by the postwar political order in the broadcast era, Burroughs instructs readers to spontaneously conduct experiments in reshaping reality by recording and cutting audio and video to promulgate hoaxes and construct "fake news" (a phrase he was perhaps the first to use).[76] As he saw it, "Illusion" created through "cutup tapes" is a "revolutionary weapon."[77] It was also an electronic "extension of the cutup method,"[78] the practice of cutting up and rearranging existing texts that Burroughs championed earlier in the 1960s as a participatory art for all: "Cut-ups are for everyone," he declares in his primary statement on the method. "Anybody can make cut-ups. It is

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[74] Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 126.
[75] Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Atheneum, 1961).
[76] Burroughs, *The Revised Boy Scout Manual: An Electronic Revolution*, ed. Geoffrey D. Smith and John M. Bennett (Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2018), 48.
[77] Burroughs, *The Revised Boy Scout Manual,* 43.
[78] Burroughs, *The Revised Boy Scout Manual,* 47.

experimental in the sense of being something to do. … Cut the words and see how they fall."[79]

As one might expect, Burroughs' call to poetic action ("Cut-ups are for everyone") performs the method in question by cutting up Tristan Tzara ("Poetry is for everyone"), itself a proto-cut-up of Comte de Lautréamont ("Poetry must be made by all and not by one"). Beneath the desire for collective artistic creation, these gestures also point toward culture itself as a spontaneous production, at once recalling Romantic views of the "spontaneously creative 'folk'"[80] and looking forward to the poststructuralist indeterminacy in which the avant-garde comes to theoretical expression. Exemplary of the former is the aesthetic horizon in which Friedrich Schelling's philosophy terminates, with poetic "creation, not of some individual author, but of a new race, personifying, as it were, one single poet."[81] As for the latter, we might cite the future projected by Foucault in "What Is an Author?" where the eclipse of the individual author (qua "author function") promises to usher in the free circulation of "fiction and its polysemous texts" bearing "the anonymity of a murmur."[82] In assembling textual cacophonies made up of other texts, authors, "voices," the spirit of Burroughs' cut-up method echoes that of the Samuel Beckett line around which Foucault frames his essay: "'What does it matter who is speaking,' someone said, 'what does it matter who is speaking.'"[83] As Robin Lyndenberg observes, "The

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[79] William Burroughs, "The Cut-Up Method of Brion Gysin" William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 29-34, 31-32.
[80] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism,* 4.
[81] Friedrich Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 233.
[82] Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" *The Foucault Reader,* ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 101-120, 119.
[83] Beckett, in this way, is made to play a peculiar role—the author function identified with the dissolution of the author function.

production of the cut-up text raises the question of who is speaking in a given phrase or fragment." In this way, "the writer of cut-ups"—like the poststructuralists—"implies that it is always language that speaks within a network of infinite and anonymous citations."[84]

To what extent, we might ask, does the spontaneous force personified in *Mumbo Jumbo* suggest the same? To put this question another way: Is Jes Grew the spontaneously creative genius of a discrete group—a nation, race, people, folk, or culture? Or is it, rather, the abyss: radical uncertainty, spontaneous creativity as such, sans limits or identity? (Is Jes Grew Black? Or as is Jes Grew "the night in which all cows are black"?) Textual evidence points in both directions. Sharing in the spirit of the Beckett line, *Mumbo Jumbo* cites "Who's your source?" (141) as the consummate Atonist question, a question to which Jes Grew can be read as the novel's response: an absent cause, an "unknown factor" (152), an "indefinable quality," a "Something or Other" that "belonged to nobody" (211) and which is legible primarily through its "anonymously created symptoms" (64). In a telling moment early on, the novel relates the conflict between Jes Grew and the Atonist Path with all the anonymity of a rumor, legend, or myth: "Someone once said that beneath or behind all political and cultural warfare lies a struggle between secret societies" (18). Critics often focus on the content of this passage. Taken at face value, however, the message misleads. As we learn over the course of the novel, the struggle between Jes Grew and the Atonist Path is not a struggle between similarly formed secret societies. Lacking the formal organization characteristic of the Atonist Path, Jes Grew figures in this passage, not in the content, but as the anonymous form in which this information comes to us, as on the

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[84] Robin Lyndenberg, *Word Cultures: Radical Theory and Practice in William S. Burroughs' Fiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 45.

"Grapevine Telegraph" (13)—one of the models, with jazz, of Jes Grew's spontaneous aural transmission. The passage above, we might also note, rewrites a famous line from the *Communist Manifesto* ("The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles")—an intertext that comes through more clearly in *The Illuminatus! Trilogy,* which opens with an epigraph attributed to *Mumbo Jumbo*: "The history of the world is the history of the warfare between secret societies."[85] By restoring the mode of polemical assertion from the *Communist Manifesto*, however, *The Illuminatus! Trilogy*'s cut-up of Reed's cut-up cuts out the note of anonymity that signals the difference between spontaneous cultural products that *just grow* (Jes Grew) and the rational truth to which the Atonist Path lays claim—a difference mirrored in Reed's revision of Marx, where the historical rationality of class analysis gives way to the folk poetics of conspiracy, those myths of modernity that, like any "popular sentiment arising with absolute spontaneity,"[86] invariably turn on the anonymous authority of Someone.

Yet if the anonymity embraced by Burroughs' cut-up method aims, in conventionally avant-garde fashion, to scramble and escape from cultural identity or tradition (that "rusty load of continuity,"[87] as he put it in a letter to Allen Ginsberg), Reed's spin on "operation rewrite"[88] calls attention to a continuous Black cultural tradition, even as it, too, revels in "the sheer play of indeterminacy."[89] That Reed's early work self-consciously joins the spirit

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[85] Wilson and Shea, *The Illuminatus! Trilogy,,* 5.
[86] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Sphinx," *The Complete Tales of Edgard Allan Poe* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2006), 729-732, 729.
[87] Quoted in Oliver Harris, *William Burroughs and the Secret of Fascination* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 8.
[88] William S. Burroughs, *The Ticket that Exploded: The Restored Text* (New York: Grove Press, 2014), 55.
[89] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 227.

of the avant-garde to a specifically Black cultural horizon is suggested in different ways by Loop Garoo and PaPa LaBas, Reed's protagonists and authorial masks in *Yellow Back* and *Mumbo Jumbo.* While Loop is characterized as a "patarealist," as we noted above, his imaginative prowess is still more emphatically tied to Hoodoo, that "syncretistic American version" of Haitian Vodun.[90] PaPa LaBas similarly figures in *Mumbo Jumbo* as a Hoodoo conjure man. PaPa's first name, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. points out, is a tribute to Papa Lega, the loa or spirit of communication or divine mediation in Haitian Vodou. As for his last name, "LaBas" calls to mind *Là-bas* (1891), Joris-Karl Huysmans' Decadent novel about an author who, while studying history to escape from the spiritual emptiness of modernity, discovers a thriving world of occultism in the underground (*là-bas*, "down there") of fin de siècle Paris, not unlike the practice of Hoodoo that Reed takes to have been "driven underground."[91] In what is perhaps a reflexive nod to the convergence staged in Reed's work, an exchange in *Mumbo Jumbo* has Abdul Sufi Hamid,[92] an early Black Muslim and

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[90] Reed, *Yellow,* 154.

[91] Reed, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," 25. See J. K. Huysmans, *La-bàs (Down There),* trans. Keene Wallace (New York: Dover, 1972). In addition to the thematic affinity, there is also a formal affinity with Huysmans, who emphatically rejected literary naturalism. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s focus on the Black literary tradition leads him to miss the Huysmans allusion and force a reading instead. He writes in his original article on Reed, "[PaPa LeBas's] surname, of course, is French for 'over there,' and his presence unites 'over there' (Africa) with 'right here'" (Gates, "The 'Blackness of Blackness': A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey," *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 4 (June 1983): 685-723, 705). "Over there" is a mistranslation of *là-ba* ("under there" or "down there"). Later, in his book, Gates makes a slight concession at this point by including "down there" as a translation (*The Signifying Monkey* 223), but he still does not tell us why Reed would draw on the French to indicate Africa. Suffice it to say, Reed's intertexts exceed any racial and national border; his early work in particular consistently positions itself within the transnational literary avant-garde.

[92] Reed's main characters in *Mumbo Jumbo* are often said to be types or composites rather than being modeled specific individuals from history. On this view, critics often suggest that Abdul is a composite of Black Muslim and Black Nationalist leaders. I suspect that there is truth to this. On the other hand, critics who make this point tend to overlook that Abdul Sufi Hamid is clearly named after Sufi Abdul Hamid. A larger-than-life Harlemite who reinvented himself a few times over in the course of his life, Hamid (born Eugene Brown) is remembered primarily as a labor organizer, an early African-American convert to Islam and spiritual leader, and an outspoken anti-Semite.

proto-Black Nationalist, warn LaBas of a future in which interest in Hoodoo will be "limited" to those drawn to "the avant garde" (39)—a negative forecast, so far as Hamid is concerned, though not, presumably, for an avant-garde writer like Reed.

If these gestures suggest a certain investment in the avant-garde, however, the primary thrust of the vision that culminates in *Mumbo Jumbo* consists of laying claim to a Black tradition of improvisational aesthetics that itself models the spontaneity so prized by the historically European avant-garde. To this end, Reed set out to remake the avant-garde in the image of this tradition, or rather, to fashion this tradition, under the sign of "Neo-HooDoo," as an avant-garde project, complete with a "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto" (1972) after the manner of the first manifesto of Surrealism.[93] Where Breton positions Surrealism within a French counter-tradition of aesthetic revolt (de Sade, Jarry, Rimbaud, et al.: the micro-canon that Atraud would later repudiate), Reed's "Neo-HooDoo Manifeseto" locates his aesthetic project downstream from the virtuoso bebop jazz of Charlie Parker—the exemplary "Neo-HooDoo artist as an innovator and improvisor"[94]—as part of a broader tradition of Black music and dance whose pantheon extends from the ragtime and early jazz of Jelly Roll Morton, the blues of Bessie Smith, the soul of Otis Redding, and on through the psychedelic rock of the "Voodoo Child" himself, Jimi Hendrix. As Reed stresses, part of

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Unconnected to the Nation of Islam, Hamid took on the name His Holiness Bishop Amiru Al-Mu-Minin Sufi A. Hamid and claimed to have been born beneath an Egyptian pyramid. His reputation as an anti-Semite earned him the nickname "the Black Hitler."

[93] Reed later signaled this influence, commenting: "I was impressed by the surrealists, who drew up a manifesto to give the critics a signpost as to what they were up to. And so I came up with Neo-HooDooism as a way of explaining my connection to ancient Afro-American culture, which is American culture, you know. You cannot separate Afro-American culture from American culture" (Peter Nazareth, "A Conversation with Ishmael Reed" (1982), *Conversations with Ishmael Reed,* eds Dick Bruce and Amritjit Singh (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995), 196-204, 197).

[94] Reed, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," 27.

the impetus for uniting this Black cultural tradition under "Neo-HooDoo" (and here, we might note, Reed is not alone in tracing popular Black cultural forms back to New Orleans Voodoo[95]) derives from a persistent disavowal within American culture, a refusal to give Black culture "the credit it deserves in influencing American Culture."[96] Setting the stage for Reed's next novel, the manifesto closes by announcing that "Neo-HooDoo is Dance and Music closing in on its words"[97]—a task fulfilled in *Mumbo Jumbo,* where "Neo-HooDoo" becomes the "experimental art" of Jes Grew (Reed 152).

Were one to focus on the postwar revival of the spirit of aesthetic revolt, particularly as popularized by the beats in the 1950s, one might be tempted to question Reed's sense of Black cultural erasure. For if the progenitors of verbal spontaneity from which the beats drew inspiration included the syntactical innovations of Rimbaud and the automatic writing of the Surrealists, the greatest influence was the improvisational virtuosity of composer-musicians at the helm of the "bop apocalypse!"[98] In "Jazz of the Beat Generation" (1955), a pseudonymously published excerpt from Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* that appeared in the seventh edition of the influential *New World Writing* anthology series, Kerouac announces the arrival of this new literary movement in conjunction with the music from which it took inspiration, complete with a concise genealogy retracing the evolution of the music from early ragtime to the New Orleans jazz of Louis Armstrong in the 1920s, through the era of swing in the 1930s, and on to the ecstatic bebop of Charlie

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[95] See, e.g., Michael Ventura's argument about how early jazz and its offshoots "grew from Voodoo" ritual practices in New Orleans ("Hear that Long Snake Moan," *Shadow Dancing in the USA* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1985), 103-162). Oddly, Ventura does not cite Reed.
[96] Reed, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," 26.
[97] Reed, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," 32.
[98] Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1956), 3, 27.

Parker, Thelonius Monk, and Dizzy Gillespie in the 1940s.[99]

Retrospective writings on the period reiterate this formative influence. In Diane di Prima's novel *Memoirs of a Beatnik* (1969)—written at the height of di Prima's involvement in the Haight-Ashbury scene in the late 1960s—the loosely autobiographical narrator recalls the jazz origins of the beat sensibility that later evolved into the sixties counterculture: "Jazz was for us the most important, happening art; the first spokesmen in our idiom spoke trumpet and sax."[100] More broadly, Ronald Sukenick's memoir on postwar bohemianism registers how "central" jazz became "for underground artists of all kinds" by the 1950s.[101] The editors of *Writers In Revolt* (1963) had concurred, noting at the outset of the widely circulated anthology how the "improvisational techniques" of Charlie Parker had come to "dominate" in postwar American art.[102] The same year saw the publication of *Blues People* by Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones). Joining music criticism and social history in an ambitiously synthetic reconstruction of Black music in the U.S., *Blues People* concludes with a section in which Baraka celebrates the postwar convergence of jazz—first in the bebop of the 1940s and then even more emphatically in the free jazz of the 1960s—with the broader spirit of aesthetic revolt that he describes in terms of the "art of alienation" and "nonconformity."[103] Beyond the "very vocal attachment to jazz" of beat writers, Baraka notes the "feeling of rapport" that developed between postwar jazz currents and "the rest

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[99] This history lesson appears, in slightly reversed form, in Part 3, Chapter 10 of the novel. See Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 241.
[100] Diane Di Prima, *Memoirs of a Beatnik* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 132.
[101] Ronald Sukenick, *Down and In: Life in the Underground* (New York: Collier Books, 1987), 58.
[102] "Introduction," *Writers in Revolt,* ed. Terry Southern, Richard Seaver, and Alexander Trocchi (New York: Berkeley Medallion Books, 1963), 15.
[103] LeRoj Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Quill, 1999), 231.

of contemporary American art," not only socially, in the mingling that took place in Greenwich Village, but also aesthetically, where the exchange between artists and jazz musicians in clubs like Cafe Bohemia, the Village Vanguard, and the Half Note was fostered by affinities between the techniques of jazz improvisers and those being experimented with in other arts.[104] As a beat poet himself at this time, Baraka might have cited the jazz-infused avant-gardism of his own work. Instead, he identifies as symbols of this convergence Kerouac's stated desire "to be considered a jazz poet" in *Mexico City Blues* (1959) and Ornette Coleman's album *Free Jazz: A Collective Improvisation* (1961), on the cover of which appears a reproduction of Jackson Pollock's painting *White Light* (1954).[105]

To be sure, not all contingents of the postwar American avant-garde were willing to admit jazz influences. Most notably, John Cage—perhaps protesting too much—insisted on distinguishing his experiments in indeterminacy from jazz improvisation. What's more, Baraka's prominence in the literary milieu of the beats in the early 1960s was not especially representative—a fact which was to play a role in his political awakening. While there were other Black beat writers (most notably Bob Kaufman and Ted Joans), the homogenous racial composition of most published and promoted authors is suggested by *The Moderns: An Anthology of New Writing in America* (1963). Published the same year as *Blues People* and *Writers in Revolt, The Moderns* brought together a cross-section of beat and Black Mountain writers.[106] Baraka did more than contribute to *The Moderns,* he edited

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[104] Jones (Baraka), *Blues People,* 232-233.
[105] In the final section of *Blues People* (1963), Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) discusses this postwar convergence of jazz and the avant-garde. See LeRoj Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Quill, 1999), 230-236.
[106] *The Moderns: An Anthology of New Writing in America*, ed. Amiri Baraka (New York: Corinth Books, 1963).

it. He was also the sole Black contributor. Still, the beats enthusiastically avowed the role of jazz in their aesthetic vision, celebrating it as "the music of inner freedom, of improvisation, of the creative individual."[107] In his "spontaneous bop prosody," Kerouac aspired for his writing to "flow in a natural way like a Charlie Parker solo."[108] By the 1960s, though, a number of factors conspired to place greater distance between the increasingly suburbanized youth culture that was forming and the work of Black artists—not least the highly publicized "Beat Generation" itself. If, in "1947, bop was going like mad all over America,"[109] as the narrator in *On the Road* (1957) tells us, the runaway success of Kerouac's novel a decade later was even madder. Where those who came of age in cities a generation earlier recalled the formative influence of jazz, those who came of age in white suburbs in the late 1950s and early 1960s—among them James Douglas Morrison (Jim Morrison) and Robert Allen Zimmerman (Bob Dylan)—often cited the formative influence of rock and roll and the beats. Kerouac's novel about itinerant young Americans "mad to live" played an especially large role here. So much so that it was more than a rhetorical flourish when Burroughs, later reflecting on the eruption of the sixties counterculture, suggested that the buses arriving at the Woodstock Festival were filled with young people

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[107] The phrase comes from the beat manifesto of sorts that John Clellon Holmes published in *Esquire* in 1958. See Holmes, "The Philosophy of the beat Generation" (1958), *Beat Down to Your Soul: What Was the Beat Generation?* ed. Ann Charters (New York: Penguin, 2001), 228-238, 236. While somewhat forgotten today relative to the beat holy trinity (Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs), Holmes was the first to publish a thematically "beat" novel (with *Go*) and was the first to reference the "Beat Generation" in a mainstream publication (the *New York Times*), both in 1952. See Holmes, "This Is the Beat Generation," *Beat Down to Your Soul: What Was the Beat Generation?* ed. Ann Charters (New York: Penguin, 2001), 222-228.
[108] Quoted in Roy Kotynek and John Cohassey, *American Cultural Rebels: Avant-Garde and Bohemian Artists, Writers and Musicians from the 1850s through the 1960s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland& Company, 2008), 167.
[109] Kerouac, *On the Road,* 12.

improvising parts in a script written by Kerouac.

As for the role played by the Dionysian spirit of rock, Burroughs himself had registered this musical shift in *Naked Lunch,* which (as we saw above) envisions not jazz but "Rock and Roll adolescent[s]" in revolt. Around the same time, poems like Katherine Hoskins' "Bacchanal" (1958) captured the eruption of the Dionysian spirit that would spread over the course of the next decade:

> What joy to join in that great dancing,
>
> What rebirth in forgetting
>
> Everything
>
> But that, as we drown from individual
>
> Sense to general, Desire is all[110]

The link between the spirit of revolt unleashed in the late 1960s and that "touch of *The Bacchae* in every successful rock performance" (as Morrison Dickstein later described the Dionysian spirit of rock) is a staple in accounts of the sixties zeitgeist as it was experienced in the U.S. and beyond.[111] As the former Parisian student organizer Claus Leggewie has recently commented, "the revolt [of May 1968] was far more American in origin than the Europeans cared to admit," having been "spurred by the idea of a counterculture, which

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[110] Katherine Hoskins, "Bacchanal," Partisan Review, Vol 25, no 2 (Summer 1958): 370-371).
[111] Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997 [1977]), 192. Echoed, e.g., in Barbara Ehrenreich's emphatically Dionysian recollection of "merging with a thousand other young people in all-night, three-chord communion" at rock concerts in the sixties (*Fear of Falling*, New York: HarperPerennial, 1990, 94). In a more critical vein, Allan Bloom likewise identifies rock music with "the Dionysian" in *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 73.

was mainly carried via rock music."[112] Here too, though, a process of whitening had taken hold since Elvis. In his autobiography, Miles Davis recalled the early 1960s as a transitional period in which "Jazz started to lose its broad appeal" just as rock and roll began to permeate American culture. "All of a sudden rock 'n' roll … was in the forefront in the media"—specifically, he adds, "White rock 'n' roll stolen from black rhythm and blues and people like Little Richard and Chuck Berry and the Motown sound. All of a sudden white pop music was being pushed on television and every-where else."[113] This trend extended to the music of counterculture, including at Woodstock. Although the Festival opened with Richie Havens, closed with Jimi Hendrix, and included an appearance by Sly and the Family Stone in between, on the whole Woodstock proved largely a sea of white, both on stage and off.

The same year, Theodore Roszak's book *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1969) conspicuously illustrated the tendency toward Black erasure within the sixties counterculture. In his attempt to provide a unified theory of the counterculture, Roszak heralds the dawn of a transformative social movement, albeit one in which he is compelled to concede the rift between aesthetic and political radicals.[114] What unites the two, on Roszak's account, is above all generation. This is his theoretical innovation: the introduction of generational (Oedipal?) conflict into historical materialism. "[B]y way of a dialectic Marx could never have imagined," as he puts it, a "revolutionary element" has

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[112] Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Claus Leggewie, "1968: Power to the Imagination," *New York Review of Books*, May 10, 2018.
[113] Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 273.
[114] Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 56.

taken shape along generational lines in the youth counterculture.[115] So "imagined," generation overtakes class as the history-making social relation: specifically, the conflict between the counterculture of the middle-class youth and the rationalized social order (or "technocracy") of their elders. Yet the most spurious aspect of Roszak's theory arrives in the racial exception that he makes to generational revolution. Because demands for racial justice seek entrance into the affluent society rather than its destruction, he posits, the technocratic order's only true antagonist is the oppositional force to which it has itself given birth—quite literally—in the white middle-class counterculture. This arrogation of the task of cultural revolution to the white counterculture involves layers of unintended irony. In addition to tacitly scorning Black economic demands in the process of laying claim to quasi-Marxist revolutionary potential, Roszak also accuses Black Nationalists of reviving the "old fashioned" "nationalist mythopoesis of the nineteenth century" as though his book were not itself premised upon an imaginary (counter-)community of the nineteenth century, to wit, artistic bohemia.[116] This Romantic inheritance is not lost on Roszak, who not only raises Shelley's essay on the "unacknowledged legislators of the world" as an early "counter cultural manifesto," but also identifies such a legislator in Allen Ginsberg, whose

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[115] Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture,* 34. Roszak's suggestion that it was beyond Marx to imagine intellectual fantasies of the "politics of consciousness" such as Roszak attributes to the "middle-class young" (51) is comically naïve in light of Marx's critique of the Young Hegelians in *The Germany Ideology,* which is a critique of precisely such "politics of consciousness" a century in advance. History repeats as farce.

[116] Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, xii. Jerrold Seigel's later book on the origins of modern Bohemia, which he theorizes "not [as] a realm outside bourgeois life but the expression of a conflict that arose at its heart"—"a special, identifiable kind of life [that would] appear only in the nineteenth century" and which was reincarnated in "the Beat Generation of the 1950s" and "the hippiedom of the 1960s"—is readily legible as an academic afterimage of the 1960s, a critical and historical inquiry into the line of thinking present in Roszak's book (Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 10, 5).

"Howl" he extols as the postwar counterculture's "founding document."[117] What *is* lost on Roszak is that the influences which converge in the spirit of aesthetic revolt galvanized by "Howl" include not only Blake, Whitman, and Rimbaud, but also the ecstatic rush of jazz improvisation it emulates, each of its lines "measured in a single breath as if blowing an extended cadenza on a saxophone."[118]

While Reed indicates no interest in the book's revolutionary theory, the absurdity of Roszak's effacing of Black culture earns *The Making of the Counter Culture* the honor of being one of the only individual works that Reed references by name in his "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto." How remarkable, Reed points out, that the Roszak's counterculture should dress, talk, gesture, play music, and dance as it does, nary a whisper on Roszak's part about the "Black influence on this culture."[119] To be sure, though, Roszak was hardly an outlier here. Long after the dust of late 1960s had settled, the pervasive tendency toward Black erasure stands out in the revisions of rock and roll history dramatized in late twentieth-century Hollywood blockbusters like *Back to the Future* (1985) and *Forrest Gump* (1994). Recall the iconic school dance scene in which Mary McFly, a time-traveling white kid from the suburbs, filling in on guitar in a Black doo-wop band, winds up taking the spotlight and inventing rock and roll. Blown away by Marty's performance of "Johnny B. Goode" (written by Chuck Berry in 1955, the year in which the scene is set), the injured musician for whom Marty fills in, Marvin Berry, is shown off-stage calling his cousin, Chuck, to say he has just discovered the "new sound" that his cousin has been looking for. To the same effect, *Forrest*

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[117] Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 55, 67
[118] Kotynek and Cohassey, *American Cultural Rebels,* 170.
[119] Reed, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," 26.

Gump's revisionary retelling of postwar American culture traces Elvis's provocative on-stage moves to a bed and breakfast in rural Alabama at which we see a young Elvis encounter the stilted dance moves of a young white boy in leg braces. Whatever one thinks of Reed's remarks about white rock bands as unwittingly "conjuring [Neo-HooDoo] music and ritual,"[120] or Michael Ventura's similar insistence on the continuity between rock and roll performances and the "Voodoo rite of possession by the god,"[121] one has to appreciate the brazenness with which these movies rewrite the pioneering efforts of Black artists. In *Back to the Future,* erasure is even thematized by the family photograph from which Marty is slowing disappearing. Ushering in rock and roll in the process of ensuring that the dance, and thus his parents' romance, can proceed, Marty saves himself from—and simultaneously consigns achievements of Black artists to—historical oblivion. As Ben Lerner points out, "when he got back to the future, white people would have invented, not appropriated," rock and roll.[122] Nor was such erasure a matter of history by the 1980s—far from it. It took the biggest pop star in world history to break through the color line on MTV, a cable network established to capture and reflect a youth culture that executives could imagine, in MTV's early years, as exclusively interested in white artists.

If this erasure wasn't ancient history by the 1980s—let alone when Reed wrote *Mumbo Jumbo*—it wasn't a recent development either. It was a practice that Black writers had long noted. In Zora Neale Hurston's final novel, *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948)—a potboiler about southern "crackers" that Hurston wrote after her publisher rejected two

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[120] Reed, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," 29.
[121] Michael Ventura, "Hear that Long Snake Moan," *Shadow Dancing in the USA* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1985), 103-162, 154.
[122] Ben Lerner, *10:04* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2014), 230.

manuscripts about Black characters—one of the topics of conversation that crops up concerns how

> white bands up North and in different places like New Orleans are taking over darky music and making more money at it than the darkies used to. Singers and musicians and all. You do hear it over the radio at times … [I]t is just a matter of time when white artists will take it all over. Getting so it's not considered just darky music and dancing nowadays. It's American, and belongs to everybody.[123]

Still earlier, James Weldon Johnson called attention to this same phenomenon going back to ragtime in his preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922), an anthology published on the eve of the Harlem Renaissance in which both he and Hurston were to play a part. Notably, this anthology is also the primary inspiration for *Mumbo Jumbo*'s "Jes Grew," which borrows Johnson's use of an expression derived from a statement made by the character Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Described as a "heathenish" "little negro girl" in Harriot Beecher Stowe's novel, Topsy is dropped off at Miss Ophelia's home to be given "a good orthodox New England bringing up" away from her enslaved peers at Augustine's place.[124] After Topsy performs "an odd negro melody," Miss Ophelia sits her down to run through biographical questions: age, parents, birthplace, and so on. But Topsy has no answers. Asked whether she has "ever heard anything about God," whether she "know[s] who made [her]?" Topsy responds: "Nobody," adding, "I spect I grow'd. Don't

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[123] Zora Neale Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 176.
[124] Topsy's peers are described as "little plagues": I will return Reed's transvaluation of such "plague" imagery below.

think nobody never made me."[125] Raised by "speculators," Topsy is unable to position herself discursively within a continuous culture or tradition. In this way, her response registers on the order of the symbolic the degree of chattel slavery's "symbolic annihilation" (Reed's phrase).[126] At the same time, a form of cultural transmission takes hold in the music and dance that she performs, and it is in this view that James Weldon Johnson draws on Topsy's naïvely organic self-interpretation in his preface. Notably foregrounding folk and popular forms at a time in which high culture held sway among both black and white intellectuals,[127] Johnson credits black artists with having created the only artistic forms—from the cakewalk to ragtime—to have "sprung from American soil and [become] universally acknowledged as distinctive American products."[128] Tracing back the Black milieus from which a number of popular dances and musics originated, Johnson observes that, "like Topsy," early ragtime songs "'jes' grew.'"[129] And such improvised, "'jes' grew' songs," he continues—in what is perhaps an oblique reference to the emerging jazz age—are "growing all the time."[130] Yet in growing from a "racial" to a "national" music,

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[125] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 1995), 221-224.
[126] Quoted in Christopher Douglas, *A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2009), 268.
[127] In his study of the Harlem Renaissance, Nathan Irvin Huggins observes a tendency among its major figures to be "fixed on a vision of *high* culture" to the point of overlooking the significance of creative developments in popular arts, above all in jazz. This could also be seen in Johnson, whose protagonist in *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* dreams of "symphonic scores based on ragtime" (Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance,* 10). On the other hand, Johnson's preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* challenges those who would "deny that Ragtime is an artistic production," and he dismisses the disapproval of all things "new" and "popular" as mere "scholasticism" (14). Explicit references to jazz, however, are notably absent from Johnson's preface (whereas the formal and thematic impact of jazz features in literature published the same year: e.g. Eliot's "The Waste Land" and Lewis's *Babbitt*).
[128] James Weldon Johnson (ed.), *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (The Floating Press, 2008 [1922]), 6.
[129] Johnson (ed.), *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, 10.
[130] Johnson (ed.), *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, 11.

Johnson notes, a tendency has emerged to forget the "Negro origin [of this] American music."[131]

Much of *Mumbo Jumbo*'s impetus comes into view here. If a longstanding American practice consists of obscuring the Black origins of cultural forms that "jes' grew," *Mumbo Jumbo* flips the script, retelling the jazz age from the standpoint of Jes Grew with a view toward the reawakening of this creative force in Reed's time. Anticipating the spirit of George E. Lewis's more recent advice to young Black artists (namely, "if you find yourself written out of history, you can feel free to write yourself back in"[132]), *Mumbo Jumbo* not only operates as a bridge between avant-garde revolt and the spirit of jazz; it altogether reimagines the relationship, as when Reed cleverly rewrites the dawn of Dada as an outgrowth of the Jes Grew contagion in one of the novel's many paratextual news headline inserts: "UPON HEARING ETHEL WATERS SING 'THAT DA-DA-STRAIN' AND A JAZZ BAND PLAY 'PAPA DE-DA-DA' EUROPEAN PAINTERS TAKE JES GREW ABROAD" (Reed 105). In a similar way, Reed's "Art Detention Center" not only echoes Jarry's image and the avant-garde critique of autonomous art; Reed also builds on it in *Mumbo Jumbo*'s postcolonial subplot involving the "Mu'tafikah," a multiethnic art heist collective made up of "bohemians of the 1920s" (Reed 15) whose dedication to repatriating artworks and artifacts from Western museums parallels Reed's effort to reclaim a cultural tradition qua Jes Grew. To drive this point home, we might recall the dream of unleashing chance activity in the streets that came to prominence in the 1960s. If this theme found expression in

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[131] Johnson (ed.), *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, 9.
[132] George E. Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2008), xxxii.

countercultural anthems like Jefferson Airplane's 1969 single "Volunteers" ("Look what's happening out in the streets / Got a revolution, got to revolution / Hey, I'm dancing down the streets / Got a revolution, got to revolution"),[133] the message found a much broader audience in the run-up to the late sixties in Martha & The Vandellas's iconic 1964 recording of "Dancing in the Streets": an "important song," with its famous "[Call] out around the world" interpreted by many at the time as a call to get out into the streets.[134] Here, we might note, if there is any question about what Reed means by describing Jes Grew as a contagion, at least part of what he means is surely indicated by the vividness with which many of us, even now, can hear Martha Reeves sing "Dancing in the Streets" in our mind—one of a thousand songs by which Jes Grew has infected us, and in extreme cases, even incited us to dance. What's more, the first verse of "Dancing in the Music" celebrates the eruption of dancing to a "new beat" in cities, not accidentally chosen, but in which Black music and dance developed in the wake of the Great Migration: Chicago, New Orleans, and New York City. In this way, the song lyrically condenses the historical path to which Reed gives expanded narrative life in *Mumbo Jumbo*, which follows the spread of Black music and dance in "Sporadic outbreaks" (13) of Jes Grew, a contagion that leaves "streets … littered with bodies" (17) "from New Orleans to Chicago" and onto New York City, before "leaping across the ocean" (65).

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[133] Jefferson Airplane hailed from the Haight-Ashbury district, the heart of the counterculture. The song was written and recorded in the runup to the Woodstock Festival (at which they performed it) as the title track of Jefferson Airplane's fifth album *Volunteers* (1969).
[134] Larry Neal, "The Social Background of the Black Arts Movement," 19.

A Closer Look

In the process of personifying this cultural tradition, *Mumbo Jumbo* is constructed from begin to end around the struggle between the radical indeterminacy that marks Jes Grew's spread and the rational attempt to contain it. Reimagining history as a war between these opposing forces, *Mumbo Jumbo* narrates the spread of jazz in the 1920s as a protean social contagion that induces dancing and revelry, a joyful plague that "enliven[s] the host" (6). But the spontaneous eruption of Jes Grew encounters its nemesis in the project of reason upheld by the Atonist Path. Defenders of "Civilization As We Know It" (4), the Atonist Path registers the Jes Grew phenomenon as an It to be Known. Thus, as Jes Grew spreads from New Orleans to cities across the U.S. and beyond, Atonists coordinate through the Wallflower Order, the central organization of the Atonist Path, to "categorize it analyze it expel it slay it" (17). Yet the task of restoring intelligibility over mystery is made difficult by the contagion's mutability. As an Atonist anxiously observes at the outset, "once we call it 1 thing it forms into something else" (4). So in addition to the scientific apparatus in which Atonist operatives research and monitor the ecstatic contagion, the Wallflower Order's anti-Jes Grew efforts also include a cultural initiative guided by an esoteric theory according to which Jes Grew is "seeking its words," its Text (6).

Giving new meaning to Adorno's sneering reference to those who would treat "the history of jazz as if it were Holy Writ,"[135] this sacred Text, we learn, traces all the way back to the cult of Osiris and has been in the possession of one Hinckle Von Vampton, a surviving member of a once-prominent but long-excommunicated military order of the Atonist Path.

[135] Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 54.

After bringing himself to the attention of the Wallflower Order through a "well-planted headline" in the New York *Sun* (63), an Atonist organ where he has taken a job, Von Vampton leverages his exclusive knowledge of the Text's whereabouts (he has strategically "scattered" it between fourteen "Jes Grew carriers" in Harlem [69]) to strike a deal with the Wallflower Order permitting him to head the modern crusade to prevent Jes Grew from finding its words. To this end, Von Vampton secures resources to execute a plan that entails, first, gathering and destroying the Text, and second, starting a magazine, the *Benign Monster,* in which to prop up a literary figurehead (or "Talking Android") calculated to prevent Jes Grew from spontaneously coming to literary expression in the work of Harlem writers.

Behind *Mumbo Jumbo*'s hints of metafictional reflexivity (the plot of the text revolves around a Plot to find and destroy a Text), the novel's text-centered plot also suggests a number of post-gothic intertexts. Much like the mystery-shrouded grimoire of H. P. Lovecraft's "History of the *Necronomicon*," which is said to be "rigidly suppressed by the authorities of most countries, and by all branches of organised ecclesiasticism," the Text in *Mumbo Jumbo* finds itself in the crosshairs of the institutionalized powers that be.[136] And much like the cryptogram that leads to treasure in Edgar Allan Poe's tale "The Gold Bug," LaBas must decode a cryptic note to find where the Text is hidden (98).[137] More broadly, *Mumbo Jumbo*'s search for a text recalls the origin of modern detective fiction in Poe's

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[136] H. P. Lovecraft, "History of the *Necronomicon," The Fiction: Complete and Unabridged* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2008), 621-622, 622. Reed's novel may be said to echo Lovecraft's gothic taste in hoaxes. It is perhaps not by coincidence that Abdul Hamid, the character who comes into possession of the Sacred Text in *Mumbo Jumbo,* shares a first name with the figure to whom Lovecraft's hoax essay links the Necronomicon, Abdul Alhazred.
[137] Below Harlem's Cotton Club, it turns out; though when they arrive, they discover that the Text has been destroyed.

Dupin trilogy. In the first story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the narrator recounts the circumstances of his first encounter with Poe's detective, C. Auguste Dupin, at an obscure library in Paris where both happened to be "in search of the same very rare and very remarkable volume."[138] By Poe's third and final detective story, "The Purloined Letter," a missing letter supplants violent crime in motivating the plot. In this way, the search for a text advances in the course of Poe's stories from a passing metaphor for detective work to the object of detective work. In addition to revolving around a missing text whose contents are never disclosed, both "The Purloined Letter" and *Mumbo Jumbo* tie this narrative conceit to the rift between the rational and the intuitive, and each, moreover, invokes a sibling rivalry drawn from ancient myth.[139]

In *Mumbo Jumbo,* this rift comes to life in the standoff that ensues between Von Vampton and LaBas—the one a scheming agent of the Atonist Path, the other a visionary exponent and "carrier" of Jes Grew. With his two-phase "plan to stamp out Jes Grew" (78), Von Vampton's plotting is in keeping with the rationalized method of operation on display at the Wallflower Order's "bustling" headquarters, where all action is performed just "as the law laid down" (62). Upon assembling a team to staff the *Benign Monster,* Von Vampton's first order of business is to establish bylaws, or "rules of the house" (72).

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[138] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe,* ed. J. Gerald Kennedy (New York: Penguin, 2006), 238-270, 241.

[139] In Poe's tale, the imaginative limitations of the Prefect's procedural rationality stymie his ability to locate a politically sensitive letter. It falls to Dupin to appreciate the poetic cunning with which Minister D—, the man known to have stolen the letter, has hidden it in plain sight. After Dupin recounts his recovery of the letter, the story closes by revealing the text of the substitute letter in which D— is destined to discover that Dupin has duped him. It is a quotation from Jolyot de Crebillon's *Atree et Thyeste* (1707), a tragedy of revenge modeled after the story of the eponymous brothers from Greek mythology. Beyond evoking the simultaneous intellectual rivalry and kinship between Dupin and D—, the literary reference recalls the violence that figures in Poe's prior detective stories, though in a way that calls attention to the textual nature of its construction.

Beyond the shadowy designs of the Wallflower Order, the same spirit of bureaucratic and legislative formalization—the hallmark of the Atonist Path—extends to the public and political reaction to the contagion, which includes calls for laws prohibiting the rapturous dancing that Jes Grew causes (93). This effort in particular—to legislate the movement of bodies, to envelop activity within symbolic strictures—aptly distills the Atonist drive to subordinate the biosphere to the logosphere, life to the written word. In addition to positive law and its variants—the organized "plan," "the script" (66)—control of the press serves throughout the novel to figure the symbolic domination by which Atonist organs "make an 'orderly' world" (153), from newspapers that mold the national narrative to the magazine in which Von Vampton plans to subvert Jes Grew's spread.

Above all, this drive to organize and control the world through rational-symbolic means is what distinguishes the Atonist Path from Jes Grew. Beginning with the metaphor of contagion itself, the novel is replete with images illustrating the morphological difference between Jes Grew's spontaneous growth and the rational design characteristic of the Atonist Path. Later in the novel, as Von Vampton's plan begins to falter, he wonders whether Jes Grew has a Wallflower Order of its own, an "administrative arm" (139) in which the activity of "carriers" is coordinated. When this idle notion passes, Von Vampton is left to confront the more daunting prospect that Jes Grew's power derives from the absence of central organization. For such a "dispersed" nature, "showing up when you least expected," is incapable of being "herded, rounded-up" (140). At a jazz club one night, Von Vampton's partner confronts this first-hand when he attempts to record the permutations of Jes Grew, ultimately finding the dance moves too "difficult to write down" (103). Unlike the tightly "choreographed" (71) world of the Atonist *Path,* the contagion's "strange course"

(13)—both on the level of individual cases and when viewed from afar as it spreads from city to city—has "no definite route" (25): it *Jes Grew*.

The music after which *Mumbo Jumbo*'s "discontinuous jumping-around Jazz-like narrative" is modeled is of course exemplary of such undirected growth.[140] Unsurprisingly, Atonist agents scheme to replace jazz with orchestral music by getting the state to "subsidize" "symphony orchestras across the country" (154). If an affective connection to "Western" music plays a role here, still more significant is the structural homology between the vertical organization after which the Atonist Path would remake the world and the reign of rational design modeled by orchestral concerts in which musicians perform parts within a predetermined arrangement. By contrast, jazz thrives on improvisation. Rather than subordinating the activity of performers to a prearranged score, the emergent order that erupts in real time in jazz performances opens the way to the horizon of spontaneity that Reed holds up as an all-encompassing ideal.[141] Other figures of Jes Grew's spontaneous growth include the aforementioned "Grapevine Telegraph" (13). Reed borrows this from Booker T. Washington, who uses it in *Up from Slavery* (1901) to describe the networks by which information orally spread on plantations. Significantly, the term first entered into circulation in the wake of the Civil War as a way of contrasting "official" (vertically organized) channels of communication from any and all "informal or unofficial method of relaying important or interesting information," usually "by word of mouth."[142] Besides

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[140] Ishmael Reed, Introduction, *The Reed Reader*, xvi.
[141] As in his image of "Neo-HooDoo" art as a "celebration" involving "dance music and poetry and whatever ideas the participating artists might add" (Reed, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," 33).
[142] *Random House Dictionary of American Slang, Volume 1, A-G* (New York: Random House, 1994), 951.

suggesting the organicism of Jes Grew in general, "grapevine" also bears a surplus resonance in being linked to Osiris, the god of wine to whom Reed traces the origin of Jes Grew. The Egyptian agricultural celebrations to which LaBas traces Jes Grew's contagious dancing were modeled after the life cycle of the grapevine, which is violently cut down every year only to spring forth with new life each spring. LaBas's recognition of this cycle of life informs the sublime calm with which he responds to Jes Grew's eventual destruction. So far from having seen its end, LaBas rests assured that "Jes Grew is life," and thus "has no end and no beginning" and "will only spring back" each time it is destroyed (204).

Valences of Contagion

In *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. reads the natural force with which Jes Grew is identified as a parody of the central role of natural forces in the literary naturalism of Richard Wright.[143] For Gates, there is nothing to interpret here. It is one more parodic revision and reversal: a Signifyin(g) signifying nothing but the indeterminacy of Signification. On closer inspection, however, one might conclude that Reed's depiction of Jes Grew as a natural force operates as more than a sendup of literary naturalism. To begin with, Jes Grew is not just any natural force but a contagion, a plague, which is less

[143] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey,* 222. While Gates does not specify any further, the natural force that haunts the action and diegesis of Wright's novel *Native Son* (1940) is the American racial order. Drawing ironically on the lofty register of the sublime, Wright's narrator describes the pervasive presence of this order in Bigger Thomas's life as "a sort of great natural force, like a stormy sky looming overheard, or like a deep swirling river stretching suddenly at one's feet in the dark. As long as he and his black folks did not go beyond certain limits, there was no need to fear that white force. But whether they feared it or not, each and every day of their lives they lived with it; even when words did not sound its name, they acknowledged its reality (Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2005), 114).

interesting as an indeterminant signifier than as a symbol of indeterminacy: a "physical incarnation" of "unspecified powers," as Antonin Artaud says of the plague in *Oedipus Rex*.[144] And indeed, part of what Reed is doing in *Mumbo Jumbo* is rewriting the Oedipus story. For the moment, we need only recall the obvious: that the plague in *Oedipus Rex* figures exclusively as a force of destruction to be overcome through investigation. By contrast, the plague of Jes Grew—while equally a symbol of indeterminacy—is "electric as life," a creative force "characterized by ebullience and ecstasy" (6), in response to which characters are divided. More immediate than Sophocles, Reed's transvaluation of the plague motif also marks a significant break with the menacing presence of contagion in the Cold War imaginary. Beyond animating the political rhetoric of anti-communism, narratives of contagion pervaded postwar American culture, from Hollywood B-movies like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), a sleeper hit adapted from Jack Finney's science-fiction serial *The Body Snatchers* (1954), to the work of Reed's literary contemporaries like Amiri Baraka and William S. Burroughs.

After founding the Black Arts Theater/School in Harlem in the wake of Malcolm X's assassination in 1965, Baraka consummated his transition to revolutionary Black politics by writing a string of militantly Black Nationalist plays, among them "A Black Mass" (1965), a dramatization of the Nation of Islam's myth of Yacub. Originating in the teachings of Nation of Islam founder Wallace Fard Muhammad, and retold in the widely read *Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), the myth of Yacub tells of the creation of the cave-dwelling white race (or "white devil") at the hands of an evil scientist some 6,000-plus

[144] Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double,* trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 75.

years ago.[145] The story bears an uncanny resemblance to the science fiction conceit of George Schuyler's novel *Black No More* (1931), a satire in which a scientist named Dr. Junius Crookman invents of a race machine that can transform people from black to white. In fact, one can trace the trope to the very dawn of science fiction in Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1823), which finds Dr. Frankenstein at one point horrified at the prospect of his actions leading to "a race of devils" being "propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror."[146] In "A Black Mass," Baraka leans into these science fiction resonances by placing Yacub ("Jacoub" in the play) in a dark and "fantastic chemical laboratory."[147] Upon encountering Jacoub's creation, a colleague in the laboratory cries out: "It is a monster, Jacoub. That's what you have made."[148] Unlike in *Frankenstein*, however, Jacoub's white monstrosity immediately lunges at a nearby woman and bites her, "draining [her] of color" and infecting her with its "whiteness."[149] With this touch of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Baraka replaces the ancient eugenics technique described in the myth of Yacub with a "lab leak" scenario in which hereditary transmission gives way to viral transmission. "This whiteness spreads itself," another colleague observes.[150] And what it spreads is a violent lack of human feeling, which is what leads Jacoub to banish the infected to live in caves as a kind of permanent

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[145] Malcolm X with Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 164-167. See also Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America* (Secretarius Memps Publications, 2006), 103-121.
[146] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or, the Modern Prometheus* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 139. This takes place after the monster that Dr. Frankenstein has given life returns and demands a female partner.
[147] LeRoi Jones [Amiri Baraka], "A Black Mass," *Four Black Revolutionary Plays* (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), 17-40, 21.
[148] Jones [Baraka], "A Black Mass," 30.
[149] Jones [Baraka], "A Black Mass," 33.
[150] Jones [Baraka], "A Black Mass," 34.

containment measure. In this way, Baraka's take on the myth of Yacub not only combines various science-fiction tropes (including the lack of human feeling, which recalls the invasive pod people in Finney's Cold War allegory[151]); it also repurposes Cold War political rhetoric. If, as J. Edgar Hoover proclaimed, "the virus of communism" "spreads like an epidemic and like an epidemic" makes "quarantine … necessary to keep it from infecting the Nation,"[152] Baraka's play dramatizes the necessity of preventing the virus of whiteness from infecting the Black Nation.

Perhaps in part as a tribute to Baraka's contagion-laden adaptation, William S. Burroughs began incorporating elements of the myth of Yacub into his own developing origin story for the atomic age. As he writes in "Astronaut's Return," a short story first published in 1968,

> According to ancient legend, the white race results from a nuclear explosion in what is now the Gobi desert some 30,000 years ago. The civilization and techniques which made the explosion possible were wiped out. The only survivors were slaves marginal to the area who had no knowledge of its science or techniques. They became albinos as a result of radiation and scattered in different directions. Some … moved westward and settled in the caves of Europe. The descendants of the cave-dwelling albinos are the present inhabitants of America and western Europe. In these caves the white

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[151] Incidentally, the iconic scene from *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) in which Becky (played by Dana Wynter) turns into a feeling-devoid pod person takes place in a cave. The scene was filmed in the Bronson Cave at Griffith Park, a common shooting location for Hollywood B-movies.
[152] Quoted in Pricilla Wald, *Contagious: Cultures, Carries and the Outbreak Narrative* (Durham: Duke, 2008), 175.

> settlers contracted a virus passed down along their cursed generation that was to make them what they are today a hideous threat to life on this planet.[153]

While viral imagery permeates Burroughs's fiction, the virus in question here is language itself, Burroughs's famed "word virus." In an earlier iteration of this origin story—before adding the racialized etiology—Burroughs leaps from the possibility of a prehistorical "nuclear disaster" to a revision of Paul's revision of Genesis: "What we call history is the history of the word. In the beginning of *that* history was the word."[154] And the word, Burroughs declares, is a virus, a "cerebral parasite" that has spread from speech and writing to the "array of calculating machines"[155] that increasingly traps human life in what Burroughs—perhaps echoing the dawn of "the age of communication and control" (Norbert Wiener)[156]—calls the "control machine."[157] Unlike Marshall McCluhan's mediatic "extensions *of* man," Burroughs takes the implements of the word virus to be extensions of "a separate organism attached to [the human] nervous system."[158] History, as the history of

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[153] This story was later included as a chapter in *Exterminator!* See William S. Burroughs, "Astronaut's Return," *Exterminator! A Novel* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), 22-27, 23-24. Like virtually everything Burroughs wrote, versions of this origin story would later recur in slightly altered form in his fiction. See, for instance, *Cities of the Red Night* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), 20.
[154] William Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded: The Restored Text* (New York: Grove Press, 2014), 56-57. To which he later adds, "and the word was bullshit" (225).
[155] Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded,* 164, 165.
[156] Nortbert Wiener, *Cybernetics: or, Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2013 [1948]), 39. This is how Wiener describes the world unleashed by advances in automated computing machines. It is customary in Burroughs criticism to mention a certain family connection at some point. The "William S. Burroughs" that shows up in histories of computing as the inventor of the adding machine is the writer's grandfather and namesake (see, e.g., Paul E. Ceruzzi, *Computing: A Concise History* (Camrbidge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 5).
[157] Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded,* 118.
[158] Burroughs, *The Ticket that Exploded,* 55.

the word so conceived, becomes the history of control systems—from "Great libraries and bureaucracies" to "Newspapers, magazines, muttering voices on TV and radio"—in which the "symbol language" of the "virus enemy" grows.[159] In this viral revision of historical materialism, the machines of the word virus join something of Marx's "vampire-like" conception of capital ("dead labour" that "lives only by sucking living labour"[160]) to the "infective power" that evolutionary theorists would soon begin attributing to cultural replicators ("memes").[161] In an essay summing up his "general theory," Burroughs is emphatic that "the Word is literally a virus," a virus in the technical sense that it lacks any "internal function other than to replicate itself." Shifting to the figurative, he then offers a vivid portrait of the biomedical crusade against infectious disease in modern science as the triumph of one virus over its competitors. "[S]o firmly" has the word virus "established itself" in the human organism, he writes, that it can now "sneer at gangster viruses like smallpox and turn them in to the Pasteur Institute."[162]

In *The Ticket that Exploded* and *Nova Express,* the second two novels of what has come to be known as his cut-up trilogy, Burroughs turns this police action on its head by setting forth a "mythology for the space age" that pits the "Nova Police" against the viral

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[159] Burroughs, *The Ticket,* 217, 174.
[160] Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), 342.
[161] Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (London: Oxford University Press, 1989 [1976]), 193. Dawkins quotes his colleague N. K. Humphrey: "[M]emes should be regarded as living structures, not just metaphorically but technically. When you plant a fertile meme in my mind you literally parasitize my brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme's propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell" (*The Selfish Gene* 192). Dawkins uses the language of "convenience" to justify the personification of genes on which his book is predicated. "Just as we have found it convenient to think of genes as active agents, working purposively for their own survival, perhaps it might be convenient to think of memes in the same way" (*The Selfish Gene* 196).
[162] William S. Burroughs, "Ten Years and a Billion Dollars." *The Adding Machine: Selected Essays* (New York: Seaver Books, 1986). 48-52, 48.

power of the word, here figured as the "Nova Mob," a criminal network of alien invaders that seek world control.[163] As elsewhere, Burroughs does "not presume to impose 'story' or 'plot' 'continuity.'"[164] What we encounter are textual collages—novels in the form of a "series of oblique references," as *The Ticket that Exploded* gives notice.[165] Nonetheless, we gather from fragments on "The Nova Conspiracy" that semantic deformation through syntactical variation itself achieves the "purpose" of Inspector Lee's "writing" (Burroughs's authorial mask): namely, "to expose and arrest Nova Criminals," and thereby "rub out the word."[166] By literally cutting up and folding in words from various sources, the novels perform the word virus-arresting action identified with their protagonist: "Control machine is disconnected by the nova police … Word fell out of here … The law is dust."[167] Finally, for Burroughs, the only way to break the spell of the word virus is by using language against itself to interrogate its modalities, the better to scramble and rewrite the layers of script by which the modern control machine shapes human life.[168]

While at work on *Mumbo Jumbo,* Reed edited and published *Necromancers from Now* (1970), an anthology that opens with an inscription anticipating his turn to detective fiction: *"We are Detectives of the metaphysical, about to make an arrest*."[169] If Reed's introduction to the anthology is any indication, Burroughs was on his mind around this time. In addition to citing Burroughs's revision of the myth of Yacub, Reed goes on to

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[163] William S. Burroughs, *Conversations with William S. Burroughs*, 11.
[164] Burroughs, *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text* (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 184.
[165] Burroughs, *The Ticket that Exploded,* 15.
[166] Burroughs, *Nova Express,* 5, 3.
[167] Burroughs, *The Ticket that Exploded,,* 175.
[168] Burroughs, *The Ticket that Exploded,* 56.
[169] Ishmael Reed (ed.), *19 Necromancers from Now: An Anthology of Original American Writing for the 1970s* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1970), x.

mention the McCluhanite media prophecy that Burroughs began to espouse in the mid-1960s about the impending print apocalypse (which is what led to his "electronic revolution"). Far from "dead," however, Reed insists that the work of an emerging generation of multicultural writers indicates that the printed word is "very much alive and kicking."[170] Besides doing the work of editorial stage-setting for the anthology at hand, this assurance of the future of the printed word also foreshadows the plot of *Mumbo Jumbo,* which splits the Burroughsian "word virus" to tell the story of a viral power—Jes Grew—that is "seeking its words" (6). At the same time, *Mumbo Jumbo* echoes something of Burroughs's cut-up trilogy's frenetic method and purpose in the use to which it puts bricolage to construct a narrative exposing the machinations of control. Significantly, though, Reed diverges from Burroughs by imagining contagion as a liberatory force while positioning the Atonist Path—Reed's take on the control machine—as an emphatically anti-viral force whose agents seek to stop the spread of the Jes Grew contagion. Where Baraka positions Black Nationalism in opposition to the virus of whiteness, and Burroughs foments opposition to the word virus, Reed thus offers an affirmative image of a contagion linked to the spread of Black cultural forms that *just grow*. The key difference between Burroughs and Reed is that in *Mumbo Jumbo* contagion (Jes Grew) models an alternative to rational control (the Atonist Path).

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[170] Ishmael Reed, Introduction to *19 Necromancers from Now: An Anthology of Original American Writing for the 1970s*, ed. Ishmael Reed (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1970), xii, xxiii-xxiv. Reed's quotes Burroughs as saying, "Words are 'oxcarts' and may disappear sooner than we think." Reed's quotation of Burroughs is itself a cut-up. Burroughs' original statement, which comes from his 1966 *Paris Review* interview, reads: "[W]ords are an around-the-world, ox-cart way of doing things, awkward instruments, and they will be laid aside eventually, probably sooner than we think" (William Burroughs, "Interview with William Burroughs" (1966), in William S. Burroughs & Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 1-8, 3).

While this affirmative vision of contagion was short-lived in his work, Reed's transvaluation of contagion in *Mumbo Jumbo* plays on a familiar trope within the annals of aesthetic revolt.[171] In *The Birth of Tragedy,* Nietzsche warns against reducing the eruption of "Dionysian power" at certain moments in history, moments which give birth to the "singing and dancing" of "ever-growing throngs," to mere mass manias or "popular diseases." Those who from "dullness of spirit" would thus dismiss the Dionysian, says Nietzsche, "have not the slightest inkling of how spectral and deathly pale their 'health' seems when the glowing life of Dionysian enthusiasts storms past them."[172] Likewise, *Mumbo Jumbo* venerates the life-giving nature of Jes Grew in comparison to the Atonist idea of health (24). But rather than guarding against "popular disease," Reed fully embraces the epidemiological register. In this way, Reed revives the avant-garde fascination with unleashing the "power of contagion"[173] over against the rational attempt to "channel" life "in predefined directions" in modern society.[174] It was in this spirit that Tristan Tzara celebrated Dada in 1922—the same year in which James Weldon Johnson's anthology appeared—as "a virgin microbe that insinuates itself with the insistence of air into all the spaces that reason hasn't been able to fill with words and conventions."[175] Not long after,

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[171] In *The Last Days of Louisiana Red* (1974), Reed's follow-up to *Mumbo Jumbo,* Jes Grew gives way to Louisiana Red, a division-sewing plague of aggression, vice, and addiction.
[172] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings,* trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1999), 17-18.
[173] Antonin Artraud, for instance, is said to have talked incessantly about the about how the modern world has lost the "power of contagion" present in "Ancient religion" (Anais Nin, *The Diary of Anais Nin, Vol. 1: 1931-1934*, ed. Gunther Stuhlmann (New York: Swallow Press, 1966), 187). Similarly, Georges Bataille wrote about "the sacred world" as "a world of communication or contagion" (Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, trans. Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 1994), 114).
[174] André Breton, "Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto," *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1972), 283.
[175] Tristan Tzara, "Lecture on Dada," in *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries*, trans. Barbara Wright (London: John Calder, 1977), 112. On the Surrealists, see Tyrus Miller, "Poetic Contagion:

the rapid spread of jazz inspired a wave of epidemiological metaphors—and this is doubtless the primary historical intertext on which Reed's contagion metaphor plays—of the sort memorialized by J. A. Rogers's reference to "the epidemic contagiousness of jazz" in his contribution to *The New Negro* (1925), the first anthology of the Harlem Renaissance.[176] "The true spirit of jazz," Rogers comments, in a phrase that could also have been said of Dada, "is a joyous revolt from convention, custom, authority," in short, "from everything that would confine the soul" in "modern machine-ridden and convention-bound society."[177]

To Grow or Not to Grow Like Topsy

One way of reading the natural resonances of the Jes Grew contagion is as a refashioning of outmoded, biologistic ideas of race. On this reading, one might argue that a tension remains unresolved in Reed's early work between, on the one hand, the rupture of self-creation it calls forth in the spirit of aesthetic revolt, and on the other, the more or less naturalized racial identity to which Jes Grew simultaneously seems to be linked as a continuous cultural tradition. The dancing that Jes Grew inspires, as PaPa LaBas and his

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Surrealism and William's A Novelette," William Carlos Williams Review 22 (Spring 1997): 17-27. Visions of poetic contagion are at least as old the dialogues of Plato, where Socrates warns of the contagion of mimesis, of that which is imitated on the stage spreading to life (*Republic* 395c-d). St. Augustine would later echo this in diagnosing the theater's role in the "spiritual disease" plaguing the Roman world amid its long decline. Having constructed theaters to appease the gods in a bid to prevent the spread of physical plagues, argues Augustine, the Romans in turn unleashed "a more deadly contagion," one which affected not "bodies" but "souls" (Saint Augustine, *The City of God: Books I-VII,* trans. Demetrius B. Zema and Gerald G. Walsh (Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America P, 1950), 70). Reed of course flips the script on Augustine with his "psychic" contagion (5): "unlike physical plagues," Jes Grew is "characterized by ebullience and ecstasy" (6).

[176] J. A. Rogers, "Jazz at Home," *The New Negro,* ed. Alain Locke (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 216-224, 216. Quoted by Reed in *Mumbo Jumbo,* 64.

[177] Rogers, "Jazz at Home," 217.

magician colleague Black Herman claim in an exchange with Abdul, is not only "part of our heritage" but nestled "deep in the race soul" (34). Elsewhere, though, a decidedly less naturalized, more aestheticist vision of the "heritage" to which Reed lays claim comes into view, as in the Julia Jackson quotation that he cites in writings that frame the project of "Neo-HooDoo." There, Reed tells us that when Jackson, a New Orleans Voodoo queen, was "asked the origin of the amulets and talismans in her studio," she responded, "I make all my own stuff."[178] One notes the shift of registers. To the question of historical or traditional origins, she answers with the imperative to create. That this gap or ambivalence is left open in Reed's work is suggested by the very different alternatives in view of which LaBas concludes his lecture on Jes Grew at the end of *Mumbo Jumbo*, wanting the students either "to have the heads their people had left for them or create new ones of their own" (217).

In his genealogy of literary multiculturalism, Christopher Douglas brackets these ambiguities to read *Mumbo Jumbo* as an allegory of cultural identity in which Jes Grew—a "medium of cultural continuity" characterized by "adaptation and creativity"—faces off against the repressive "white civilization" of the Atonist Path.[179] The coordinates of Douglas's reading broadly echo those of Walter Benn Michaels' arguments about the persistence of race within twentieth century cultural discourse (in his book *Our America*) and the eclipse of "ideology" by "identity" in the late twentieth century (*The Shape of the Signifier*).[180] For Douglas, what is significant about the struggle between Jes Grew and the

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[178] Reed, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," 27. See also Reed, *19 Necromancers from Now,* xvi.
[179] Christopher Douglas, *A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2009), 267.
[180] See Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995) and *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004).

Atonist Path is the way that it is "fundamentally enabled" by the cultural retention thesis that took shape in the anthropological writings of Zora Neale Hurston and Melville J. Herskovits in the 1930s.[181] Douglas stops short of signing off on Michaels' categorical claim about the cultural repackaging of race. For him, the work of Hurston in particular illustrates the careful way in which anthropologists could study African cultural survivals in America without introducing group generalizations in which race reappears in culturalist garb. Nonetheless, Douglas notes the frequency with which race slips in through the backdoor of cultural "continuity." As he puts it, "the notion of race is not so much built into it [the idea of continuity] as it is an ever-present danger."[182] And on Douglas's reading, this "danger" is at full bloom in *Mumbo Jumbo*, where the conflict between Jes Grew and the Atonist Path both relies on anthropological studies of cultural retentions from the 1930s and looks forward to the "end of history" theorists of the post-Cold War era for whom all social conflict becomes "organized around identities rather than ideologies." In *Mumbo Jumbo,* Douglas claims, Reed anticipates Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" argument two decades later in presenting an "identity-based struggle" as "the key structure of world history."[183]

I am not entirely convinced by this. For one thing, we might note the nontrivial way in which Jes Grew is legible precisely as a foil to "identity." Identity, after all, is a rational concern. Or rather, reason is precisely the power to identify. In *Mumbo Jumbo,* the drive to identify—reason—is conspicuously identified with the Atonist Path, which coordinates

[181] Douglas, *A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism,* 269.
[182] Douglas, *A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism,* 265.
[183] Douglas, *A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism,* 271, 273.

throughout the novel to "categorize" Jes Grew, to make its protean manifestations intelligible and thereby amenable to rational control. To interpret the novel as a struggle of one discrete identity against another is to overlook that what is at stake in the conflict between the Atonist Path and Jes Grew is fundamentally the rift between the will to reason (the power to identify) and the spontaneous force of an "indefinable" and "unknown" "Something or Other" (a power that eludes reason/identification). Building on the account so far developed in this chapter, I want to propose an alternative to Douglas's "identity-based struggle" reading of *Mumbo Jumbo,* but one that is nonetheless invested in interrogating how Reed's work, as part of the aesthetic currents described above, interacts with broader intellectual and political currents that came to a head in the twentieth century. Rather than reading the novel's core conflict through the prism of identity, I want to suggest that the agon between Jes Grew and the Atonist Path dramatizes the two competing conceptions of social order that have contended for intellectual and political preeminence in modernity. In fact, as I will presently attempt to show, the phrase "Jes Grew" turns out to offer a choice entry point for a brief genealogy of the rift between spontaneous, as against rational, conceptions of order.

Although no longer heard much colloquially, Topsy-like growth was among the figures to have joined the stock of English idioms through *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). As readers of that original "Great American Novel" multiplied, variations on the phrase "grow'd like Topsy" (including James Weldon Johnson's "jes' grew") came to alternatively describe something of unknown origin, something that has formed without intention or

design, or at its most general, any kind of rapid or apparently uncontrolled growth.[184] In effect, permutations of the idiom—their literary origin often forgotten, their semantic valence exceeding anything Stowe intended—mirrored the evolutionary process with which Topsy's spontaneous growth came to resonate. Like Topsy, references to and meanings of Topsy just grew. (Nor, incidentally, have they altogether stopped growing. In Richard Seaver's memoir *The Tender Hour of Twilight* (2012), for instance, the former Grove Press editor in chief, reflecting on "the year of revolt and revolution," recalls how the rebel imprint "had grown exponentially" in the run-up to 1968—"not rationally" but "like Topsy"[185]: an especially apt usage given the "'uncontrollable' spontaneity" with which the counterculture itself spread.[186])

In Stowe's novel, as we touched on above, Topsy naïvely articulates the ethical perversion of chattel slavery. Lacking any form of upward symbolic identification, Topsy looks downward to the soil to interpret her origin. Denied the Christian knowledge of herself as the child of a divine creator—denied any filial relationship whatsoever—Topsy's naïvely organic account of herself ("I 'spect I grow'd") performs the sentimental and religious equivalent of a reductio ad absurdum. That a child should be left to fathom that she was not born or created but simply "grow'd," as if spontaneously, is meant to be read as

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[184] The idea of "The Great American Novel" comes from John William DeForest's article in *The Nation* (9 January 1868) by the same name. He defined it in terms of providing a "picture of the ordinary emotions and manners of American existence" and cited *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as the novel that had come "the nearest approach to the desired phenomenon."

[185] Richard Seaver, *The Tender Hour of Twilight: Paris in the '50s, New York in the '60s* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 407.

[186] This is how the student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit later characterized the events of May 1968 in Paris. Herve Bourges, *The Student Revolt: The Activists Speak,* trans. B. R. Brewster (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), 103. Quoted in George E. Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives," *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 91-122, 114.

an absurdity that slavery itself produces: a mark, as Topsy's name suggests, of the topsy-turvy institution in which she has been raised. Quite apart from the intended force of Stowe's Christian pathos, however, growing interest in the explanatory power of precisely such spontaneous growth—a topic considerably amplified by the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) just seven years after *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—came to inflect Topsy's entrance into idiomatic use, to the point that scholarly references to "the 'Topsy' theory" within different disciplines became synonymous with "evolutionary theory."[187] In the late nineteenth century, Oliver Heaviside exemplified this trend. "As for the origin of life," he wrote, "the only reasonable view seems to me to be Topsy's theory. She was a true philosopher, and 'she spekt she growed.'"[188]

Beyond uses in this evolutionary register, likening any form of rapid growth to Topsy became a frequent refrain in twentieth-century political rhetoric. In the wake of the 1930s, the ever-expanding laws, agencies, and budgets of the modern administrative state inspired many to comment on how "federal regulation, like Topsy, just 'grow'd'"[189] References to Topsy became so commonplace in the U.S. Congress over the course of the twentieth century that Illinois Senator Carol Moseley-Braun once called attention to the frequency with which then Senate majority leader Trent Lott, perhaps without realizing it, "allude[d] to a fictional slave girl."[190] Notably, though, invoking Topsy in this context not only differed from but in an important sense conflicted with the evolutionary valence that

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[187] Samuel A. Johnson, *Essentials of Political Science* (New York: Barron's, 1971), 13.
[188] Oliver Heaviside, *Electromagnetic Theory* (New York: Cosimo, 2008 [1893]), 20.
[189] Craufurd D. Goodwin, "The Lessons of History," *The Wilson Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 91-97, 92.
[190] William Safire, "On Language: Stop Me Before I Apologize Again," *The New York Times* (Oct. 4, 1998).

Topsy elsewhere took on. As products of purposive-rational design rather than blind evolution, the growth of legislation and bureaucracy in the modern administrative state signified precisely the obverse of an evolutionary process by installing rational political "purpose into the jungles of disordered growth" (i.e., the free-market capitalism of the nineteenth century).[191] In this sense, the administrative state did not grow like Topsy so much as it grew beyond her, designing institutional organs with which to guide and regulate a modern, nationally integrated economy made up of firms that themselves tended toward vertical integration and bureaucratic organization.

When used in this way, references to Topsy revealed the competing political visions that came to a head in the twentieth century, as when Julian Huxley described the prospects of socialist planning in terms of the "birth of a new kind of society"—one that "has not, like Topsy … 'jest growed.'"[192] In much the same spirit, Albert Guérard celebrated the capacity of consciously constructed modern constitutions, paired with continuous legislation, to "supersede blind tradition," making "The Topsy ("jest grow'd") theory" of social and political order "as obsolete as laissez faire."[193] (Revealingly, one of the examples that Guérard provides of the rise of conscious direction in modern society is "the stamping out of contagious diseases."[194]) One might broadly trace the modern intellectual tradition of those who embraced the project of rational social organization to the birth of modern

[191] Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980 [1914]), 148.
[192] Julian Huxley, *A Scientist Among the Soviets* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1932), 50-1.
[193] Albert Guérard, quoted in B. J. Koekkoek, "The Advent of the Language Laboratory," *The Modern Language Journal* 43, no. 1 (Jan. 1959): 4-5, 5.
[194] Albert Leon Guerard, *A Short History of the International Language Movement* (New York: Boni, 1921), 10.

philosophy itself in Descartes.[195] As for those who favored the "Topsy theory" of society, they, too, drew on an intellectual and political tradition long preceding Topsy and Darwin. Having cropped up in both the Scottish Enlightenment and German Romanticism, intimations into spontaneous order recur in different guises and in different fields across modern intellectual culture. But rather than settling on an intellectual origin,[196] we might observe instead that this is precisely the sort of question that visions of spontaneous growth seek to dispel in the study of society. As the Scottish Enlightenment thinker Adam Ferguson argues in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767):

> Like the winds, that come we know not whence, and blow whithersoever they list, the forms of society are derived from an obscure and distant origin; they arise, long before the date of philosophy, from the instincts, not from the speculations, of men. The croud of mankind, are directed in their establishments and measures, by the circumstances in which they are placed; and seldom are turned from their way, to follow the plan of any single

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[195] Rene Descartes, *A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, trans. Ian Maclean (New York: Oxford UP, 2006). See, in particular, the societal analogies to which Descartes compares his philosophical method of abandoning the hodgepodge of inherited wisdom in order to reconstruct his system on the basis of reason alone. Like buildings constructed over time by several architects using varied materials, or nations whose customs and laws "only gradually" emerge, Descartes observes that cities which grow of their own accord, undirected by any rational planning, "look more like the product of chance than of the will of men applying their reason" (12-13). Descartes is careful to stipulate that he does not intend to promote the "reform [of] a state by changing everything from the foundations up," "overthrowing it in order to rebuild it," and that his "project has never extended beyond wishing to reform my own thoughts and build on a foundation which is mine alone" (13-15). Nonetheless, his own analogies make it difficult to miss the parallels between the Cartesian gambit and the subsequent development of political projects, from the French Revolution to socialism, driven by the desire to overthrow inherited tradition in the name of reason.

[196] Incidentally, the idea of spontaneous growth traces at least as far back as the ancient writings of Chuang-tzu (see Murray N. Rothbard, "Concepts of the Role of Intellectuals in Social Change toward Laissez Faire," *The Journal of Libertarian Studies* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 43-67, 46).

projector.

Here, we are a long way from the role of will in social contract theories, a long way from such "single projectors" as the Hobbesian sovereign or the Rousseauvian legislator. For "even in what are termed enlightened ages," Ferguson concludes, "nations stumble upon establishments, which are indeed the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design."[197]

In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith famously isolates the role of such action-sans-design in the sphere of economic activity when describing the process in which individuals, guided by nothing other than self-interest, are "led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of [their] intention."[198] If voluntary exchange in the market thereby contributes to society spontaneously, in a manner exceeding even the intentions of the individuals involved, then clearly, argues the classical liberal, the "system of natural liberty" which "establishes itself of its own accord" is superior to any purposively designed system.[199] Hence the limit that Smith seeks to place on the sovereign, on the grounds that no political authority, however constituted ("no single person," "no council or senate whatever"), should presume to design or direct economic activity through economic legislation or discretionary power, on pain of producing unintended consequences less automatically providential than those of the invisible hand.[200] Where the absolutism of the Hobbesian sovereign promises escape from the war of all against all in the state of nature,

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[197] Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society,* ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2001), 119.
[198] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Vol. 2 (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Classics, 1976), 456.
[199] Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Vol. 2, 687.
[200] Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Vol. 2, 456.

liberalism thus sets out to separate vertically installed political order from the quasi-natural order produced spontaneously through competition in the market, the site of a kind of economically sublimated war of all against all.

In thus glimpsing the spontaneous generation of order not from design but from competition, Smith's invisible hand anticipates the blind process of natural selection in Darwinian evolution.[201] And indeed, by the time that *The Origin of Species* was published nearly a century after *The Wealth of Nations,* Smith's "system of natural liberty" had come to govern English industrial capitalism (via "Manchester Liberalism"). The symmetry between Darwin's theory and the competitive society in which it emerged was not lost on contemporaries. While Nietzsche suggested that "English Darwinism" breathes of the "distress and overcrowding" of life in England,[202] Marx sardonically commented that it is "remarkable how Darwin rediscovers, among the beasts and plants, the society of England." Marx went on to note that Darwin's theory seemed to invert a moment within Hegelian dialectic: where Hegel analyzes "civil society" "as a 'spiritual animal kingdom'" in the *Phenomenology,* "in Darwin, the animal kingdom figures as civil society."[203] Had Marx investigated this parallel further, he might have recognized that the two in fact shared a common intellectual ancestor. Echoing spontaneous theories of civil society, the dynamic that occupies Hegel's account of the "spiritual animal kingdom" is the process in which individuals, acting out of competitive self-interest, nonetheless advance universal social

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[201] See Frank H. Knight, "Social Science and the Political Trend" (1934), in *Freedom and Reform* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Press, 1982), 24-43, 38.
[202] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 292.
[203] Karl Marx, Letter to Engels (18 June 1862), *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, *Vol. 41: Letters 1860-1864*, trans. Peter and Betty Ross (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985), 380-381, 381.

and intellectual causes. As for Darwin, there is something to the suggestion that his "animal kingdom" echoes "civil society." What the historical materialist overlooks is the intellectual-historical locus of the connection: namely, that evolutionary thinking is prefigured in the unintended, indeed spontaneous, image of order which first entered Enlightenment thought with Bernard Mandeville's analogizing of society and nature in *The Fable of The Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714).[204]

It was in the writings of Herbert Spencer that social and natural theories of spontaneous growth merged. Spencer published his first book, *Social Statics* (1851), while an editor at *The Economist*. Fittingly for an editor of a publication founded to promote the political agenda of the Anti-Corn Law League, *Social Statics* elevated laissez faire into an all-encompassing cosmology—complete with a quasi-biological foundation—of the spontaneous evolution of society toward a utopia of voluntary cooperation in which contractual relations in the market altogether supplant politically organized social structures. Expanding on this vision in subsequent years, Spencer—who is of course primarily remembered for his association with "social Darwinism" and for coining the phrase "the survival of the fittest"—later distilled the practical fulcrum of his project by sharply distinguishing between "two orders of agencies" in social life: the "spontaneously-formed" and the "law-made."[205] As "a living, growing organism," Spencer insisted, society cannot and should not be rationally "law-made," or as he put it, "placed within apparatuses

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[204] While Mandeville's controversial book did not show "*how* an order formed itself without design," F. A. Hayek would later comment, "he made it abundantly clear that it did," and in this way anticipated "the twin ideas of evolution and of the spontaneous formation of an order" (F. A. Hayek, "Dr. Bernard Mandeville," *The Essential Hayek,* ed. Chiaki Nishiyama and Kurt R. Leube (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1984), 176-194, 177).
[205] Herbert Spencer, *The Man Versus the State* (Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, 1960), 140-141, 144.

of dead, rigid, mechanical formulas."[206] Instead, following the laissez-faire injunction that the "wisest plan is to let things take their own course,"[207] social order must be allowed to evolve of its own accord, a process that can only take place through the "spontaneously-formed" activity and results of the market. As he saw it, there was a fundamental "error" in treating social order as though it were "a manufacture; whereas it is a growth."[208] In this connection, Spencer might have cited *Capital,* where Marx distinguishes human history from "natural history" (evolution) on the grounds that "we have *made* the former" and looks forward to the eclipse of the "spontaneous" development of free-market capitalism by an economy under "conscious and planned control."[209] In this, *Capital* formed part of the broader intellectual tide to which Spencer replied as the classical liberal creed began to be challenged in the second half of the nineteenth century by political movements (viz., social liberalism and socialism) which responded to the effects of industrial capitalism by abandoning the gospel of spontaneous evolutionary progress in favor of using political means to achieve social ends. Faced with the growing political will for the latter, Spencer closed his book *The Man versus the State* (1884) by declaring the crossroads at which the classical liberal tradition stood: "[T]he function of liberalism in the past was that of putting a limit to the powers of kings. The function of true liberalism in the future will be that of putting a limit to the powers of parliaments."[210]

While Spencer was revered in his time as a kind of "Victorian Aristotle," particularly

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[206] Spencer, *The Man Versus the State*, 141.
[207] Spencer, *The Man versus the State,* 304.
[208] Spencer, *The Man Versus the State*, 116.
[209] Karl Marx, *Capital,* Vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), 493, 173. Emphasis added.
[210] Spencer, *The Man Versus the State*, 209.

in the U.S., by the 1930s the Spencerian theory of everything—having increasingly come under fire in the era of progressive reform in its effort to justify opposition to "all efforts at the conscious and directed change of society"[211]—suffered a definitive blow with the collapse of the free-market system in the Great Depression. In the run-up to the first round of New Deal legislation in the U.S., books like Stuart Chase's *A New Deal* and George Soule's *A Planned Society* (both published in 1932) eulogized the age of laissez-faire. After "flourish[ing]" in the nineteenth century, wrote Chase, laissez-faire "is now a despairing invalid on our hands."[212] Likewise, Soule observed, "The battle for an individualistic, laissez-faire economy, self-regulated by competition, is definitely lost." "Today," Soule proclaimed, "we need synthesis, coordination, rational control."[213] In his book on Western intellectual history the following year, Alfred North Whitehead echoed this trend, noting that "no one now holds that, apart from some further directive agency, mere individualistic competition, of itself and by its own self-righting character, will produce a satisfactory society."[214] Not long after, the American sociologist Talcott Parsons pointedly set forth his book *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) by asking: "Who now reads Spencer?" Which was shorthand for: who still believes that "we have been blest with an automatic, self-regulating mechanism which operated so that the pursuit by each individual of his own self-interest and private ends would result in the greatest possible satisfaction of the wants

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[211] Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955 [1944]), 32, 7. On Spencer's prestige in the U.S., see chapter 2 of Hofstadter's book, "The Vogue of Spencer," 31-50.
[212] Stuart Chase, *A New Deal* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1932), 25. Chase coined the phrase that became synonymous with FDR's legislative agenda after featuring in his presidential campaign messaging.
[213] George Soule, *A Planned Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), 172, 91.
[214] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas* (New York: Mentor, 1955 [1933]), 42.

of all"?[215]

That "Spencer is largely forgotten now and certainly little read" remains a commonplace.[216] To be sure, though, Spencer was read, and his writings are readily legible as an intellectual bridge. In addition to representing the last stand of classical liberalism against the "spread of legislative control,"[217] Spencer's work also looks forward in certain respects to the emergence of the neoliberal intellectual project in the 1930s, which responded to the rise of the interventionalist social welfare state not as a possibility but as an established social fact.[218] Just as Parsons was asking who now read Spencer, Walter Lippmann was at work on *The Good Society* (1938), the book that inspired the 1939 Walter Lippmann colloquium in Paris that is now recognized as the birthplace of neoliberalism. As if in answer to Parsons' question, Lippmann—acknowledging the unfavorable position in which he found himself, "swimming hopelessly against the tide"—set out nonetheless to revive the liberal intellectual and political project, in part by attempting to explain why liberalism had "lost its influence" by the time of "Herbert Spencer's old age" to movements that sought "to organize a directed social order."[219] Having once shared in the progressive vision of replacing "unconscious striving" with "conscious intention" by installing rational "plan where there has been clash, and purpose into the jungles of disordered growth,"[220] Lippmann now lamented the development of a political consensus in which intellectuals could "imagine no alternative" to the eclipse of the market by public agencies set up to

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[215] Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: The Free Press, 1937), 3, 4.
[216] Paul Johnson, *Darwin: Portrait of a Genius* (New York: Viking, 2012), 75.
[217] Spencer, *The Man versus the State,* 35.
[218] Spencer, *The Man Versus the State*, 36.
[219] Walter Lippmann, *The Good Society* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1937), 4, xiii, xi.
[220] Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980 [1914]), 148.

"direct the course of civilization and fix the shape of things to come."[221] Lippmann's phrase here, "imagine no alternative," plays on a Spencerian refrain. In *Social Statics,* Spencer repeatedly arrives at the conclusion that there is "no alternative" to the natural liberty of the market.[222] As readers of Spencer would have picked up on, Lippmann uses the phrase ironically to mark the eclipse of Spencer's vision by an intellectual consensus that could "imagine no alternative" to the political agenda of rationally organizing society. Which is to say, precisely the inverse of the neoliberal policy agenda to which Margaret Thatcher—restoring Spencer's original use of the phrase—would famously declare "no alternative" decades later.[223]

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[221] Lippmann, *The Good Society*, 5, 3-4.

[222] For examples of Spencer's compulsion to repeat this phrase, see *Social Statics* (London: George Woodfall and Son, 1851), 23, 32, 40, 42, 51, 88, 89, 156, 175, 307, 334, 393. Spencer uses the phrase to signal the logical necessity with which he arrives at his conclusions as a result of consistently applying his first principle (namely, natural liberty, or the equal freedom of all, meaning the freedom "to do just what [one] would spontaneously do," provided it does not conflict with the equal freedom of others [434]). At some points, the repetition of this phrase produces an almost comedic effect: "There is clearly no alternative but to declare man's freedom to exercise his faculties," he writes, immediately adding, "There is clearly no alternative but to declare the several limitations of that freedom needful for the achievement of greatest happiness. And there is clearly no alternative but to develop the first and chief of these limitations separately" (88). Some of Spencer's "no alternatives" have aged well, as when he concludes that there is "no alternative" but to accept "that the rights of women are equal with those of men" (156). All the same, the consistent application of Spencer's principle dictates that the state has no alternative but to permit citizens such natural liberties as working for subsistence wages within factories free of any form of recourse or oversight (e.g., protective legislation or union representation) while their children starve.

[223] There is a certain irony to the fact that the neoliberal project in some sense sets forth, in Lippmann's hands, by lamenting a world in which intellectuals could "imagine no alternative" to the eclipse of markets. In recent decades, critics of neoliberalism have sometimes paired Margaret Thatcher's "There is no alternative" with an expression that began to resonate in the wake of the "end of history" to the effect that it had become "easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism." The late Mark Fisher uses the latter for the title of the first chapter of his book *Capitalist Realism.* Since Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek have each credited the other for the provocation, Fisher uses the passive voice in attributing the phrase to both (*Capitalist Realism,* London: Zero Books, 2009, 2). Andrew Cole (see *The Birth of Theory* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2014), 22, 175-176 n 77) traces the phrase back to Zizek's introduction to *Mapping Ideology* (1994) and Jameson's 2003 article "Future City," where we find, respectively, "as Fredric Jameson perspicaciously remarked … it seems easier to imagine the 'end of the world' than a far more

Before coming to policy expression in the late 1970s, however, the neoliberal intellectual project long percolated in the background of the emerging "organized society," fostered in no small part by the formation of the Mont Pelerin Society, the organization founded by F. A. Hayek in 1947 to forge an international network of pro-market intellectuals committed to reshaping the climate of ideas in which economic policy would be made in the future.[224] A specific interpretation of history guided the neoliberal conviction that the effort of thinkers and intellectuals could be "very powerful," as Hayek put it as early as 1933, even if "it takes a long time to make its influence felt."[225] In a kind of reversal Hegel's "owl of Minerva,"[226] neoliberal thinkers observed that "a change in theory

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modest change in the mode of production" (*Mapping Ideology,* New York: Verso, 1994, 1) and "Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism" ("Future City," *New Left Review* 21 (2003): 65-79, 76). The earliest instance I have come across is in Jameson's book *The Seeds of Time* (based on his 1991 Welleck Lectures): "It seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism" (*The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), xii). In any case, one is tempted to read the ambiguous origins of the phrase that "Someone once said" as indicative of the rise of a certain crowd-sourced tendency, now so familiar in the age of internet memes, toward spontaneously produced and anonymously circulated ideas (or in other words, it was probably said by a graduate student). Incidentally, George Soros did not share in the assessment of Marxist scholars at the time, writing in 1995: "The collapse of the global marketplace would be a traumatic event with unimaginable consequences. Yet I find it easier to imagine than the continuation of the present regime" (George Soros, *Soros on Soros,* New York: John Wiley, 1995, 197). A couple of years later, the Asian financial crisis dramatized the fragility of the emerging global economy in the neoliberal age—an event in which Soros' hedge fund, Quantum Fund, played an outsized role by shorting the Thai baht in January of 1997.

[224] See Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (eds), *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009).

[225] Friedrich Hayek, "The Trend of Economic Thinking," *Economica* 40 (1933), 121. From Hayek's inaugural address at the London School of Economics in 1933.

[226] G. W. F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right,* trans. T. M. Knox (New York: Oxford, 2008), 16. Hegel's image condenses his view that knowledge is retrospective, hence philosophical theory only comes after the action of history. Or in other words, for Hegel a change in practice is only later reflected in theory. By contrast, the neoliberals focused on how developments in theory in the present shape practice policy in the future (and, by the same token, how policy in the present reflects theory of the past). Marx, incidentally, surely had Hegel in mind when he proclaimed that the point was not to follow philosophers in interpreting the world but to change it (then again: besides Hegel, what political philosopher has *not* sought to change the world?). Ironically, one is tempted to say that Marx himself proved to be a good Hegelian in his refusal, in his mature writings

is reflected in practice only after a lapse of time."[227] In other words, they observed the "lag" between the formation and spread of ideas and their eventual incorporation into policy and legislation.[228] The exemplary instance here was the time it took for the ideas of Smith to advance from theory to policy. By the same token, no sooner did liberalism govern England (a triumph sealed by the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846) than was a new intellectual and political tide taking shape—what many neoliberals simply called "collectivism"—that would reveal its own delayed impact in the twentieth century. In his 1951 essay "Neo-Liberalism and Its Prospects," Milton Friedman rehearsed this "lag" interpretation of history as a struggle between one after another intellectual tide, commenting: "Ideas have little chance of making much headway against a strong tide; their opportunity comes when the tide has ceased running strong but has not yet turned." If Lippmann had confronted the "strong tide" of "collectivism" in the 1930s,[229] however, Friedman looks forward here to a moment that would "afford a rare opportunity to those of us who believe in liberalism to affect the new direction the tide takes."[230] Two decades later this theme recurs in *Free to Choose* (1980), the book co-authored by Milton and Rose Friedman for a PBS television series by the same name, the last chapter of which confidently proclaims: "The Tide Is

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on political economy, to speculate upon the future form that a socialist society would take, focusing instead on analyzing the existing relations of capitalist society. On this point, Lippmann—whose reading of Marx otherwise devolves into journalistic stereotypes (to use a term that Lippmann himself coined)—is not mistaken when he observes that "there is nothing in [Marx's writings], as Lenin and Stalin soon discovered, which defines *how* the economy shall be organized and administered" (*The Good Society* 178. Emphasis added).

[227] Lippmann, *The Good Society,* 45.

[228] Often citing A. V. Dicey's lectures on *Law and Public Opinion* in nineteenth-century England. See, e.g., Lippman, *The Good Society*, 46; Milton Friedman, "Neo-Liberalism and Its Prospects," *The Indispensable Milton Friedman: Essays on Politics and Economics*, ed. Lanny Ebenstein (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2012), 3-9, 3;

[229] Lippmann, *The Good Society,* 4.

[230] Milton Friedman, "Neo-Liberalism and Its Prospects," *The Indispensable Milton Friedman: Essays on Politics and Economics*, ed. Lanny Ebenstein (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2012), 3-9, 6.

Turning."[231]

Commentators often stress the break between classical liberalism and the neoliberal revival on the matter of laissez-faire. The latter, it is said, should not be "identified with laissez-faire."[232] The reason is straightforward. Rather than imagining economic activity as a naturally occurring phenomenon outside the jurisdiction of the state, neoliberal theory begins with an intrajuridical understanding of economic freedom. Laissez-faire, on this view, "must always mean freedom within a given social framework of legal standards and regulatory practices."[233] But this did not necessarily entail a break with laissez-faire so much as a reinterpretation of it. Some, to be sure, criticized the doctrine of laissez-faire head on. Lippmann, for instance, argued that "it was wholly unreal" for doctrinaires of laissez-faire to question or deny the jurisdiction of the state given that contractual relations in the market "depended upon some kind of law, upon the willingness of the state to enforce certain rights."[234] By contrast, Henry C. Simons called for "a positive program for laissez faire," one predicated on the need for the state to provide a "legal and institutional framework" for the market.[235] On the need for such a positive institutional framework, all neoliberals were in agreement. Indeed, what motivated Lippmann's forceful critique of

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[231] Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman, *Freedom to Choose* (New York: Avon Books, 1981), 271. Published as a tie-in to the ten-part PBS documentary series, this project represented the neoliberal counterpart to John Kenneth Galbraith's book and documentary series *The Age of Uncertainty* (1977), co-produced by the BBC, CBC, KCET and OECA. While both were supported by public broadcasting organizations, only one of them represented a public sponsored jeremiad against public programs generally. Ronald Reagan celebrated the Friedman duo's project as "superb."
[232] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (New York: Picador, 2008), 132.
[233] Harry D. Gideonse, Introduction to Henry C. Simons, *A Positive Program for Laissez Faire: Some Proposals for a Liberal Economic Policy* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1934), iii.
[234] Lippmann, *The Good Society,* 187.
[235] Henry C. Simons, *A Positive Program for Laissez Faire: Some Proposals for a Liberal Economic Policy* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1934), 3.

laissez-faire was that he blamed the demise of liberalism in the late nineteenth century on the doctrine's "negativism." In its axiomatic rejection of the state, he argued, laissez faire failed to offer "a guide to public policy."[236] In this way, laissez-faire proved self-defeating. In its march against institutional protections, laissez-faire failed to protect laissez-faire.

In his opening remarks at the Paris colloquium in 1939, Louis Rougier, who organized the event, concisely announced the neoliberal gambit: "The liberal regime is not just the result of a spontaneous natural order," he said, "it is also the result of a legal order."[237] The operative terms here are "just" and "also." Neoliberal thinkers did not abandon the view of the market as a spontaneous order. They abandoned the classical liberals' negligence of political order. In other words, they abandoned a laissez-faire approach to laissez-faire. Breaking with "the political dogma of laissez-faire" which held that "nothing should be done," they resolved that something must be done if the market is to be restored to its paramountcy in social life.[238] This entailed a certain reassessment of Spencer's opposition between "law-made" and "spontaneously-formed" social order. Unlike Spencer, the neoliberals did not shy from "law-made" order. Instead, they advanced a vision according to which the sole rightful aim of "law-made" political order is to provide a framework in which to safeguard the "spontaneously-formed" order of the market.

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[236] Lippmann, *The Good Society,* 195. In this way, the neoliberal criticism of classical liberalism paralleled a potential criticism of Marx within socialism. Where the doctrine of laissez faire succeeded at negatively critiquing politically protected privileges, it failed at offering positive policy. Likewise, one could say that Marx's critique of capitalist society failed to offer a positive vision of socialist society (see footnote above).
[237] Quoted in Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (New York: Picador, 2008), 161.
[238] Lippmann, *The Good Society,* 207-208. One hears echoes of Lenin's famed "What Is To Be Done." Rob Van Horn and Philip Mirowski point out the Leninist character of the neoliberal project in "The Rise of the Chicago School of Economics and the Birth of Neoliberalism," *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective,* ed. Philip Mirowski Dieter Plehwe (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009), 139-178, 161.

Simultaneously, many neoliberal thinkers remained every bit as wedded to a quasi-natural account of the latter—a view suggested in Lippmann's veneration of the results of the market as "an organic, not a fabricated, synthesis,"[239] as well as the inevitable allusions to Topsy that show up in their writings. In *Free to Choose*, for instance, Milton and Rose Friedman compare voluntary exchange in the market to other spheres of human activity "in which a complex and sophisticated structure arises as an unintended consequence of a large number of individuals cooperating while each pursues his own interests." Language itself, they argue, similarly exhibits order without having been "planned" by a "central body." "Like Topsy," they conclude, the order that arises within such "continually changing and developing" spheres of human activity "just growed."[240]

Hayek, for his part, invokes Topsy-like growth while railing against the rise of the modern spirit of rationalism from which socialism emerged in his book *The Counter-Revolution of Science* (1952). Refusing to "recognize sense in anything" that has not been "deliberately constructed," the modern spirit of rationalism, Hayek charges, is driven by its "love of organization" to extend its "aesthetic predilection for everything … consciously

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[239] Lippmann, *The Good Society,* 176.

[240] Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman, *Freedom to Choose* (New York: Avon Books, 1981), 16-17. In the PBS documentary series that accompanied the publication of this book, the Topsy reference did make it into the television script. This was not the only time that Milton Friedman alluded to Topsy. Indeed, the tricky position in which neoliberals would eventually find themselves—halfway between the "law-made" and the "spontaneously-formed"—is suggested by the qualification that Friedman later makes when observing that "monetary systems, like Topsy, just grow. They are not and cannot be constructed *de novo*. However"—the famed monetarist immediately adds—"they can be altered and affected in all sorts of ways by deliberate action." This "is why," he goes on, "an understanding of monetary phenomena is of much potential value"—value, presumably, in a political, rather than economic, sense (Milton Friedman, *Money Mischief: Episodes in Monetary History* (New York: Harvest, 1994), x-xi).

constructed over anything … 'just grown.'"[241] This rift between that which has "just grown" and that which is "consciously constructed" returns in Hellenized form in Hayek's theoretical writings under the labels *kosmos* and *taxis.* Broadly recalling Spencer's opposition between the "spontaneously-formed" and the "law-made," Hayek introduces these "two kinds of order" to distinguish spontaneous or "grown order" from rationally designed or "made order."[242] In Aristotelean terms, the key difference comes down to the absence of efficient and final causes in the case of *kosmos.* More plainly: *kosmos* forms of itself, whereas *taxis* is consciously willed and purposive. Spurred on by a number of factors—not least the advent of total war—the early twentieth century brought an age of "taxis" or positive social organization. For champions of the modern spirit of rationalism (what Hayek sometimes specifies as "constructivist" or "intellectual rationalism"), the ongoing eclipse of market *kosmos* by rationalized *taxis* was of course a welcome advance over the free market capitalism of the prior century. It signaled the dawn of socially protective policies and measures within "powerful institutions designed to check the action of the market."[243] It meant that the spontaneous or "unpremeditated" outcomes of the market would give way more and more to the "conscious and deliberate" determinations of

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[241] F. A. Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science: Studies in the Abuse of Reason* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1952), 113. Hayek here traces the rise of modern rationalism to the "scientistic" education system that emerged from the French Revolution through institutions like the Ecole Polytechnique. It was here, Hayek says, that the goddess of reason was enshrined, setting the stage for designs on society's reorganization that spread from Saint-Simon to the socialist tradition that emerged in his wake. In this connection, we might note that Reed's name for the Atonist Path's primary organization obliquely critiques the role played by elite American universities in producing the intellectuals and professionals at the helm of postwar liberalism. "Wallflower Order" plays on "Ivy League." Incidentally, the first critic to draw attention to this was Henry Louis Gates, Jr., himself an Ivy League professor (*The Signifiying Monkey,* 255; Gates credits Catherine Mursofsky).
[242] F. A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty, Vol. 1: Rules and Order* (London: Routledge, 1982), 37.
[243] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon, 1944), 76. Polanyi's book shared its year of publication with *The Road to Serfdom*.

public bodies set up to provide public services or otherwise make purposive economic interventions in service to the common good and public interest.[244] In short—and above all—it elevated political will over against market forces by linking the legitimacy of the nation-state to an active role in ensuring the material well-being of citizens through various goal-oriented institutional mediations in the economy.

The leading figure of the neoliberal intellectual project, Hayek took aim at efforts to consciously direct economic outcomes toward politically willed ends. If the road to hell is paved with good intentions, Hayek argued that "the road to serfdom" is paved with "intentionalist" political measures in which the purposive decision-making of public officials supplants the spontaneous activity of entrepreneurs in the market. Echoing Spencer on the "error" made by those who would treat social order as a "manufacture" rather than a "growth," Hayek denounced the political desire to remake society after the designs of conscious "will" as "the fatal conceit of modern intellectual rationalism."[245] Were the drive to replace all spontaneous social institutions with positive organization to continue unabated, Hayek warned, "human reason" would "place itself in chains of its own making."[246] The only salvation from the prison house of positive organization was to be found in the embrace of spontaneous order. This demanded a certain renunciation of the collective political will, a certain "humility toward the impersonal and anonymous social processes by which individuals help create things greater than they know." For in contrast

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[244] Barbara Wootton, *Freedom under Planning* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1945), 6, 141.
[245] Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism,* ed. W. W. Bartley III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 49.
[246] F. A. Hayek, "Individualism: True and False," *The Essential Hayek* (ed. Chiaki Nishiyama and Kurt R. Leube), Stanford: Stanford UP, 1984), 131-159, 153.

to "design theories" of social order, which "lead to the conclusion that social processes can be made to serve human ends" through rational control, Hayek's spontaneous theory of social order insists that when individuals are left to pursue their own ends, the outcome exceeds anything that "human reason could design or foresee."[247] This is because the market, rather than directing activity in accordance with the overarching will and purpose inscribed within a predetermined plan, plays host to a plurality of knowledge-utilizing wills and purposes. Moreover, rational design, Hayek argues, cannot simulate the signaling function by which the market processes and transmits the knowledge that is dispersed across society and ever changing in relation the flux of concrete local conditions. While no finite human agency can possibly possess the totality of particular knowledge spread across society at a given moment, the market solves this problem by reducing the local and concrete knowledge that agents in the market utilize to quantities (prices) to which other market agents then respond. In this way, without the need of conscious direction or overarching coordination, the *kosmos* of the market emerges in real-time from the spontaneous activity of many wills and purposes.

Updating Spencer's "no alternative," Hayek observed that modern society confronted an alternative. But he maintained that there is "no choice" beyond modeling society after either after *taxis* or *kosmos*: it is a question of either submitting to the direct commands of public authorities in a rationally organized society or else "submitting to the anonymous" and ultimately "blind forces of the social process" that emerges from the

[247] F. A. Hayek, "Individualism: True and False," *The Essential Hayek* (ed. Chiaki Nishiyama and Kurt R. Leube), Stanford: Stanford UP, 1984), 131-159, 136-137.

spontaneous order of the market.[248] For Hayek the choice was obvious. In light of the evolutionary insight that "order generated without design can far outstrip plans men consciously contrive," the ideal neoliberal market-state must protect the multiplicity of wills at play in the market from the intrusions of political will. Owing nothing to "the fictitious will of the people," the only rightful aim of political order is then to uphold a legal framework of general rules (i.e. abstracted from any substantive purposes or social outcomes) in which to safeguard the market from "the dangers of 'rational' interference with spontaneous order."[249] To be free, in this view, is above all to be free from collective structures set up to carry out the purposes of an overarching political will. Or as Hayek once put it, "Freedom means that in some measure we entrust our fate to forces which we do not control."[250]

The Atonist Pathology

Near the end of *Mumbo Jumbo,* Reed suggests a direct parallel between Jes Grew and the spontaneous order of the market when he juxtaposes a discussion of the ultimately "unknown" (152) nature of Jes Grew's spread in the 1920s with a paratextual insert from Studs Terkel's *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (1970) in which the journalist Carey McWilliams recalls how, at the hearings held after the stock market crash of 1929, the industrial and financial insiders who testified "hadn't the foggiest notion what

[248] Hayek, "Individualism: True and False," 147.
[249] Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit,* 37, 49, 8
[250] Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty, Vol. 2, The Mirage of Social Justice* (London: Routledge, 1976), 30.

had gone bad" (153). Immediately thereafter, a conversation heard among the top brass at the Wallflower Order amplifies this parallel by reframing the expansion of state intervention in the economy in this period as a response to the out of control "liquidity of Jes Grew" (154). In this way, the novel reimagines the onset of the Great Depression as an orchestrated effort to augment state power and stop the spread of Jes Grew. This bold revision of history becomes less outlandish once the parallel between Jes Grew and the market is observed. Like the Atonist effort in *Mumbo Jumbo* to submit Jes Grew to rational control, the era in which it is set would terminate in the expansion of political measures tasked with exercising political control over the market.

While Reed need not have read neoliberal writings to have picked up and extended Topsy-like growth as an all-encompassing model of social life, the conflict between Jes Grew and the Atonist Path gives imaginative form to precisely Hayek's opposition between dispersed, spontaneous order that "just grew" (*kosmos*) and the will to rational order that is "consciously constructed" (*taxis*). In other words, *Mumbo Jumbo* brings the two kinds of order that came to a head in the twentieth century—an updated theory of which drives Hayek's contribution to neoliberal theory—into dramatic conflict. Whether or not we opt to "retrospectively classify Reed a proto-neoliberal,"[251] this overlap is not sleight. With all the force of Hayek's critique of "the fatal conceit" of "constructivists who believe that man can master his fate" through the "endeavour to make everything subject to rational control" and in this way "shape the world" according to human will[252]—itself a revival of the older

[251] Nicholas Donofrio, "Multiculturalism, Inc.: Regulating and Deregulating the Culture Industries with Ishmael Reed," *American Literary History* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 100-128, 102.
[252] Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit,* 27; Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty: A New Statement of the Liberal Principles of Justice and Political Economy, Vol. 2, The Mirage of Social Justice,* 30; Hayek, *Law,*

laissez-faire denunciation of "every attempt to control the powers of nature and subject them to the will of man"[253]—Reed emphatically positions his work in opposition to the worldview according to which the "physical and social environment of man is subject to rational manipulation and … history is subject to the will and action of man."[254]

Embodying this rationalist worldview in *Mumbo Jumbo,* the "Atonist Path" takes its name from the religious revolution of Akhenaton, the Egyptian pharaoh who was perhaps the first in history to attempt to abolish spontaneously grown polytheistic religious practices and install a new religion dedicated to the worship of a single god, the Egyptian sun deity Aton. Reed's intertext here is Freud's last book, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), which traces the origin of monotheism back to Akhenaton.[255] As for "Path," this of course refers to a known way, whether rational, as in a purposive means to a determinant end, or religious, like the "straight and narrow path" described in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:14). "Path" also calls to mind the Greek *pathos* (suffering), and one is tempted to read it as short for pathology. Turning Freud on his head, however, Reed takes the

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Legislation, and Liberty: A New Statement of the Liberal Principles of Justice and Political Economy, Vol. 1, Rules and Order, 34.

[253] Lester F. Ward, *Pure Sociology* (New York: Macmillan, 1914), 512. Ward's various swipes against laissez-faire are clearly direct against Spencer, who was still prominent in the field of sociology in the early twentieth century.

[254] Ishmael Reed, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," *New and Collected Poems* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006), 25-33, 31. While he attributes this worldview to "Western Civilization" here, the laissez faire tradition suggests otherwise.

[255] "Atonist" has sometimes been read as an indication of the Atonist Path's estrangement from music or *tone* (see, e.g., Donald L. Hoffman, "A Darker Shade of Grail: Questing at the Crossroads in Ishmael Reed's Mumbo Jumbo," *Callaloo* 17, no. 4 (Autumn 1994), 1245-1256, 1246). Yet if anything is "atonal" it is the polymodal means by which Reed's language channels the spirit of Jes Grew—a force that, like the atonality of free jazz, moves beyond the confines of a given key or mode. Incidentally, the famed atonal jazz composer-musician Sun Ra (born Herman Poole Blount) was named after Black Herman, the Harlem magician who shows up as a character in *Mumbo Jumbo*.

Atonist Pathology to be the will to reason itself, with Freud—one of the many historical figures to make a brief appearance in the novel—representing the consummate Atonist, the latest in a long line of rationalist thinkers to, or in LaBas's Hoodoo idiom, "interpret the world by using a single loa" (24).

To fully appreciate Reed's revision of Freud in *Mumbo Jumbo*, it is worth recalling Freud's foray into civilizational detective work. Beginning with *Totem and Taboo* (1912-1913), Freud began applying psychoanalysis to broader "cultural problems."[256] Closer in ambition to Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* than to clinical research, this project—to which Freud later returned in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927)*, Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930)*,* and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939)—built around Freud's notion of having discovered the psychogenesis of social order in paternal conflict. As Freud put it in *Totem and Taboo*, "the beginnings of religion, morals, society and art converge in the Oedipus complex." Accordingly, the mystery of social life "prove[d] soluble on the basis of one single concrete point," namely, "man's relation to his father."[257] Mining and arranging anthropological materials in service to this hypothesis, Freud's *Totem and Taboo* arrives at an origin adequate to this "one single" Oedipal truth in the story of the murder of the father by the primal horde. Rather than liberating the horde from the father's rule, this collective deed—the patricidal crime to which all roads human lead back—unites the complicit under a law all the more binding for the sense of guilt out of which it arises.

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[256] Sigmund Freud, "Postscript" (1935), *An Autobiographical Study,* trans. James-Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), 131-137, 133.
[257] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo,* trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989 [1912-13]), 194.

While Freud thus abandons the rational genesis of social order found in Hobbesian political theory, he upholds a form of retrospective rationality in purporting to discover and raise the origin of social order to self-knowledge.[258] Herein lies part of the allure of *Oedipus Rex.* In addition to dramatizing the tragic blindness of human action, Sophocles's play also models the investigation by which Oedipus arrives, in the end, at self-knowledge ("I will know my origin," says Oedipus, "burst forth what will"[259]). This investigation is also what makes *Oedipus Rex* the first detective story. As a plague ravages Thebes, Oedipus learns that the only way to stop it is by identifying the murderer of Laius, the former king. Having previously solved the riddle of the Sphinx, Oedipus sets out once again to save Thebes, now by gathering evidence, interviewing citizens, and following clues to solve the crime. Famously, though, Oedipus's investigation terminates in the painful recognition that he and the culprit of the crime he seeks to solve are one and the same. Or as Freud puts it, noting the parallel with his life's work, "The action of the play is nothing other than the process of revealing, with cunning delays and ever-mounting excitement—a process that can be likened to the work of a psychoanalysis—that Oedipus himself is the murderer of Laius."[260]

Oedipus, on Freud's account, reenacts the traumatic event we all unconsciously harbor as part of "the archaic heritage of mankind": that "once upon a time [we] had a

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[258] Freud's myth reverses the Hobbesian story according to which individuals exchange liberty for the security provided by a central authority. For Hobbes, the willingness to submit before the Leviathan, i.e. a sovereign power invested with the authority to determine law, is a matter of rational calculation. Freud, by contrast, holds the murder of the father (primal sovereign?) to generate the sense of guilt from which social order is forged.
[259] Quoted in Bernard Knox, "Sophocles' Oedipus," *Tragic Themes in Western Literature*, ed. Cleanth Brooks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 7-29, 21.
[260] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, *Vol. IV*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1974 [1952]), 261-2.

primeval father and killed him."[261] Freud's conviction on this point commits him to a model of phylogenetic transmission according to which we inherit "memory traces of the experiences of former generations."[262] In generic terms, it leads him to treat "the history of society as a murder mystery"[263]—a tendency at full bloom in *Moses and Monotheism,* a detective novel in its own right.[264] Joining elements of the "process of revealing" in which Oedipus comes to discover both his crime and that his origin and identity are other than what he believed them to be, Freud attempts to show that the original Moses was not Hebrew but Egyptian and, furthermore, that the great founder of Judaism was murdered. On his account, the original Egyptian Moses was a noble inspired by the religious revolution of Akhenaton, the Pharaoh who established the earliest known form of monotheism in exclusive worship of the sun deity Aton. When Akhenaton's death brought an end to the Aton religion in Egypt, Freud speculates, Moses carried it to an oppressed Semitic tribe. But when the instinctual renunciation demanded by this highly spiritual religion proved too much, the great lawgiver was murdered. This postulate—the "murder of Moses by his people"—provides Freud with the "link between the forgotten deed of primeval times and its subsequent reappearance in the form of Monotheistic religions."[265] Though only later, with Christianity—born likewise, Freud insists, of the violent death of another great figure—is the crime "admitted."[266]

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[261] Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism,* translated by Katherine Jones (London: Hogarth Press, 1939), 159, 161.
[262] Freud, *Moses and Monotheism,* 159.
[263] Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of a Moralist* (London: University Paperbacks, 1965), 198.
[264] An early draft of *Moses and Monotheism* bore the title *Der Mann Moses. Ein historischer Roman (The Man Moses: An Historical Novel*).
[265] Freud, *Moses and Monotheism,* 144.
[266] This part of Freud's argument is especially surprising in historical context. Just as a ruthless wave of anti-Semitism was engulfing Europe, Freud seems to provide a psychoanalytic validation of

The dubious nature of most of the claims made in *Moses and Monotheism* notwithstanding, Freud's patricidal master narrative would seem a fitting intellectual afterimage of the death of God in modernity. One recalls that the famous declaration of Nietzsche's madman, "God is dead," is accompanied by the accusation, "We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers."[267] For Freud, we killed not God but the primeval father, and God—in fact every social institution—is a father substitute, a symbolic surrogate. In this discovery, Freud lays claim to a quasi-theological certainty all his own: the truth, not of the living God, but of the murdered father. Where Paul had once written "In the beginning was the Word [Logos]" (John 1:1), Freud thus introduces a macabre edge into Goethe's revision: "In the beginning was the Deed."[268] But Freud does not thereby abandon logos: on the contrary, he readily identified the Greek *λόγος* (logos) as the one god to whom he remains committed.[269] Like any detective though, Freud takes logos—rational knowing—to arrive not in the beginning but in the end, in his case, through psychoanalytic investigation into the origin of human neurosis.

Mumbo Jumbo offers a visionary alternative to the rationalist bent of such detective work. A "jacklegged detective of the metaphysical" (212), LaBas echoes Freud's ambition inasmuch as world events in the early twentieth century bring him to break from his

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the Christian charge that "you [the Jews] killed our God." The "reproach is true, if rightly interpreted," says Freud. "It says … you won't admit that you murdered God" qua the substitute "primeval Father"; whereas "we did the same thing, but we admitted it" (Freud, *Moses and Monotheism,* 145; Freud returns to this theme at 215).

[267] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 181.

[268] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust* I.1237 (trans. Peter Salm, New York: Bantam, 2007), 97. Freud alludes to Goethe's revision in *Totem and Taboo*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), 200.

[269] Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961), 54.

clinical practice as a HooDoo therapist to investigate the conflict at the root of civilization. But rather than following in Oedipus's footsteps and investigating a murder in order to put an end to the plague, LaBas pursues a "conspiratorial hypothesis" (25) to the effect that the Atonist Path's rational effort to control the spontaneous spread of Jes Grew is precisely the site of the conflict through which "Civilization As We Know It" has been forged. Reed signals his break with Freud early on in the novel when news of Jes Grew's outbreak prompts Atonists to question medical experts about psychological techniques capable of "[locking] it up." As one Atonist frantically asks, "Can't you protective-reaction the dad-blamed thing?" (4). This oblique reference to the Oedipus complex reframes it as an instrument with which Atonists seek to "lock," and thereby rationally contain, the manifold flows of life unleashed by Jes Grew. In the end, though, *Mumbo Jumbo* echoes something of Freud's attempt to treat the origin of social order as a murder mystery. By substituting the Oedipus myth for the Osiris myth, however, Reed replaces the crime of patricide to which Freud traces the origin of social order from out of the state of nature with a crime of fratricide in which two kinds of order come into view.

This substitution comes to the surface near the novel's end at the gala where Von Vampton plots to carry out the second phase of the anti-Jes Grew plan. Unable to recruit a Black poet, Von Vampton has to resort to getting his partner, Hubert "Safecracker" Gould, to show up in blackface and masquerade as "the most exciting" and "dominant figure in Negro letters today" (144). But before Gould can finish reciting a cringe-inducing poem before the gala audience, LaBas and his entourage crash the event and take to the stage to expose Gould as a literary minstrel who is complicit in Von Vampton's plan to destroy Jes Grew. When it comes time for LaBas to do like Poe's Dupin and "[enter] into some

explanations"[270]—a formality demanded by an Atonist art critic in attendance who insists that the detective "explain rationally and soberly what they are guilty of" (160)—LaBas, rather than offering a rational explanation, waxes inspirational and rhapsodizes at length about the ancient origin of the conflict between Jes Grew and the Atonist Path in the sibling rivalry between Osiris and Set. In contrast to Freud's origin story, where the vertical relation to the father stands between order and nature, Reed's fratricidal origin story hinges on siblings each of which embodies a kind of order. Where Osiris's dances spontaneously "caught-on" and "infected other people" (162), Set's obsession with "discipline" and "tabulating" (162)—in short, his will to rational control—leads him to murder Osiris. In view of this foundational myth, civilization is riven by a conflict, not between "nature" and "culture," but between spontaneous order and rational order, such that the periodic eruption of Jes Grew is not the return of the repressed so much as the return of an irrepressible alternative to the rational order that the spirit of Set is forever seeking to impose on the world.

The Will to Spontaneity / Order without Sovereignty

More broadly, there emerges a certain "elective affinity" between avant-garde experiments in spontaneous self-creation and the neoliberal intellectual project. Key here is the rejection of conscious, purposive design in favor of spontaneous activity from which order emerges without any overarching will or sovereignty. Modeling an open-ended creative process not as consciously directed by an individual artist but as it spontaneously

[270] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Purloined Letter," *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*, 327-344, 335.

unfolds from the spontaneous activity of participants, avant-garde experiments embraced freedom in the form of dispersed activity beyond the control of a sovereign artistic will. As John Cage described the stakes of the withdrawal of the unilateral authority of the score in his music experiments: "the old idea was that the composer was the genius, the conductor ordered everyone around … In our music, no one is boss."[271] Like the *kosmos* generated by the market, the outcomes of which "are unpredictable and on the whole different from those which anyone has … deliberately aimed at,"[272] the incorporation of spontaneity, contingency, and the dispersal of control in avant-garde experiments similarly produced outcomes that could not be known in advance. Indeed, as if to echo Hayek's identification of freedom with "unforeseen and unpredictable actions,"[273] Cage defined his ideal of "experimental action" as action "the outcome of which is not foreseen."[274]

To be sure, it was not with a view toward the spontaneous order of the market that the avant-garde set out to "destroy the reasonable" and "recover the natural, unreasonable order" (as Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia once summed up the Dadaist mission).[275] Yet one might conclude that avant-garde revolt against reason was nonetheless led, as by an invisible hand, to promote an end which was not part of their intention. This was not always true though. For some artists, the connection was surely not lost. Reed is perhaps one such case. Beyond *Mumbo Jumbo,* Reed's dithyrambs to "free enterprise" suggest one of the sources of his aversion to collective politics. Another is William S. Burroughs. Although his writing is

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[271] Quoted in Roy Kotynek & John Cohassey, *American Cultural Rebels*, 180.
[272] Hayek, "Competition as a Discovery Procedure," *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, and the History of Ideas* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978), 180.
[273] Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty, Vol. 1: Rules and Order,* 56.
[274] John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1973), 39.
[275] Quoted in George Brecht, *Chance-Imagery,* 5.

often said to be ideologically and politically ambiguous, Burroughs' antipathy for the postwar social order permeates his fiction. In addition to the revolt against the "control machine," which is readily legible as a figure of the bureaucratically rationalized structures of the postwar social order,[276] Burroughs fairly conspicuously channels Spencer in *Naked Lunch* when proclaiming the evil of "Bureaucracy" in terms of its "turning away from the human evolutionary direction of infinite potentials and differentiation and independent spontaneous action."[277] As Allen Ginsberg aptly noted in his testimony at the obscenity trial of *Naked Lunch,* among the political factions at war in the novel, Burroughs himself identified with the Factualists, the essentially "conservative" group that is animated by "a feeling of laissez-faire, whatever is natural."[278] Outside of his fiction, Burroughs leaves even less ambiguity as to his guiding political antipathy. As he put it in a 1949 letter to Jack Kerouac, "[W]e are bogged down in the octopus of bureaucratic socialism." Having become a landlord around this time after purchasing a home in New Orleans, Burroughs complained in a letter to Allen Ginsberg a few days later about the rent controls he confronted, which prompted him to declare: "To dictate to a man what he can and can't do with his own property is *Un-American Socialism*." Shortly thereafter, Burroughs sold the New Orleans property and headed off to Mexico, where, in another letter to Ginsberg, he celebrated the absence of the "obscenity" of a "'Welfare' State." As if to gloss the thesis of

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[276] As he broadly defined it in a 1972 interview with Robert Palmer, "The control machine is simply the machinery—police, education, etc.—used by a group in power to keep itself in power and extend its power" (Burroughs, "Rolling Stone Interview," *Conversations with William S. Burroughs*, ed. Allen Hibbard (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1999), 51-79, 74). C.f., Louis Althusser's famous essay on the State Ideological and Repressive Apparatuses, also published around this time.
[277] William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 134.
[278] Allen Ginsberg, "Excerpts from the Boston Trial of Naked Lunch," in William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (New York: Blackcat, 1966), x-xxxvi, xxvii).

Hayek's recently published *Road to Serfdom,* Burroughs goes on in this letter to suggest that the U.S. and England are "heading in the direction of a Socialistic police state," "not too different from Russia." Worried that the younger Ginsberg remained suspectable to being "infected" by "socialistic views," Burroughs closes this letter by addressing his dear pupil in no uncertain terms: "Believe me, socialism and communism are synonymous, and both unmitigated evil, and the Welfare State is a Trojan Horse."[279]

Looking at the social order modeled and even prefigured by the aesthetics of spontaneity, one might draw a similar conclusion—namely, that it was a Trojan horse for neoliberalism.

Coda

Perhaps not by coincidence, the farcical character of the unmasking sequence that takes place at the gala near the end of *Mumbo Jumbo* recalls the penultimate scene of every *Scooby-Doo* episode. While Hinckle Von Vampton is primarily modeled after Carl Van Vechten, the controversial patron of the Harlem Renaissance, Reed's modification of his first name suggests at an additional, perhaps contemporary, reference.[280] An obvious candidate is Warren Hinckle, then famous in San Francisco as a magazine editor and

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[279] Burroughs, *The Letters of William S. Burroughs, Vol. 1: 1945-1959,* ed. Oliver Harris (New York: Penguin, 1994), 43, 44, 57, 60. Burroughs rehearsed this conclusion in his next letter to Kerouac: "The way things look from here, don't know as I'll ever want to go back to the States. I fear the U.S. is heading for Socialism which means, of course, ever-increasing interference in the business of each citizen. What ever happened to our glorious Frontier heritage of minding ones [*sic*] own business? The Frontiersman has shrunk to a wretched, interfering, Liberal bureaucrat" (61).

[280] Carl Van Vechten's 1926 novel about the Harlem Renaissance is paradigmatic of one of Reed's satirical targets: namely, white cultural entrepreneurs repackaging black culture for white commercial audiences (Carl Van Vechten, *Nigger Heaven* (1926)).

chronicler of the counterculture.[281] Yet Hinckle also faintly recalls the villain in the series-opening episode of *Scooby-Doo*. This would not be surprising. Like many a postmodernist, Reed never saw a cultural form or medium beyond or beneath his "absorptive capacity" as a writer.[282] Moreover, critics have often observed the cartoonish quality of many of the routines in Reed's fiction. Perhaps the first to note this was Irving Howe, who compared Reed's style of satire to *Captain Kangaroo* in an article published in *Harper's* just a couple of months after the original *Scooby-Doo* series made its television debut on CBS in September of 1969.[283]

At the center of *Scooby-Doo*'s debut episode is one Mr. Wickles. An art curator of a local museum, Wickles concocts a ruse to keep an elaborate art theft and forgery scheme going when it is threatened by the arrival of a professor from England named Jameson Hyde White. Like Hinckle Von Vampton, Wickles has a penchant for role playing as a medieval knight. Wickles' plan involves moonlighting as a phantom knight on which he can then pin Professor White's disappearance. As a joke by Shaggy gives notice, the professor's name foreshadows what Wickles plans to do with him: "I've heard of hide-and-seek before, but never Hyde White." As it will turn out, the medieval armor-clad Wickles has hidden the professor beneath a tribal mask and cloak on exhibit in the museum. The episode's plot is accordingly organized around a rhyming pair of homonyms: a knight by night hides Hyde White. Besides the arbitrary wordplay, the name of the English professor is also a reference to the gothic novella from which *Scooby-Doo* derives its format. Like the character in Robert

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[281] See Warren Hinckle, "The Social History of the Hippies," *Ramparts Magazine* (March 1967), 5-26.
[282] Bruce Dick and Amritjit Singh, eds. *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995, 211.
[283] Irving Howe, "New Black Writers," *Harper's Magazine* (Dec 1, 1969), 130-146, 141.

Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), a hallmark of *Scooby-Doo* villains is the double-life: upstanding citizen by day, masked criminal by night. Without fail, the double life uncovered in the course of the gang's investigation each episode operates in the grand American tradition of protecting financial interests.[284] The case of Wickles is no exception; hiding Hyde is a means to pumping out cheap art forgeries. One might even take the scheme narrated in *Scooby-Doo*'s inaugural episode as an allegory for the formula into which the Saturday morning cartoon series itself presses its literary precursors in the culture industry.[285] In any case, by hiding Hyde behind a tribal mask, Wickles sets the stage for the penultimate scene in which the mask is removed to reveal the hidden White. In this way, the episode produces an image suggestive of racial unmasking on which Reed draws and gives new meaning at the end of *Mumbo Jumbo.*

Scooby-Doo surely caught the attention of anyone linked to the broader counterculture. Cashing in on the commercial success of *Easy Rider* (1969), the Saturday morning cartoon brought the psychedelic aesthetic of the day-glo painted bus—the vehicle by which Ken Kesey and the Pranksters sought to disrupt the routines of postwar American life—into living rooms across the U.S. Yet if the early hippies reveled in the great mystery of life at a moment in which "wonder was the order of the day,"[286] the Mystery Machine in which the Gang rolls into town announces the return of a disenchanted world in which

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[284] Coincidentally, in the vast catalogue of spin-offs, re-boots, and feature films making up the *Scooby-Doo* franchise today, an exception to the show's disenchanted universe of natural (pecuniary) explanation occurs when the gang visits New Orleans in the 1998 direct-to-video classic *Scooby-Doo on Zombie Island*, where the voodoo they encounter while investigating a southern plantation turns out to be real.
[285] An obvious objection here is that neither detective fiction nor Stevenson's penny dreadful stand as paragons of high art.
[286] Ed McClanahan, *Famous People I Have Known* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1985), 33.

there is behind every bump in the night a natural explanation, and behind every gothic mystery a pecuniary interest. In an oddly prescient way, the moral of each episode is the same as the political catchphrase that would shortly loom over the 1970s: *follow the money*.

Before long, though, the spirit of mystery and money would make peace as widespread political and institutional disillusionment—compounded by the prolonged economic crisis of postwar social order—set the stage for a renewed embrace of that great "mystery machine": "the magic of the marketplace," as Reagan would soon refer to it.[287]

[287] Quoted in Jonathan Levy, *Ages of American Capitalism: A History of the United States* (New York: Random House, 2021), 595; On the embrace of magic and spontaneity among writers in Reed's generation, see Sean McCann and Michael Szalay, "Do You Believe in Magic? Literary Thinking after the New Left," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 18, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 435-468.

CHAPTER 2

The Sound and the Theory:

Jacques Attali and the Cunning of Spontaneous Aesthetics

"Contemporary events differ from history in that we do not know the results they will produce."

—F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944)[1]

"The result of this struggle is a difference between the intention and its realization, a difference which the artist is not aware of."

—Marcel Duchamp "The Creative Act" (1957)[2]

Introduction

In an address titled "The March into Socialism," delivered just days before his death in early 1950, the economist Joseph A. Schumpeter rehearsed his famous prediction that capitalism would eventually give way to a form of bureaucratic socialism. As if to dramatize the unassailable advance of postwar social democracy, he paused at one point to underscore the marginal position in which intellectual dissenters found themselves. In an oblique reference to F. A. Hayek's recently founded Mount Pelerin Society, he wryly observed, "I believe that there is a mountain in Switzerland on which congresses of economists have been held which express disapproval." Yet the prophet of creative

[1] F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007), 57.
[2] Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act," *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Lemer Peterson (New York: De Capo Press, 1973), 138-140, 139.

destruction saw little reason to entertain the possibility that these dissenting economists might reverse the historical drift from the private heroism of market activity to the bureaucratic routines of public authority. So irrelevant were these "anathemata," as he described Hayek's conclave of Ishmaels, that they "have not even provoked attack."[3]

At a time when rearview mirrors have long since come to reflect "the road from Mont Pelerin" following the turn "from post-war Keynesianism to neoliberal Hayekianism," Schumpeter's throwaway reference to the neoliberal intellectual vanguard stands out.[4] Constructing and then promulgating an "intellectual emergency equipment" in the run-up to the economic crisis of the 1970s, these once-marginal economists were soon guiding statecraft away from the "tottering" postwar social structure and toward markets.[5] In this way, they stepped into a role that Schumpeter himself had imagined for intellectuals in *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1942), that is, not "making history" but playing "midwife's assistant" to institutional change.[6]

Schumpeter was not alone in his developing appreciation of intellectuals as the unacknowledged legislators of the world.[7] But where others embraced the role of shaping

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[3] Joseph A. Schumpeter, "The March into Socialism," in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975), 415-426, 418.
[4] Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (eds), *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009); Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a Failing System* (London: Verso, 2016), 52.
[5] F. A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty, Vol. 3: The Political Order of a Free People* (London: Routledge, 1982), 152. In this article, I center my reading of neoliberal theory on Hayek, its leading figure. To be sure, the translation of neoliberal theory into policy often diverged from strictly Hayekian precepts—notably, for instance, in the adoption of Milton Freidman's monetarism.
[6] Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy,* 149.
[7] The crisis of the 1930s pushed a number of economic thinkers to theorize the role of ideas—and thus the thinkers and intellectuals who carry them—in shaping society. Famously, this is the key in which John Maynard Keynes closes his *General Theory* (1936): "the ideas of economists and political philosophers … are more powerful than is commonly understood. … Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some

the climate of ideas in which political agendas would be forged, Schumpeter was content to prophecy the destiny of intellectuals from a distance. Heir to the critical spirit of the bourgeois public sphere and later augmented by an expanding educational system, the intellectual stratum, in Schumpeter's view, presaged one more theater in which capitalism invited its own destruction. As an afterimage of the crisis-torn 1930s, this portrait of the intellectual was backed by experience.[8] By focusing solely on the intellectual's role in creating an "atmosphere of hostility to *capitalism*," however, Schumpeter overlooked a

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defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back" (*The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, 383)). Even more fervently than Schumpeter, Hayek both insisted on the importance of ideas and theorized intellectual antipathy to capitalism (see Hayek, "The Intellectuals and Socialism," *University of Chicago Law Review* 16 (1949): 417-33). In *The Road to Serfdom,* the primary idea that Hayek critiqued was the historical inevitability of state-led economic planning. "If in the long run we are the makers of our own fate," he writes, "in the short run we are the captives of the ideas we have created" (*The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007), 58). Initially echoing Marx's dictum that we make our own history, Hayek replaces the limiting factor of material "circumstances" (Marx) with "ideas," thereby underscoring his objective: to change ideas. Schumpeter criticized Hayek on this point for stripping ideas from "the historical conditions from which they arose" (i.e. Marx's "circumstances") and treating them "as if they floated in the air" (Schumpeter, Review of *The Road to Serfdom* by Friedrick A. Hayek, *Journal of Political Economy* 54, no 3 (June 1946): 269-70, 270). In retrospect though, it becomes clear that Hayek was playing the long game. Beyond analyzing the intellectual climate of his time, Hayek set out to change it, not only by contributing to the established channels of intellectual life, but also by forming the Mont Pèlerin Society—the central organ of what Philip Mirowski calls the "Neoliberal Thought Collective," which permitted "the incubation of integrated political theory and political action outside of the more conventional structures of academic disciplines and political parties" (*Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (London: Verso, 2013), 42-43). While ultimately tied to favorable "circumstances" (the economic crisis of the 1970s), the fruits of Hayek's indefatigable dedication to the "long-term goal of generating ideological change" speak for themselves (Angus Burgin, *The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets Since the Great Depression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2012), 51). Reading Hayek today, one is struck by the extent to which the winds of "inevitability" now blow in the opposite direction, namely, toward markets. To revise Keynes: in the long run we are all neoliberals, or so it seems.

[8] Among the political factions that Schumpeter (and Hayek, for that matter) witnessed the rise of in the Austrian Republic of the 1920s and 30s (Christian Socials, Social Democrats, and German Nationalists), the only common denominator was criticism of capitalism qua "antipathy to liberalism" (Jerry Z. Muller, *The Mind and the Market: Capitalism in Modern European Thought* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 351).

significant intellectual countercurrent that was forming in response to precisely the march of bureaucratization with which he identified capitalism's eventual eclipse—a countercurrent that would come to include, though by no means be limited to, Hayek's neoliberal intellectual vanguard.[9]

By the time that Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* reached publication in the early 1940s, many intellectuals were discovering a new object of critique, with Weber's steel shell of bureaucracy increasingly overtaking Marx's commodity form in the critical imaginary. Where Marx had imagined the eventual eclipse of capitalism's "spontaneous" development by an economy under "conscious and planned control," a new wave of thinkers came to be more concerned about the rise of a bureaucratically organized society in which the "conscious decision[-making]" of administrators signified not only the eclipse of the free market, but also the institutionalized domination of instrumental rationality.[10] In the process, market-critical anti-capitalism steadily gave way to forms of state-critical anti-institutionalism.

In one notable case, the work of single thinker exhibited this intellectual shift, when Walter Lippmann went from celebrating the prospect of a new era of "conscious intention," defined by the rational "effort to introduce plan where there has been clash, and purpose

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[9] Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy,* 145 (emphasis mine). Schumpeter's chapter on "Growing Hostility" (143-155) tends to blur the line between criticism and hostility. Broadly, the idea is that capitalism produces the conditions for "discontented" intellectuals, and this discontent then "rationalizes itself" in the form of criticism (153). Hostility seems to be both the presupposition and byproduct of this state of affairs. What begins as the hostility of intellectuals, however, spreads across society as a result of "the power of the written and spoken word" to which intellectuals lay claim (147).

[10] Karl Marx, *Capital,* Vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), 173; Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1999 [1944]), 38.

into the jungles of disordered growth," to criticizing just this trend in *The Good Society* (1937).[11] In addition to inspiring the 1938 colloquium that became the birthplace of neoliberal theory, Lippmann's book sounded a key refrain within the emerging critical zeitgeist in declaring the "tragic" result that must befall any attempt to consciously construct "a rational society" insofar as it concentrates political and economic power in state bureaucracies.[12] Not long after, Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) would query in the same spirit: "Is there a greater tragedy imaginable than that, in our endeavor consciously to shape our future in accordance with high ideals, we should in fact unwittingly produce the very opposite of what we have been striving for?"[13]

Far from confined to incipient neoliberal thought, tragic interpretations of the rationalist optimism that once fueled progressive views of history proliferated in response to the wave of institution-building that intellectuals came to decry by midcentury—on the heels of two calamitous World Wars—as "bureaucratic collectivism," the "administered world," the dehumanized "organizational society," or simply "the system." And while the "tragic view of history" may have come natural to more conservative intellectual formations, it hardly fell to any one political camp to theorize "the tragedy of

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[11] Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1980), 148.
[12] Lippmann, *The Good Society* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1938), 105. Angus Burgin has described the effect of Lippman's book as sending "seismic waves through the Depression era's nascent network of academic supporters of free markets," prompting pro-market intellectuals "to see themselves as engaged in a broader political struggle and as participants, however dispersed, in an emerging movement" (*The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets Since the Great Depression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2012), 55, 56). On the colloquium, see Jurgen Reinhoudt and Serge Audier, *The Walter Lippmann Colloquium: The Birth of Neo-Liberalism* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). Upon later publishing *The Constitution of Liberty*—a book that Margaret Thatcher is said to have carried around with her—Hayek pronounced it "the final outcome" of a "trend of thought which may be said to have started twenty-two years ago when I read *The Good Society*" (quoted in Burgin, *The Great Persuasion*, 55).
[13] F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007), 60.

Enlightenment."[14] As Dwight MacDonald proclaimed from a political standpoint he dubbed "radical" in the 1940s (as opposed to "progressive," under which he now included his Marxist affiliation of the 1930s): "The process of history"—now haunted by the specter of "bureaucratic collectivism"—had proven altogether "more complex and tragic" than nineteenth-century thinkers like Marx once imagined.[15]

Among the spheres in which this countercurrent of twentieth-century intellectual culture took hold, the critique bureaucratic reason was nowhere more alive than in the aesthetic valorization of indeterminacy within the postwar avant-garde. Drawing on the anti-institutional spirit of aesthetic revolt that extended from the Romantics to the Surrealists, artists ranging from Charlie Parker and John Cage to William Burroughs and Ken Kesey responded to the rise of rationalized social structures by championing practices of spontaneity and improvisation. In music, literature, theater, and beyond, experiments in spontaneous self-creation immanently unfolded an alternative to the institutional rigidity of a life-world increasingly subservient to "artificial constructions of abstract rationality."[16] Abandoning models, scripts, and scores as so many implements of rational design, these experiments embraced chance, open-endedness, and indeterminacy not only as an artistic conceit, but also as a utopian horizon of social life generally. Over and against the politically formalized aims inscribed within the institutions of the postwar social structure, the participatory horizon opened up by these experiments in aesthetic self-creation fathomed

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[14] Daniel Aaron, "Conservatism, Old and New," *American Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1954): 99-110, 99-100; Paul Connerton, *The Tragedy of Enlightenment: An Essay on the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge UP, 1980).
[15] Dwight MacDonald, *The Root Is Man* (Alhambra, CA: Cunningham Press, 1953), 44.
[16] Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998), 10.

collective life as art and art as an emergent product of uncoordinated creative activity that, with romantic abandon, is "forever becoming."[17] As this quest for spontaneity reached its postwar crescendo in the revived spirit of aesthetic revolt unleashed in the late 1960s, Norman Mailer would aptly record the dawn of a "new style of revolution": "revolution by theater," "without a script."[18]

Like the neoliberal intellectuals, the avant-garde currents that came to a head in the "spirit of '68" forcefully rejected the postwar social structure. But more than negation turns out to join the two. For even without intending to be, the art of spontaneity, as I will argue below, is the neoliberal idea of freedom in sensuous form. The sociality modeled in aesthetic experiments in spontaneous self-creation, that is to say, virtually incarnates the neoliberal vision of social order. As if to model the withdrawal of social-democratic legislation in the ideal neoliberal political order, the eclipse of the script and the score in spontaneous art heralds the "noisy sphere" of the market into which neoliberal theory would have the social life-world transformed.[19] In this view, the unscripted drama in which revolutionary passion terminates in the sixties turns out to involve a certain tragic reversal, having unwittingly performed in microcosm the spontaneous order that subsequently comes to generalized political expression in the neoliberal policy turn.

I am of course not the first to entertain something like a tragic interpretation of aesthetic revolt. Scenes of tragic anagnorisis have long featured in critical reflection on the

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[17] Friedrich Schlegel, "Athenäum Fragments," *Germany Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe*, edited by Kathleen Wheeler, New York: Cambridge UP, 1984: 47.
[18] Norman Mailer, *Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History* (New York: Plume, 1994), 223.
[19] Karl Marx, *Capital,* Vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), 279-80.

spirit of '68.[20] Already in the 1970s, Régis Debray would declare May '68 "the cradle" of a renewed capitalism. Reminding us that it is "blindness" that "makes tragedy," Debray concluded that the cultural revolutionaries unwittingly prefigured the tearing down of social institutions that capital itself would come to find a barrier to accumulation.[21] Other versions of the tragic interpretation crop up, for instance, in the scene of recognition that Susan Sontag stages in her 1996 afterward to *Against Interpretation* (1966).[22] Or in Jean Baudrillard's retrospective sense that "the revolution [of the sixties] has well and truly happened, but not in the way we expected."[23] In more subdued form, it is legible in Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's discussion of the "paradoxical impact" of what they call the

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[20] A notable exception is found in the caution with which Sean McCann and Michael Szalay, in their incisive study of the cultural politics and literary sensibility forged in the sixties, preface their analysis of the "libertarian sensibility" that they observe to have been shared by the New Left and the New Right: "Hindsight is twenty-twenty, of course, and it is unfair at this late date to task the countercultural radicals of the sixties with political changes that would take decades to accomplish" ("Do You Believe in Magic? Literary Thinking after the New Left," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 18, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 435-468, 441). For the late David Graeber, on the other hand, this was not such a stretch. Like the "spirit of 1968 in America," he observes, "May 1968 in Paris" was a "revolt in the name of individual liberation, pleasure, and self-expression against every sort of stifling social convention and bureaucratic constraint. … It hardly seems coincidental that neoliberalism became the dominant ideology at precisely the moment when the generation that attended college in the late 1960s began to come to institutional power" (David Graeber, "Neoliberalism, or The Bureaucratization of the World," *The Insecure American*, ed. Hugh Gusterson and Catherine Besteman (Berkeley: University of California P, 2019), 79–96, 90).

[21] Régis Debray, "A Modest Contribution to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Tenth Anniversary," *New Left Review* 115 (May-June 1979): 45–65, 60, 46, 58.

[22] Having previously heralded not only "the death of tragedy" owing to modern self-consciousness, but also the dawn of a "new sensibility" in the 1960s in which art and life merged, Sontag's 1996 afterword—"Thirty Years Later"—reflected on the emergence of a new capitalism to which her putatively revolutionary ideas proved all too amenable. Tragic imagery followed: "Something was operating to make these marginal views more acceptable, something of which I had no inkling"—something she turns to Nietzsche to name: "we had entered, really entered, the age of nihilism" (Susan Sontag, "The Death of Tragedy," *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 2001), 132-139; "One Culture and the New Sensibility," *Against Interpretation*, 293-304, 302, 300; "Thirty Years Later," *Against Interpretation*, 307-312, 308, 311).

[23] Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil* (London: Verso, 1990), 4.

"artistic critique" in the wake of the sixties.[24] More emphatically, the late Bernard Stiegler had described the relation between May '68 and capitalism as "a ruse of history" in which those who "imagined they were fighting capitalism" actually "helped it evolve, accompanying and legitimating its transformation."[25] Still more familiar are stories of the underlying unity between cultural and economic developments since the 1960s. The distinguishing feature of these accounts generally comes down to the relation in which authors identify the isomorphism between the two. Thus, where Fredric Jameson's well-known account of postmodernism hinges on the "explosion" of cultural production within a new stage of capitalism (the age of multinational capital, or "late capitalism"), Walter Benn Michaels has more recently turned to the explosive growth of inequality in the postmodern age as a prism in which to identify the formal unity between postmodern aesthetic theory and neoliberal economic theory.[26]

My approach differs in a couple of ways. Rather than attempting to theorize postmodernism, I focalize what might be thought of as its intellectual prehistory in the work of artists and intellectuals who—responding with horror to the intrusion of bureaucratically rationalized social structures in the twentieth century—turned to spontaneity. It is in this connection that I identify the unwitting consonance between spontaneous art and neoliberal theory. After framing this morphological congruity, I offer a reading of Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1977) as a

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[24] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2005), 199.
[25] Bernard Stiegler, *The Lost Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Polity, 2014), 32.
[26] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991), 48; Walter Benn Michaels, "The Beauty of a Social Problem (e.g. unemployment)," Twentieth Century Literature 57, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 2011): 309-327.

poststructuralist text in which avant-garde aesthetics and neoliberal theory self-consciously converge. In this way, I attempt to bridge the gap left open by accounts in which it remains unclear just what to make of this or that morphological similarity between the cultural/postmodern and the economic/neoliberal. With *Noise,* in short, the formal connection is made material.

After being introduced into the Anglophone humanities by the journal *Social Text* in the early 1980s, *Noise* was translated and published as part of the University of Minnesota Press's influential Theory and History of Literature series.[27] But although *Noise* captured the imagination of many critics on the left for its unique blend of socio-aesthetic history, heterodox musicology, and utopian prophecy, its actual political stakes have only rarely received scrutiny.[28] This is odd given its author's proximity to political power and the extent to which it directly responds to the crisis-torn period of interregnum attending the breakdown of the postwar social structure in the late 1970s.[29] *Noise,* as I read it, is a political agenda-setting text—one that not only temporally precedes but actively prefigures

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[27] Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music,* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1985). In 1983, the journal *Social Text* introduced Attali into the Anglophone humanities by publishing a translation of *Noise*'s Introduction together with an interview conducted by Jean-Joseph Goux and *Social Text* editor Fredric Jameson ("Interview with Jacques Attali," *Social Text* 7 (Spring-Summer 1983): 3-18). When *Noise* was published, the influential musicologist Susan McClary contributed the widely read Afterword; Jameson wrote the Foreword. The series in which it was subsequently published, University of Minnesota's Theory and History of Literature (it was a relatively early volume at #16), lead the way in curating and consolidating a theory canon between 1981 and 1998—a time when theory spread in the humanities even as its initial period of flourishing in the U.S., 1964-1981, had come to an end and the anti-theory backlash had set in (see Paul A. Bové, *In the Wake of Theory* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1992), 2).

[28] A recent exception is Eric Drott's "Rereading Jacques Attali's *Bruits*," *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 4 (Summer 2015): 721-756.

[29] I use interregnum in Antonio Gramsci's sense (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 276). 1973–1979 is generally seen as the period of interregnum, or structural crisis, for the postwar social structure (See, e.g., David Kotz, "End of the Neoliberal Era?" *New Left Review* 113 (Sept-Oct 2018): 29-55, 32).

the neoliberal policy turn precisely in "heralding" a utopian future predicated on the eclipse of the postwar social structure by the Dionysian noise of spontaneous self-creators.

The Art of Spontaneity

The abdication of unilateral composition in John Cage's *4'33"* (1952) is exemplary of the open-ended indeterminacy to which artists turned in the face of the vertical authority inscribed in the postwar social structure. A "silent" piano piece, performances of *4'33"* collapsed the separation between performance and audience as the contingent noise of the audience filled in, itself becoming the music. Here, the sovereign act of the artist takes the form of framing the ongoing concert of life over which the artist-sovereign exercises no control. In addition to dramatizing the limit of conscious (i.e. rational or symbolic) construction in the failure of blank bars to dictate empty space-time, the composition's tacit incorporation of the audience into the pale of creation recasts a familiar desire in the annals of aesthetic revolt, namely, to recover an ancient unity of art and life through collective participation. This desire runs from Rousseau's veneration of the intransitive production of festival, in which "the spectators become an entertainment to themselves," through Nietzsche's reconstruction of the birth of Greek tragedy from the spirit of collective music creation in Dionysian rites, and on to the avant-garde currents in which Cage positioned his work.[30] Outside of intellectual provocation, one could even on occasion encounter the thing itself, as in New Orleans during Mardi Gras: "the one American art," as

[30] Jacques-Jean Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theater,* trans. Allan Bloom (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1960), 126.

Ishmael Reed once observed, which has always seen the audience "participate in the action."[31]

Joining an avant-garde sensibility to a music that first emerged from the syncretic culture of New Orleans, the eruption of bebop jazz in the 1940s anticipated the broader turn against postwar organization that would later take hold in generational waves, particularly among those intellectuals-in-training (à la Schumpeter) in the rapidly expanding university system. Responding in particular to the hierarchical organization of jazz in the big band era, bop broke with the orchestral symphony model of big-band swing by downsizing the group and minimizing or altogether nixing the vertical authority of the composer, score, and conductor (band leader). Instead of playing parts in accord with a predetermined arrangement, bop generated singular performances by fostering techniques of spontaneous improvisation that, while tacitly rule-bound, dispersed creative control. This leveling of the creative process cleared an opening for the technical and improvisational virtuosity of figures like Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Thelonious Monk to shine forth, allowing individual bop composer-musicians to advance beyond the role of entertainer to be recognized as artists in the tradition of the Romantic cult of genius. In addition to modeling a "democratic and participatory form of musical expression," then, the bebop revolt against vertical structure also fostered hierarchy in the form of stardom.[32] The difference was that an emergent hierarchy underwritten by spontaneity replaced the rationally organized hierarchy of big band jazz.

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[31] Ishmael Reed, *Shrovetide in Old New Orleans* (New York: Atheneum, 1989), 26.
[32] Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity,* 185. Belgrad's focus on its democratic character misses this.

While Cage, for his part, may have denied any jazz influences, the rapturous spontaneity of bop improvisation suffused postwar aesthetics.[33] As the editors noted at the outset of *Writers In Revolt* (1963), a mass market anthology that circulated widely in the 1960s, the "improvisational techniques put forward by the late Charles Parker … now dominate."[34] Beyond music, the impact was especially marked in the sublime deference to the word as it comes in the writing of the Beat Generation, whose attempt to channel the rhythm and corporeal intensity of jazz performances gave Surrealist automatism new life and expanded reach.[35] As it turned out, the growing resonance of the Beat message—the ecstatic celebration of bohemian spontaneity over against the mechanical mind of Moloch—was a kind of dress rehearsal for the emergence of the sixties counterculture that saw, to quote a prophetic line from William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959), "Rock and Roll adolescent hoodlums storm the streets of all nations."[36]

Having in *4'33"* called forth—and called attention to—an unscored horizon of creative activity, Cage set the same insight to the stage with *Theater Piece No. 1* (1952).

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[33] A driving factor in Cage's denial is certainly the historically popular, as opposed to art, character of jazz. In any case, the denial replicated a longstanding tendency to "forget" the contributions of Black musicians that preceded jazz itself (see James Weldon Johnson (ed.), *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (The Floating Press, 2008 [1922]), 6-9).
[34] "Introduction," *Writers in Revolt,* ed. Terry Southern, Richard Seaver, and Alexander Trocchi (New York: Berkeley Medallion Books, 1963), 15.
[35] Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1956), 3. As a 1959 cover story in *Life* magazine noted, the "one enormous difference" of the Beat Generation was that, instead of being "ignored by the general populace" as its bohemian and avant-garde forerunners had, it "has attracted wide public attention and is exerting astonishing influence" with its peculiar brand of "nonpolitical radicalism" (Paul O'Neil, "The Only Rebellion Around," in *Beat Down to Your Soul,* ed. Ann Charters (New York: Penguin, 2001), 424-439, 426, 435).
[36] Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems,* 21; William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (New York: Black Cat, 1966), 44. Surveying the eruption of the counterculture a decade later, Burroughs—prompted by Kerouac's early death—traced its genesis to *On the Road,* his late friend's bestseller. Having produced "a dream that was taken up by a generation," he wrote, "Woodstock rises from [Kerouac's] pages" (Burroughs, *Word Virus* (New York: Grove, 2000), 324).

Channeling the abandonment of "fixed" forms in view of which Antonin Artaud inveighed against "the formal screen we interpose between ourselves and the public," this unscripted theatrical performance prefigured "the blurring of art and life" in later Happenings.[37] Like earlier Dada exhibitions that supplied visitors with weapons to destroy the art they hated, these experiments broke down the barriers between artist, artwork/performance, and aesthetic reception by hailing co-artists in place of passive recipients, thereby supplanting the role of detached spectator with an open horizon of spontaneous participation. In this way, the avant-garde attack on autonomous art took aim at the division of labor itself, to which it responded with attempts supersede the separation between production and consumption.

In the realm of literature, Tristan Tzara and André Breton had pursued this open end by crafting their texts on Dada and automatic writing as recipes, hence texts that call acts of creation into being.[38] Among postwar Beats, this participatory horizon returned most explicitly in the cut-up method championed by William Burroughs. Rather than mining the recesses of the unconscious or channeling the flow of conversation, the cut-up method—modeled after film editing and collage art—called for cutting, rearranging, and splicing together words from existing texts in virtually infinite variations. The syntactical play and contingency thereby unleashed streamlined the revolt against rational design as a ready-made practice of upending the fixing power of "*the word,*" or logos itself.[39] Echoing

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[37] Antonin Artaud, "No More Masterpieces," *The Theater and Its Double,* trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 75-76 (Artaud's essay circulated widely in the 1960s, including in the *Writers in Revolt* anthology cited above); Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2003).
[38] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 2007 [1984]), 53.
[39] William Burroughs, *Nova Express: The Restored Text* (New York: Grove Press, 2014), 2.

the Dada dictum that "Poetry is for everyone" (Tzara), Burroughs proclaimed, "Cut-ups are for everyone. … Cut the words and see how they fall."[40]

By the mid-1960s though, the diffusion of electronic media seemed increasingly (for neither the first nor last time) to point beyond the word-dominated world to which the cut-up method reacted. Echoing McLuhanite media prophecies of the time, Burroughs himself pronounced the impending expiration of the word-based "way of doing things."[41] In perhaps the most notable response to this expectation, novelist Ken Kesey gave new meaning to Burroughs' injunction to "cut the words" by abandoning writing altogether for the electronic frontier. Why be "a seismograph," Kesey resolved, when you can be "a lightning rod."[42] Following conspicuously on the Beat path, Kesey and his circle of collaborators (the "Merry Pranksters") set out on the road in 1964 to convene various cross-media experiments in spontaneous self-creation. Instead of gathering literary material, they compiled film and audio to be incorporated into a feature-length celebration of aesthetic revolt. The transition from production to post-production never quite panned out, however, and instead of finishing and releasing a final product, the group leaned into their intransitive mode of aesthetic creation. This embrace of open-ended audio-visual experimentation culminated with their famed "Acid Tests," where lights, projectors, and LSD joined live Grateful Dead sets in cities across the West Coast. Ultimately, they came to view these events as the true "Prankster movie": living audio-visual experiences in which

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[40] Burroughs, "The Cut-Up Method of Brion Gysin" William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 29-34, 31-32.
[41] Burroughs, "Interview with William Burroughs" (1966), in William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 1-8, 3.
[42] Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test,* New York: Bantam Books, 1999, 8.

attendees actively participated, rather than being "separated into entertainers and customers." Beyond reinventing the bohemian art of the party, the "lightning" of collective creation unleashed at these events—in which performance and audience merged in "one experience, with all the senses opened wide, words, music, lights, sounds, touch"—heralded the Dionysian spirit of the counterculture.[43]

The Pranksters' aesthetic experiments coincided with a broader revitalization of the avant-garde's ongoing Reformation of the modern religion of art in the 1960s. Among countless others, groups and movements like the Situationists, the Happenings, Fluxus, and the Yippies set forth in various ways to overcome—as Protestants did the wall between clergy and laity—the separation between performance and audience, production and consumption, art and life. Repackaging the radical insight distilled in Cage's blank score, Abbie Hoffman described the media crack that the Yippies exploited as a "blank space."[44] Attempting to disrupt the passive spectatorship and predetermined structure of broadcast programming, the Yippies sought to call upon the young to interpolate themselves into this blank space by participating in a "festival of life in the streets and parks throughout the world"[45]—and, in the process, spontaneously create the televisual spectacle that (as their chant in Chicago famously declared) the whole world is watching.[46]

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[43] Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test,* 232, 8.
[44] Abbie Hoffman*, Revolution for the Hell of It* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005), 183. He outlines the media strategy for producing "mass participation" in the Yippie myth at 81-82.
[45] Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, "Yippie Manifesto" (1968). Accessed on dpya.org.
[46] Here, at last, was the fulfillment of the spectator's latent "ambition to occupy a central place in the stream of world events" (Sigmund Freud, "Psychopathetic Characters on the Stage," *The Tulane Drama Review* 4, no. 3 (March 1960): 144-148, 144). Hence Allan Bloom's verdict on the sixties as "the first revolution made for TV. They were real because they could see themselves on television. All the world had become a stage, and they were playing leads" (Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 328). See Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is*

Not for nothing did the Yippies think to show up outside the opening of the MoMA's 1968 retrospective on "Dada, Surrealism, and their Heritage" (held from March to June): while the exhibition catalogue contemplated the "typically Dadaist desire to fuse art and life," the Yippies proclaimed the true heirs of Dada and Surrealism alive in the streets.[47] As the following month revealed, this heritage was nowhere more alive than in the streets of Paris, which saw the contagion-like spread of Situationist-inspired actions in May 1968. A self-proclaimed sublation of Dada and Surrealism, Situationism ushered in the broader zeitgeist by joining a critique of the postwar social structure to a utopian vision of self-creation where all activities of life blend "into a single but infinitely diversified flow" in which "[p]roduction and consumption"—"previously separated"—"will merge and be superseded" by the "creative" activity of individuals who spontaneously make "their own lives" and thus "continually reinvent their own unique fulfillment" beyond institutional mediation.[48]

All told, the iterations of aesthetic revolt that came to a head in the sixties—exemplified by experiments in spontaneous self-creation across different media—did more than register disaffection with the postwar social structure. They modeled an alternative to

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Watching (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980) and Michael Szalay, "New Left Melancholia, or Paul Potter Swallows Television," *A New Insurgency: The Port Huron Statement and Its Times*, ed. Howard Brick and Gregory Parker (Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, 2015), 417-435.

[47] William S. Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism, and their Heritage* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968), 53. Following the lead of the San Francisco Mime Troupe and other practitioners of guerilla theater, the Yippies realized Artaud's vision of taking the stage to the streets. Harold Rosenberg later noted the exhibit's providential coincidence with May 1968 in Paris: "At the very moment when the [MoMA] was presenting 'Dada, Surrealism and Its [sic] Heritage,' Surrealism as a radical movement had come to life in the streets" (Harold Rosenberg, "Surrealism in the Streets," *The De-definition of Art* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1982), 49-54, 52).

[48] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle,* §191; Debord and Pierre Canjuers, "Preliminaries toward Defining a Unitary Revolutionary Program" (1960), *Situationist International Anthology,* ed. and trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 305-310, 309.

the organizations and institutions much cherished by the prior era of social-democratic theory and practice. Where the latter had set out to replace "the free action of individual wills" with the unified political will enshrined in forms of "organized control," the bearers of aesthetic revolt sought precisely to liberate the free action of individual wills from the strictures of rationalized social organization.[49] Abandoning the political "endeavor consciously to shape our future" (Hayek), those who adopted what Herbert Marcuse called the "aesthetic ethos" embraced contingency in place of institutionalized rationality, participating in open-ended projects that dispersed control, and ultimately, prefigured the spontaneous order in which the social life-world would be remade.

Taxis and *Kosmos*

For Hayek, the primary evil confronting the twentieth century consisted of attempts to direct the economy toward conscious political ends. Under the ominous heading of the "road the serfdom," Hayek opposed precisely what Karl Polanyi welcomed in *The Great Transformation* (1944) as the development of "powerful institutions designed to check the action of the market" through various socially protective policies and measures.[50] Or what Barbara Wootton, one of Hayek's fiercest intellectual antagonists in the 1940s, described as the dawn of "freedom under planning" secured through "the conscious and deliberate" determination of "economic priorities" within various public bodies. For Wootton, these

[49] Franklin Delano Roosevelt, quoted in Alan Greenspan and Adrian Wooldridge, *Capitalism in America: A History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018), 252.
[50] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon, 1944), 76. Polanyi's book shared its year of publication with *The Road to Serfdom*.

institutional mediations introduced a degree of overarching design and purposiveness into the economy, supplementing the spontaneous or "unpremeditated" nature of market results with goal-oriented interventions in service to social welfare (much to the chagrin of "fanatical admirers of the market" like Hayek).[51]

Hayek spent the better part of his intellectual life crafting arguments against these purposive-rational trends. By the end of his career, he came to view all products of human history in analogy with evolution, as an inheritance of institutions "we never made."[52] For Hayek, then—as, in part, for Marx—capitalism developed spontaneously. Yet Marx believed human knowledge might advance from spontaneity to conscious control—a horizon he shared, broadly speaking, with thinkers ranging from Einstein to Bertrand Russell, the latter having identified the arrival of a "fully scientific" society as one that "has been created deliberately with a certain structure to fulfill certain purposes."[53] Hayek, by contrast, maintained that economic activity could only be made amenable to overarching rational design at the expense of political tyranny and economic stagnation. On his view, the tragedy of reason qua purposive economic design lies in the fact that it transposes conscious "will"—"the fatal conceit of modern intellectual rationalism"—onto an otherwise spontaneous order.[54] In the process, rational economic design subordinates the market order's plurality of wills and purposes to a single overarching will.

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[51] Barbara Wootton, *Freedom under Planning* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1945), 6, 141, 7. Wootton's book is heavily in dialogue with Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, which she read in manuscript form prior to its publication.
[52] Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988), 14. Compare to Marx, who distinguishes human history from "natural history" (evolution) on the grounds that "we have made the former" (*Capital*, 493).
[53] Quoted in Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit,* 59.
[54] Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit,* 49.

By midcentury, this overarching will permeated national economies in the form of purposive social policy and legislation crafted in the name of the common good, public interest, or general social welfare. Hayek responded by taking aim at political will itself as a ruse of centralized control that preys on an atavistic longing for "'solidarity'" to which intellectuals especially are prone.[55] Over against Rousseau's "general will," Hegel's "universal will," and their socialist, populist, and nationalist successors, Hayek liked to quote Carl Menger's remark to the effect that the most important institutions "come into being without a *common will* directed towards establishing them."[56] Rather than serving "the fictitious will of the people," then, the proper role of the state is to uphold a legal framework of general rules (i.e. abstracted from any substantive purposes or outcomes) in which to safeguard the market from "the dangers of 'rational' interference with spontaneous order."[57] Or in other words: in sacred deference to the evolutionary insight that "order generated without design can far outstrip plans men consciously contrive," the neoliberal market-state must protect markets from politics.[58]

The most stirring dimension of Hayek's argument for spontaneous order remains his epistemic critique of overarching rational design. The plurality of wills and purposes at play in the market have not only their own interests, argued Hayek, but also their own knowledge. What's more, he argued that the dispersed and concrete nature of this knowledge—spread as it is across society and in constant flux owing to changing local conditions—is simply not amenable to the generalization required for overarching rational

[55] Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit,* 36.
[56] Quoted in Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit,* 3.
[57] Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit,* 49, 37.
[58] Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit,* 8.

design. Lacking omniscience, any public body tasked with central control inevitably confronts the problem that it cannot possibly possess the totality of particular knowledge present in society at a given moment; whereas it is precisely the signaling function of the market, Hayek insists, that solves this problem, by reducing the otherwise irreducibly local and concrete knowledge that market actors utilize to quantities (prices) to which other market actors then respond.

As Hayek sees it, it is the virtue of the market that such knowledge aggregation cum information processing obtains without conscious coordination. In his most theoretically developed text, Hayek sets out the key to his thinking in the opposition between *taxis* (rational or "made order") and *kosmos* (spontaneous or "grown order").[59] Sans *taxis,* the *kosmos* of the market unfurls spontaneously, or "forms of itself," from the dispersed knowledge and activity of many wills and purposes.[60] It is from this that we get what Philip Mirowski has described as the core of the neoliberal worldview: the "epistemic superiority of the market in all things"—or, as it has popularly come to be known, the wisdom of crowds.[61]

If it is difficult to evoke the extent to which our world has been remade in the image of Hayekian *kosmos* in recent decades, this is partly because it has become the air we breathe. And here, it is worth pointing out that the tension embedded in this characterization ("remade in the image of *kosmos"*) is indicative of an abiding tension within the neoliberal project itself, at the level of statecraft and beyond, namely, "made

[59] Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty, Volume 1: Rules and Order* (London: Routledge, 1982), 35-37.
[60] Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit,* 20.
[61] Philip Mirowski, "Hell Is Truth Seen Too Late," *boundary 2* 46, no. 1 (Feb 2019): 1-53, 46.

order" made in deference to spontaneous order. The irresistible example to cite in this connection is perhaps Wikipedia, whose founder took inspiration from Hayek in *designing* a platform on which knowledge could *spontaneously* self-organize.[62] The same principle of self-organization is of course pervasive online via "social media." In addition to Hayekian *kosmos* though, the dawn of Web 2.0 is equally the fulfillment of the desire to unleash spontaneous self-creation at play in the spirit of aesthetic revolt. In effect, variations on Cage's blank score proliferate in the form of digital platforms. We call the noise from the audience "user-generated content"—"trending" outbursts of which operate as virtual market signals.[63]

It goes without saying that although opposition to institutionalized social and political control is common both to neoliberal theory and to aesthetic experiments in spontaneity, the latter were not convened with a view toward "the emancipation of *market forces* from social and political control."[64] But herein lies the element of tragedy: without knowing or intending it, the aesthetics of spontaneity prefigured the neoliberal utopia of a society modeled after the "spontaneous order" of the market. Distilled in slogan form in the counterculture's ethos of everybody "doing their own thing," the spirit of spontaneous self-

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[62] Mirowski, "Postface: Defining Neoliberalism," *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*, 423.
[63] To be sure, random coughs differ from activity on self-organizing platforms. In the case of the latter, intention—the difference between blinking and winking—comes into play. Nonetheless, the blank score looks forward to the latter by dramatizing the negation of the overarching intentionality inscribed in rationalized social structures that attempt to realize determinant ends through purposive design. By contrast, the intentionality at play in self-organizing platforms is distributed across participants within networks endowed with a kind of purposive purposelessness—the key to social order having become the provision of frames for spontaneous activity.
[64] John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 208. Emphasis mine.

creation found its preeminent aesthetic model in jazz improvisation. Unlike the members of an orchestra, who subordinate their activity to the overarching "will" or *taxis* of the score and conductor, the dispersal of creative wills at play in jazz performances generate a musical *kosmos*—the emergent results of which, like those of the market, "are unpredictable and on the whole different from those which anyone has … deliberately aimed at."[65]

Commenting on the radical character of jazz improvisation in 1980, anthropologist John Szwed claimed that "no political system has yet been devised with social principles which reward maximal individualism within the framework of spontaneous egalitarian interaction."[66] Like others though, Szwed failed to think through the political implications of a society modeled after spontaneous self-creation—a political project, incidentally, that was very much in motion by 1980. To state the obvious, we know it better today as the neoliberal order. It was undoubtedly this order that Bill Clinton had in mind when reflecting on one of his lifelong passions: "Jazz is about creativity within a certain order. It's made for a people that are creative and entrepreneurial."[67]

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[65] Hayek, "Competition as a Discovery Procedure," *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, and the History of Ideas* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978), 180.
[66] John Szwed, "Josef Skvorecky and the Tradition of Jazz Literature," *World Literature Today* 54, no. 4 (Autumn 1980): 588. Quoted in Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity,* 191.
[67] Quoted in Alfonso W. Hawkins Jr., *The Jazz Trope: A Theory of African American Literary and Vernacular Culture* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), vi.

The Sound and the Theory

So far, I have treated the aesthetics of spontaneity and neoliberal theory as separate developments within a broader intellectual countercurrent. What is "tragic" about the former, I suggested, is the way it unwittingly plays into the latter's not-so-invisible hand. Hayek, for his part, was equally unaware of any such synergy. Overlooking the aesthetic quest for spontaneity, he lamented that writers and artists remained under the spell of willful or "constructivist rationalism."[68] In Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music,* however, I will argue that the two together in the run-up to the neoliberal policy turn.

A somewhat late entry to the wave of "French Nietzscheanism" that came to prominence in the late 1960s and 1970s, Attali's *Noise* carries the Dionysian spirit of the late '60s into the crisis-torn period of interregnum in the late '70s, from which it projects a utopian future modeled after aesthetic freedom.[69] In doing so, *Noise*'s stakes are considerably raised by its author's relation to political power. A leading intellectual within the newly formed Socialist Party in France, Attali was about as close to "midwife's assistant" (to recall Schumpeter's image) as one can be to institutional change. As François Mitterrand's primary economic advisor in the early 1980s, Attali went on to oversee nothing less than the dawn of "no alternative" in France, that is, the shift to neoliberal

[68] Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit,* 49.
[69] Alan D. Schrift, "French Nietzscheanism," *The History of Continental Philosophy,* Vol. 6, ed. Alan D. Schrift (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010), 19-46, 29, 20). On Nietzsche as the primary source of the aestheticist bent of poststructuralist thought, see also Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley, U of California P, 1985).

economic policy.[70] Unlike the purely theoretical engagement with neoliberal theory we find in Michel Foucault, then, we encounter in Attali a bridge between theory and policy.[71] Or in Alvin Toffler's redundant phrase: "an intellectual idea-man" poised to put "ideas into action."[72] Of course, Mitterrand's rise to power was by no means guaranteed in the late 1970s. Nonetheless, *Noise* is legible as an agenda-setting text that mobilizes the anti-institutional spirit of aesthetic revolt as a resource with which to respond to the economic crisis of the 1970s. In the process, *Noise* prefigures the neoliberal turn precisely in projecting a future in which the Dionysian noise of spontaneous self-creators supplants the postwar social structure.

To motivate the arrival of such a utopia, Attali wrenches together a kind of sonic Hegelianism in which music provides privileged access to the movements of history and political economy. Thus, while a collaborator in the intellectual "denigration of vision," Attali nonetheless departs from his poststructuralist contemporaries in elevating sound

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[70] Regarding the publicity campaign unleashed by the Socialist government to legitimize the "U-Turn" toward deflationary economic policy in 1983, Jean-Gabriel Bliek and Alan Parguez remark: "Even Margaret Thatcher did not go quite so far in her propagandistic fever" to "convince people that there was no alternative" ("Mitterrand's Turn to Conservative Economics: A Revisionist History," *Challenge* 51, no. 2 (March-April 2008), 97-109, 106-107). Eric Hobsbawm memorably records the neoliberal turn in "Socialist" France as "austerity with a human face" (*The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 411). But where Hobsbawm assumed Socialist resistance in France, recent research suggests that, on the contrary, the infusion of "experts" into the bourgeoning Socialist Party in the 1970s produced advisors (like Attali, Mitterrand's "primary economic advisor") "ideologically and culturally ready to apply policies inspired by neoliberalism" when Mitterrand came to power (Mathieu Fulla, "The 'Economist' in Politics: French Socialist Experts of the 1970s," *Revue Française de Science Politique* (English Edition) 66, no. 5 (2016): 65-101, 73, 91-92).

[71] On Foucault's relation to neoliberal theory, see Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (London: Verso, 2013), 94-101, and Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent (eds), *Foucault and Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016).

[72] Alvin Tofflin, Foreword to Attali, *Millennium*: *Winners and Losers in the Coming World Order* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1992), x.

rather than text or discourse, calling our attention to a world that is not for "beholding" but "hearing," "not legible, but audible."[73] If knowledge is retrospective, music—or so Attali proclaims—is "prophecy": a "herald of the future."[74] Giving new meaning to Hegel's "noisy din of world history," Attali spends much of *Noise* reconstructing an aural world-spirit in which transformation-heralding ruptures within successive codes of music overtake the dialectical movement of the concept as the key to history.[75] Finally, though, the payoff of Attali's music-as-herald conceit is not historical: it is the future society made perceptible in the present. Here, Attali takes the eruption of "new noise" within the postwar social structure (the regime of "repetition," in his terms) to herald the "freedom" of "a new political and cultural order" (an emergent order composed spontaneously of noise, or "composition").[76]

Attali holds the defining feature of the regime of repetition to be the silence of the listener—a condition imposed by unilateral broadcast media, the private consumption of cultural commodities, and bureaucratic organization. In a word, the regime of repetition is one of monologue: an ongoing "monologue of organizations" in which music itself "becomes a monologue" or else "a disguise for the monologue of power."[77] Broadly rehearsing critiques of the postwar social structure, Attali's account of repetition recalls, in particular, Guy Debord's account of the "passivity" induced by the spectacle society, with its

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[73] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994); Attali, *Noise*, 3
[74] Attali, *Noise*, 11.
[75] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 2004), 37. Translation altered.
[76] Attali, *Noise,* 20, 19.
[77] Attali, *Noise*, 88, 9.

"laudatory monologue" of "unilateral" communication.[78] The figure of "repetition" itself repeats a familiar motif, namely, Debord's critique of the spectacle society's "expanded repetition of the same."[79] Elsewhere describing his project as "apologia for creation rather than defense of the spectacle," Attali signaled this influence.[80] For his part though, Attali recognized that in critiquing "repetition" he was taking aim at rational economic design itself—a point to which we shortly return.[81]

Beyond the postwar social structure, the revelation toward which *Noise* leads is the horizon of "composition." Here too—herald conceit notwithstanding—Attali harkens back to the Situationists. Indeed, just as the latter envisioned a utopia of self-creation where "[p]roduction and consumption" merge in a creative flow in which individuals are free to make "their own lives" beyond institutional mediation, so Attali sets out composition as an open-ended creative process in which "production melds with consumption" to become "production-consumption."[82] The sonic bent of Attali's utopia echoes still more closely the "historical dialectic" to which Roland Barthes links the dawn of "musica practica": the

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[78] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Red & Black, 1977), §13, §24, §42.
[79] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle,* §156. As former Situationist Daniel Blanchard comments, the freedom of aesthetic play protects against "the most repugnant kind of comfort: repetition—death in disguise in the eyes of Debord" ("Debord in the Resounding Cataract of Time," *Revolutionary Romanticism,* ed. Max Blechman (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1999), 223-236, 230). Debord's animus toward repetition is linked to his Feuerbachian insistence on immediacy, which lead him to distrust symbolization or mediation of any kind as culprits of "separation." For a critique of Debord's "fantasy of immediacy," see Régis Debray, "Remarks on the Spectacle," *New Left Review* 214 (November-December 1995): 134-141.
[80] Attali, "Interview with Jacques Attali," 18.
[81] The rationality of economic planning is predicated on repetition, i.e., an economy that is "correctly foreseen and repeats itself" in accord with plans (Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy,* 178).
[82] Attali, *Noise,* 144.

anticipated eclipse of mere listening by the return of a participatory music that replays the avant-garde dream of superseding the separation of artist and audience.[83]

Attali's primary sonic predecessor is of course Nietzsche. From the outset, Attali's turn to the aural suggests the "desire to go beyond looking" that drives the early Nietzsche's Dionysian interpretation of the birth of tragedy.[84] But where Nietzsche turned to Wagner's music as "the earthquake through which" "Dionysian power" had "finally liberated itself" in the modern world, Attali's herald is the eruption of noise in free jazz—the one concrete example of "composition" he provides.[85] In general, though, Attali's account of composition repackages the anti-institutional spirit of aesthetic revolt seen above in iterations of spontaneous self-creation. In Attali's terms, the process of composition, rather than operating within an established code, "creates its own" as it goes.[86] In superseding the vertically imposed codes of all previous social structures, the freedom of composition, Attali declares, is history's "inevitable result": a terminal model of sociality, released from the grip of "domination" "by organization" under repetition, in which we actively "create our own relation with the world" and with others in makeshift

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[83] Roland Barthes, "Musica Practica," *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Fontana Press, 1977), 149-154. Walter Benjamin evoked this dream as overcoming "the opposition between the musicians and the listeners," "lead[ing] consumers to production," and "making co-workers out of readers or spectators" ("The Author as Producer," *New Left Review* 62 (July-August 1970): 83-96, 91, 93). On the line of influence from Brecht and Benjamin to Barthes and Attali, see Georgina Born, "Modern Music Culture: On Shock, Pop, and Synthesis," *New Formations* 2 (Summer 1987): 51-78, 66.
[84] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings,* trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2006), 112.
[85] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 327-328.
[86] Attali, *Noise,* 135.

projects and improvised arrangements—*compositions*—beyond "the institutions and customary sites of political conflict."[87]

The aesthetic conception of freedom at play here is a hallmark of poststructuralist theory. Emerging from the destruction of stable codes, the horizon of composition that bursts forth in *Noise* ("participation in collective play," "an ongoing quest for new, immediate communication, without ritual and always unstable") is the sonic expression of "the Nietzschean *affirmation*" to which Jacques Derrida gestures in the wake of his deconstruction of linguistic structure ("the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation").[88] Yet it is Gilles Deleuze's formulation of aesthetic freedom that leaves the surest mark on *Noise* as the likely source of Attali's terminological preference of "composition" over, say, "improvisation." Indeed, the stakes of the freedom that Attali invests in composition, set against the imposed structure of repetition, spring forth with particular clarity in the conceptual opposition that Deleuze stages in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (1970) between the vertical structure of the "plan of organization" and the "plane of immanence" on which the "process of composition" unfolds.[89]

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[87] Attali, *Noise,* 134, 121, 135, 133.
[88] Attali, *Noise,* 141; Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2005), 351-370, 369. Cf. the "eternal circulation" of Nietzsche's "Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction" (§1041 in *The Will to Power,* trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), 536).
[89] See the last chapter, "Spinoza and Us," in Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 122-130.

In keeping with his usual target, Deleuze identifies the former with Hegel; the latter with his "affective reading" of Spinoza. Translated into socio-political terms, the plan of organization stands for the postwar social structure. In defining the world systematically in terms of organs and functions, the plan of organization's key characteristic is the vertical "[d]evelopment of forms and the formation of subjects." Deleuze contrasts this with the "process of composition," which unfurls of its own accord on the "plane of immanence": instead of forms, it involves "only relations of velocity between infinitesimal particles"; and instead of subjects, "only individuating affective states of an anonymous force." As music, the plan of organization is liable to define parts in advance within a determinant role structure and arrangement.[90] By contrast, the process of composition is spontaneous: it consists of improvised jam sessions that contributors join into and depart from at will. Like Attali after him, for whom composition offers not only a new musical practice but a model of social life generally, Deleuze insists that the process of composition "is not just a matter of music, but of how to live."[91] Here though, we should note the alternative vocabulary in which we might articulate the shift that Deleuze tacitly calls for in the social life of the political animal—the shift, that is, from the determinant structure of the "plan of organization" to the "anonymous force" of composition. To the same effect, we might invoke the Hayekian opposition between rational design and spontaneous order, *taxis* and *kosmos.*

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[90] Cf. Plato's normative musical ideal, the aim of which is "good character that has developed in accordance with an intelligent plan" (*Republic* 400e).
[91] Deleuze, *Spinoza,* 128, 123.

In the crisis-torn context of the late 1970s, Attali's critique of the former (under the heading of "repetition") with a view toward unleashing the latter ("composition") stages the convergence of aesthetic revolt and neoliberal theory. In a telling moment, Attali goes on to identify one of the primary targets of his critique of repetition in the "babble" of Keynesianism.[92] Which makes sense when we consider the economist to whom Attali looked as a lodestar: namely, Hayek.[93] In this light, it is no surprise that Attali marshals his critique of repetition to disavow the postwar policy regime in which "the State," he charges, "confus[es] well-being with the production of demand" (read: Keynesian management).[94] Having not yet arrived at Thatcher's "no alternative" though, he raises "two possible strategies" when confronting the economic crisis of the 1970s directly: it "can either be contained" via "the collective appropriation of the means of producing supply and demand," or else a more creatively-destructive path can be "followed through to the end so a new social order may arise."[95] And since the former means continuing to organize society, he condemns it as a mere "economistic readjustment" of repetition, even "reactionary socialism"; whereas the latter promises to allow something new to arise—something that he claims can already be heard beyond repetition: composition. As if to redouble his debt to Deleuze, the course that Attali charts here tacitly restages the "revolutionary path"

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[92] Attali, *Noise*, 121, 131. "Keynesianism" had long become metonymic for the postwar social structure; attacking the latter "meant attacking Keynesian ideas" (Mark Blyth, *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2002), 126).
[93] Jean-Gabriel Bliek and Alain Parguez comment: "Looking closely at his writings, it becomes obvious that Attali had never been a Keynesian. … From his perspective, Hayek was a future-minded economist describing the evolution of capitalism; Keynes was a backward and outdated thinker" ("Mitterrand's Turn to Conservative Economics: A Revisionist History," *Challenge* 51, no. 2 (March-April 2008): 97-109, 104).
[94] Attali, *Noise,* 146.
[95] Attali, *Noise*, 131.

championed in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972): to forgo institutionalized constraints and pursue without recourse the process of "decoding and deterritorialization" within "the movement of the market," and thus "to 'accelerate the process,' as Nietzsche put it."[96] In this way Deleuze, whose work is nothing if not the culminating self-conceptualization of aesthetic revolt, falls fatefully into that "unhappy role of classical philosophy" in having supplied "apparatuses of power" "with the knowledge which suited them"—in this case, an intellectual of the Party that subsequently presided over "the demolition of the welfare state" in France.[97] Call it tragic. Call it the cunning of aesthetic revolt. (The authors of a textbook on Deleuzian corporate management call it "irony."[98])

In retrospect, it becomes clear what motivates Attali's concepts of repetition and composition—concepts that, following Carl Schmitt, are one with "all political concepts, images, and terms" in having arisen with "a polemical meaning" "bound to a concrete situation."[99] Like Schmitt's work, Attali's *Noise* is shaped by a period of crisis. But whereas the future Nazi jurist's work responds to a critical moment for the nation-state, Attali's *Noise* stands as a herald of what Philip Bobbitt has since termed the emergent market-

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[96] Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000), 239-240.
[97] Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Colombia UP, 2007), 88; Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of our Time*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Polity, 1998), 6. Bourdieu reflected: "If the Socialists had simply not been as socialist as they claimed, that would not shock anyone … [M]ore surprising is that they should have done so much to undermine the public interest … with all kinds of measures and policies … aimed at liquidating the gains of the welfare state" (2-3).
[98] Nicholas Ind and Rune Bjerke, *Branding Governance* (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley and Sons, 2007), 8.
[99] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political,* trans. George Schwab (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007), 30.

state.[100] And where the nation-state had "set itself against the unfettered market," grounding its legitimacy on "the promise to better the material welfare of citizens" through collective social structures, it is characteristic of the market-state that Bobbitt is compelled to shift from material outcomes to abstract possibility in identifying its source of legitimacy as the maximization of individual "opportunity."[101] Already in *Noise,* Attali's utopia of composition anticipates this dilemma by projecting a new kind of society—one modeled not on collective social structures, but rather on the aesthetic freedom of spontaneous self-creation.

Before long though, the noisy freedom of composition comes to resemble the "double sense" in which Marx sardonically interprets the freedom of industrial workers: in this case, individuals are free to perpetually compose—creating their own codes, protean identities, and connections to others—at the same time as they are free from the protective cover of collective social structures.[102] In this way, Attali's utopia—no less than the poststructuralist currents it echoes—epitomizes what Wolfgang Streeck has recently

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[100] See Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002). A long-time presidential advisor, Bobbitt is close to Attali's American equivalent (sans Attali's economic training or futurist strain à la Alvin Toffler).

[101] Philip Bobbitt, *Terror and Consent: The Wars for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Anchor, 2008), 86; Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles*, xxvi. Greta R. Kripper observes a persistent problem here: unlike under Keyesnian management, legitimacy or "the basis of consent is no longer clear" in the neoliberal era. She raises the "fatalistic acceptance of market outcomes" as a possible answer, as opposed to outcomes achieved by the human agency invested in policymakers (*Capitalizing on Crisis: The Political Origins of the Rise of Finance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011), 148). Considered in this light, the tragic resonances in Attali's turn to Dionysian noise are not incidental. Consider Attali's definition of liberty, from another book published around the same time: "the acceptance of what is tragic about the human condition" (Attali, *La Parole et l'outil* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975), 244. As quoted in Drott, "Rereading Jacques Attali's *Bruits*," 746).

[102] Marx, *Capital,* Vol. I, 272. Observing that workers are at once free *to* sell their labor-power on the market and free *from* the means to realize their labor-power otherwise, Marx's point is that such freedom is rather un-free. On the neoliberal revival of "freedom *from*," see Jennifer Silva, *Coming up Short: Working-Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Oxford UP, 2013), 14.

identified as the hallmark of "neoliberal ideological narratives," namely, "the exaltation of a life in uncertainty as a life in liberty." It is characteristic of these narratives, Streeck observes, that they "offer a euphemistic reinterpretation of the breakdown of structured order as the arrival of a free society built on individual autonomy, and of de-institutionalization as historical progress out of an empire of necessity into an empire of freedom." In Streeck's portrait of contemporary social life, we find an encapsulation of Attali's utopia of composition in its realized state:

> In the absence of collective institutions, social structures must be devised individually bottom-up … Social life consists of individuals building networks of private connections around themselves, as best they can with the means they happen to have in hand. Person-centered relation-making creates lateral social structures that are voluntary and contract-like, which makes them flexible but perishable, requiring continuous 'networking' to keep them together and adjust them on a current basis to changing circumstances.[103]

Put another way: determinant social structures lapse into so many compositions, as on Deleuze's plane of immanence: flexible connections among volitional atoms, particles contingently merged in makeshift arrangements ever liable to dissolve. Now in a technologically sophisticated manner, across vast digital networks and an international framework ensuring the subordination of politics to market signals, we encounter anew the

[103] Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?*, 46, 41. Cf., Daniel T. Rodgers' account of "Visions of society as a spontaneous, naturally acting array of choices and affinities" as the defining "intellectual production" of our "age of fracture" (*Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011), 264).

inevitable consequence that Karl Polanyi identified with allowing "the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings," namely, "the demolition of society."[104]

Fateful Futures

Perhaps, after all, the life of self-creation is our fate—a successor to the fate that Weber once confronted. Playing on "the birth of tragedy from out of the spirit of music" (Nietzsche), Weber identified the birth of the rational ethos of capitalism from "out of the spirit of Christian asceticism." But having developed from within the "thin cloak" of this-worldly asceticism backed by the spiritual force of the calling, the Puritan's rational way of life set in motion the "monstrous development" of a world ruled over by instrumentally rationalized machine production stripped of any spiritual support. Thereby, "fate decreed that the [thin] cloak should become a shell as hard as steel"—a "steel shell" from which "spirit has fled" (indeed, just as "the spirit of music" had once "flown from tragedy").[105] Like Nietzsche's account of tragedy, Weber's genesis of the spirit of capitalism terminates in its dissolution. But where Nietzsche listened for the rebirth of an aesthetically justified world, Weber gazes soberly at the eclipse of the life that "Puritans *wanted*" by a rationalized social world in which "we, on the other hand, *must*" live and work. This is of course the steel shell against which the spirit of aesthetic revolt *revolts*. A century later though, we might revise

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[104] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation,* 76. Or as Pierre Bourdieu describes the neoliberal project: the "methodical destruction" of "all the collective structures capable of obstructing the logic of the pure market" (Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance*, 95-96).
[105] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism and Other Writings,* trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin, 2002), 120-121; Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 84.

Weber. The bearers of aesthetic revolt *wanted* to escape from rationalized social structures into the life of spontaneous self-creation; we, on the other hand, *must* become entrepreneurial self-creators.

Or must we? The state of interregnum in which we once again find ourselves today—as witness the many morbid symptoms of what has aptly been called "neoliberal order breakdown syndrome"—may yet revive the market-critical vocation that Schumpeter once attributed to intellectuals: a necessary, if hardly sufficient, condition for any large-scale institutional change.[106] For Schumpeter, the source of the critical attitude toward capitalism was finally economic. Because he thought that capitalism would produce far more intellectuals than it could employ, he anticipated a growing pool of educated vectors of political-economic critique. Yet transformations in the postwar economy upended this expectation in dramatic fashion, ushering in an age of intellectual (human, knowledge, cultural, academic) capital alongside the so-called "rise of the creative class."[107] Suppose, however, that a crisis of intellectual overproduction had finally materialized. Suppose we were witnessing it now. To put it in Nietzschean terms, the question for the future might then be whether an Apollonian political left is capable of reemerging to offer an alternative to the spontaneous flows characteristic of the neoliberal age: a politics of building and structure.[108]

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[106] For economic and theoretical analysis of our contemporary interregnum, respectively, see Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?* and Rune Møller Stahl, "Ruling the Interregnum: Politics and Ideology in Nonhegemonic Times," *Politics & Society* 47, no. 3 (2019): 333–360. I borrow this phrase from Alex Hochuli and George Hoare, hosts of the global politics podcast Aufhebunga Bunga
[107] Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). On the connection between the discourse of the "creative economy" and neoliberalism, see Sarah Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2014), 2.
[108] Perhaps in the spirit of what Anna Kornbluh has recently described as "political formalism." See

With this horizon in view, we might look to the utopia that Attali projected from within the interregnum of the 1970s as a negative guide to the future. Shifting from political ideology to the Dionysian noise of self-creators, Attali's turn from the verbal to the sonic portends the eclipse of the political symbolic qua social-democratic legislation that the neoliberal market-state ushers in.[109] Abandoning any political project that would be communicable on the order of language and inscribed within collective social structures, Attali turns elsewhere, as if to revise Wittgenstein: whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must make noise. This is a task to which Nietzschean free spirits are well suited, who after all "are not exactly the most communicative spirits." To be sure though, it is hardly by coincidence that Nietzsche should have set the aesthetic freedom of his self-creators in opposition to those democratic "levelers" he charged with striving to realize "the universal green-pasture happiness of the herd"—or in other words, the political movements that Hayek would have consigned to historical oblivion, a century later, as aberrations of "the socialist century."[110]

Kornbluh, *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

[109] Alongside rational economic design, the underlying target of Attali's critique of "repetition" is the symbolic order itself insofar as it is identified with the compulsion to repeat: "the death drive is only the mask of the symbolic order" (Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–55*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1988), 326). Coincidentally, Søren Kierkegaard appears remarkably apt in this connection when observing that, without repetition, "all of life is dissolved into an empty, meaningless noise" (*Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, trans. M. G. Piety (New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 19). One thinks of descriptions of the disorienting character of "postmodernism," or as John Gray sums up the neoliberal age: "a life of fragments and the proliferation of senseless choices" (*False Dawn,* 38).

[110] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966), 55, 54. For a critical study linking Hayek and Nietzsche, see Corey Robin, "Nietzsche's Marginal Children: On Friedrich Hayek," *The Nation* (May 27, 2013).

If only in retrospect—the owl of Minerva taking flight as ever at dusk—the valorization of indeterminacy in which the spirit of aesthetic revolt terminates must strike us not only as politically inept, but also as profoundly symptomatic of the anarchic state to which neoliberalism abandons the social life-world. Any meaningful left politics of the future will have to confront the fact that the anti-institutional spirit of aesthetic revolt and the life of spontaneous self-creation are not only compatible with the neoliberal order; in many ways, they come closest to constituting the passing era's "dominant ideology."

CHAPTER 3:

"Aesthetic of Chance": *Easy Rider* and the Road to Neoliberal Order

"The macro can only function with the aid of micros. Above a given level of industrial gigantism … productivity begins to decline, and small organizations become more profitable. The search for maximum profit … passes by way of the splintering of production units. […]

Capital aspired to circulate, youth wanted to communicate through the barriers of the past. The imaginary anticipated the real and the law of the heart coincided with the law of efficiency."

–Régis Debray[1]

Introduction

It has been said that the periphery is where the future reveals itself.[2] This was especially true of Hollywood in the late 1960s, provided we lift the adage beyond its ordinary geopolitical register. Overnight, independent production in the Hollywood "periphery" seemed to advance from a backwater, a site of B-movie abjection, to become a vista of renewed relevance, dynamism, and profitability where the Hollywood "core" might discover an alternative to the increasingly bloated, top-heavy studio system. By the late

[1] "A Modest Contribution to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Tenth Anniversary," *New Left Review* I/115, May-June 1979, 48.
[2] While Mark Fisher attributed this phrase to J. G. Ballard, Alex Hochuli has pointed out that this is a misattribution (Alex Hochuli "The Brazilianization of the World," *American Affairs* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2021)).

1960s, the twilight of this system was in sight. Caught up in a cycle of overproduction just as a new generation of moviegoers was revealing preferences to the detriment of the usual Hollywood fare, aging studio executives found themselves pouring money into box office bombs like 20th Century Fox's *Doctor Dolittle* (1967) and Universal's *Sweet Charity* (1969), among other big-budget family comedies, musicals, and historical epics equally out of touch with the times. As Paul E. Steiger bluntly reported in a front-page story for the *Los Angeles Times* in late 1969, "The movie industry is financially sick."[3] Describing "the industry's struggle to adapt itself to a new set of economic and artistic realities," Steiger linked "the rise of the 'youth'-oriented picture" to the impending "decline of the studio as the fountainhead of feature film making." In 1969 alone, he noted, Paramount, MGM, and 20th Century Fox had reportedly lost over $50 million. Meanwhile, *Easy Rider* (1969), a low-budget road movie made by a couple of countercultural rebels outside of Hollywood's "anachronistic studio production system" (as Steiger described it) was on track to surpass that figure in box office earnings.

Directed by Dennis Hopper, produced by Peter Fonda, and starring both, *Easy Rider* was not the first in the wave of American cinema from the late 1960s to the late 1970s that has since come to be known as the New Hollywood. That honor generally goes to *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and *The Graduate* (1967). Yet *Easy Rider*'s unexpected success as an independent production marked a watershed in the demise of the classical Hollywood studio system, earning it a reputation among some as "the first *real* New Hollywood

[3] Paul E. Steiger, "Movie Makers No Longer Sure What Sparkle Is," *Los Angeles Times* (November 17, 1969). The following year, Steiger co-authored *The '70s Crash and How to Survive It* (1970), a presciently titled book if there ever were one.

picture."[4] Memorialized by *Time* magazine in early 1970 as "the little movie that killed the big picture,"[5] *Easy Rider*—part black swan, part flash in the pan—signaled a new horizon of independent cinematic possibility. Among those to take note of this at the time was Jim Morrison, who digressed at one point during a 1970 interview with Howard Smith on the topic of *Easy Rider*'s "break[ing] precedents all over the place." Citing figures that had just been published in the Hollywood trade paper *Daily Variety* the previous day (viz., that "*Easy Rider* was made for about $385,000" with an "estimated gross" of "50 to 60 million"), Morrison, who himself harbored dreams of breaking on through in Hollywood, presciently judged that—as "the first" "independent low-budget feature to really clean up in the old marketplace"—*Easy Rider's* success was not only "unusual" but would inevitably "open the scene up for a lot of people" at a time when the business-as-usual was struggling.[6]

To be sure, the decline of the studio system was a long time in coming—a process going back to the landmark Paramount decision of 1948 in which the Supreme Court ordered studios out of exhibition. As Roger Corman later noted, "The breakup of the studios' 'vertical' monopoly over production-distribution-exhibition in the late 1940s gradually opened up the field to independents."[7] Corman, of all people, would know. It was in the periphery of this opening field that his career had unfolded since the mid-1950s as a leading director and producer of the kind of low-budget B-movies out of which *Easy Rider* itself later grew (as we will see below). Financially troubled studios, for their part, had

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[4] Peter Biskind, "Remembering Producer Bert Schneider: Father of the New Hollywood Movement," *Vanity Fair* (December 16, 2011). Emphasis mine.
[5] "Show Business: The Flying Fondas and How They Grew," *Time* (Feb. 16, 1970).
[6] Jim Morrison, "The Village Voice" Interview with Howard Smith (1970), in *The Lizard King: The Essential Jim Morrison*, ed. Jerry Hopkins (London: Plexus, 2006), 283-299, 290.
[7] Roger Corman with Jim Jerome, *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime* (New York: De Capo Press, 1998), viii.

already begun to be swallowed up by conglomerates by the late 1960s: first Universal in 1962 and then Paramount five years later. Still, it is not for nothing that *Easy Rider*, with its incredibly timely release and success amid growing uncertainty in the industry, came to be seen as pivotal. As Peter Biskind proclaims in his history of New Hollywood, *Easy Rider's* "impact" on "the industry as a whole" "was no less than seismic."[8] No less forcefully, it has elsewhere been described as "the definitive fracture point in the Hollywood studio system"[9]; the film that "broke the mould of Hollywood studio production" and "launch[ed] a new wave of radical and experimental American cinema"[10]; the film, in short, that "changed the way films were made in Hollywood."[11] As director Paul Schrader later recalled, "[T]he whole Hollywood establishment had to stop and recess because at the exact same time" that "Hollywood had just sunk millions into several very big clinkers," "here comes this film making a fortune; it changed the industry."[12]

During the reign of the studio system that lasted from the late 1920s to the late 1960s, working in Hollywood had been more military barracks than theatrical troupe. Mirroring the broader tendency toward vertical integration in the corporation-dominated, nationally integrated industrial economy of the early twentieth century, major Hollywood studios internalized transaction costs and increased their productive and organizational capacity by owning and rationally coordinating every stage of cinematic production,

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[8] Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-and-Rock'n'Roll Generation Saved Hollywood* (New York: Touchstone, 1998), 74.
[9] Richard Corliss: "Dennis Hopper: The Easy Rider's Gone," *TIME,* TIME.com (May 29, 2010).
[10] See the back cover of Lee Hill's monograph on *Easy Rider* for the British Film Institute; Lee Hill, *Easy Rider* (London: BFI Publishing, 1996).
[11] Peter Fonda, "Fond Farewells: Dennis Hopper," *TIME Magazine, TIME.com* (May 10, 2010).
[12] Quoted in Steven Bingen with Alan Dunn, *Easy Rider: 50 years Looking for America* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2020), 81.

distribution, and (until the Paramount decision) exhibition. Making feature films in this environment was the work of specialized functionaries within the vast bureaucratic machinery of one of the major studios, where producers and production managers oversaw the production of pictures within production units made up of personnel under long-term contract with the studio. Applying "scientific management"—the version of centralized economic planning pioneered by American corporations—to the production of motion pictures was a resource- and capital-intensive prospect. Running fully operational studio lots, complete with soundstages, laboratories, and other facilitates brimming with cutting-edge equipment, all operated by an army of workers on payroll, carried immense costs. This was not a problem in the halcyon days of Hollywood's "Golden Age" when the cinema stood unrivaled as the era's primary leisure activity, and it remained viable well into the 1960s, even amid growing competition from television, with unprecedented returns on box office hits like *The Sound of Music* (1965) and *Doctor Zhivago* (1965). Then, as if to offer a window into the future—a sneak preview, in this case, of the broader economic crisis that would take hold as the postwar boom economy came to an end—Hollywood profits plummeted, and between 1969 and 1972, the major studios recorded losses in excess of $500 million.

On one level, the late 1960s marks the moment at which studios reckoned with the economic implications of the era's "generation gap." Confronted with their inability "to market films for the youth culture," studios "turned to new young filmmakers to figure it out for them."[13] But the ways in which the industry was forced to change went beyond

[13] Edward Norton, quoted in Peter Biskind, *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance, and the Rise of Independent Film* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 8.

installing a new generation of talent within existing organizational charts. In a sense, the crisis of overproduction in the late 1960s picked up where the Paramount decision had left off two decades earlier. Having previously been decoupled from vertically integrated studio exhibition, majors were now forced to modify the system of vertically organized studio production. Often under pressure from banks, studio executives responded to declining returns by cutting movie budgets, among other expenditures, and reassessing the utility of operating studio lots at full capacity—until then highly illiquid long-term fixed capital investments. To unlock a new revenue stream, studios started renting out lot space to independent production companies for the first time in the late 1960s. Simultaneously, they began establishing relationships with independent production companies to acquire new titles, and otherwise emulated independents by setting up their own low-budget, semi-autonomous subsidiaries. In doing so, studios began to abandon the centralized studio mode of production and focus on financing and distribution. United Artists offered a model here. Rather than owning its own studio and making its own films, United Artists had long specialized in financing, marketing, and distributing films made by independent production companies. As an object lesson in the potential payoff of adopting this strategy, *Easy Rider*—which was released by Columbia Pictures—played a key role in convincing studios to open the space in which the kind of films that would come to be associated with the New Hollywood could develop. In this process, independent filmmaking modeled an alternative, not to studios *per se* (on which independents often relied for financing and distribution), but to the studio system as a mode of production. Rather than being made within bureaucratically organized production units made up of long-term studio employees (the "system"), independents showed that films could be made by teams brought together

in far more flexible terms through freelance contracts. In a change foreshadowing the broader transformation of social life in the neoliberal era—the eclipse of "permanent institutions" by "the temporary contract"[14]; the onset of "flexible accumulation"[15]; the "race toward weightlessness"[16] in which firms in once "heavy" industries would begin outsourcing production to contractors in the global economy—the shift away from the studio system of production ushered in an era of deal-making in Hollywood, not only between majors and independent production companies looking for financing and distribution, but more generally with the rise of "packages": deals negotiated to assemble talent (writers, directors, producers, actors, technicians, etc.) for specific projects.

In the case of *Easy Rider*, a fortuitous connection cleared a path for the film to be made under the auspices of Raybert Productions, an independent production company, and then sold to Columbia Pictures for distribution (where it became their highest grossing film of the year, incidentally).[17] Raybert had been formed in 1965 by Bert Schneider and Bob Rafelson, who met while Schneider was an up and coming executive for Screen Gems, Columbia's television subsidiary. After leaving behind a career in the studio system to co-found Raybert, Schneider retained a direct line to the CEO of Columbia Pictures, who was not only the former president of Screen Gems, but also his father, Abe Schneider.[18] Through Raybert, Schneider and Rafelson had found immediate success as the co-creators of *The*

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[14] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984), 66.
[15] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990).
[16] Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Picador, 1999).
[17] Columbia's highest grossing release in 1969, *Easy Rider* was the fourth highest grossing film overall that year, and Hollywood's twenty-eighth most successful film of the decade.
[18] Incidentally, Abe Schneider is said to have cited *Easy Rider* when he later resigned as Columbia's CEO, stating that he was not interested in the industry if *Easy Rider* was the way of the future.

Monkees (1966-1968), the NBC sitcom about a loveable rock and roll band which imitated the music and jump cut-heavy editing style of the Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) almost as brazenly as the Beatles had lifted from blues and early rock and roll musicians. A prototype for many a lab-concocted industry plant in the coming age of cross-media "synergy" and continued conglomeration, *The Monkees* relished its own artifice, often flirting with the line at which a kitschy blink becomes a campy wink. And while few might have guessed it, the creators behind the "pre-Fab Five" were decidedly "hip" to the changin' times. More than hip, Rafelson and Schneider came to embody the aesthetic and political poles of the countercultural zeitgeist: Rafelson the cultural radical, an artist and director whose future as a martyr in the cause of auteurism lay ahead[19]; Schneider the political radical, a dyed in the wool agitator the likes of which Hollywood has rarely seen.[20] Flush with cash after the *The Monkees* became a television (and radio) hit, the Raybert duo set out to produce independent feature films more in tune with their countercultural sensibility: first with *Head* (1968), a psychedelic-cinematic successor to the Monkees' television show, and then by giving first-time director Dennis Hopper and first-time producer Peter Fonda the money to make *Easy Rider* (1969). (As Peter Fonda later quipped, "Monkee money

[19] After signing with Fox to direct *Brubaker* in the late 1970s, Rafelson—by then an established director—brought the conflict between the (auteur) director and the (studio) producer to life when he got fired after getting into a physical altercation with Fox producer Richard Berger in 1979. For auteurs of the time, Rafelson's act was nothing short of heroic. Peter Bogdanovich later said: "He punched the producer. I'd like to punch a few producers" (Quoted in Josh Karp, "Bob Rafelson Emerges to Reflect on His Feud-and-Brawl-Filled Career," *Esquire*, April 2, 2019). Thereafter, though, Rafelson was blackballed for much of his career.

[20] Unlike many, Schneider's political radicalism went beyond an aesthetic sensibility. To cite one concrete example, Scneider not only vocally supported the Black Panther Party—he personally helped Huey Newton's escape to Cuba. In his capacity as a producer, he did what he could by financing *Hearts and Minds,* the anti-war documentary made by Peter Davis and Tom Cohen in protest against the war in Vietnam.

made *Easy Rider*."[21]) Raybert's trajectory thereafter offers a direct window into *Easy Rider*'s impact on the industry. After *Easy Rider*'s success, Raybert became BBS Productions (when Schnieder and Rafelson added a new partner, Steve Blauner), and BBS signed an unprecedented contract with Columbia to make a cycle of films (for one million dollars each) granting BBS and its directors complete creative control. This was a veritable coup, a transfer of power from studio producers that allowed BBS to continue taking risks on new directors, paving the way for the unconventional narratives and gritty style of now-canonical New Hollywood films like *Five Easy Pieces* (1970; dir. Rafelson himself) and *The Last Picture Show* (1971; dir. Peter Bogdanovich). And as the results of Columbia's experiment rolled in (*Easy Rider, Five Easy Pieces,* and *The Last Picture Show* together grossed $100 million), changes at other major studios quickly followed. While Universal established the low-budget division out of which films like George Lucas's *American Graffiti* (1973) emerged, Paramount similarly made moves to position itself as "the home of the auteurs" in the early 1970s.[22]

The formation of BBS meant that *Head* and *Easy Rider* were to be the only feature films produced under the Raybert name. Their kinship did not stop there though. Echoing the broader countercultural revolt against "the system," both of these films, in different ways, act out their makers' revolt against the studio system. *Head* was directed by Bob Rafelson, co-written and co-produced by Rafelson and Jack Nicholson, with Bert Schneider credited as executive producer—all of whom make cameo appearances in the film

[21] Peter Fonda, *Don't Tell Dad: A Memoir* (New York: Hyperion, 2008), 252.
[22] J. D. Connor, *The Studios after the Studios: Neoclassical Hollywood (1970-2010)* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2015), 73.

alongside Nicholson's future *Easy Rider* cast members Dennis Hopper and Toni Basil (who was the choreographer on *Head*). Instead of a standard establishing shot, *Head*'s opening shot is an extreme close-up of the red ribbon at a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a newly constructed bridge (the Gerald Desmond Bridge in Long Beach, then just completed). Just as the ceremony is getting underway, the Monkees make their entrance by breaking through the ribbon, and Micky Dolenz, the band's guitarist, jumps off the bridge into the water below, plunging us into an aggressively solarized underwater montage of Micky floating with mermaids to the sound of the Monkees' psychedelic "Porpoise Song." Besides the breaking of the ribbon, which indirectly evokes the bureaucratic "red tape" from which the film itself breaks as an independent production, the act of jumping from the bridge—a "marvel of modern architecture," as the mayor describes it—suggests *Head*'s retreat from the formulaic construction of studio productions. The next song we hear, "Ditty Diego," gives notice of the non-linear flow that replaces conventional narrative construction in the film. Offering both a warning and a brief lesson in experimental fiction, the words to the song clue viewers in on the absence of a single unifying narrative ("We hope you like our story, although there isn't one"), non-linear emplotment (instead of "one, two, three," "it may come three, two, one, two, or jump from nine to five"), and the importance of form over content ("meaning" "in form" rather than "fact"). The song also telegraphs the distance that Raybert's co-founders sought to assert from the popular media property that made them rich, identifying the Monkees as "A manufactured image with no philosophies," and gleefully declaring, "The money's in, we're made of tin, we're here to give you more." This gesture is indicative of the film's shift from the sitcom's broadcast-friendly playfulness to a more combative, biting mixture of black comedy, critical reflexivity, and ironic play. But

beyond mocking itself, war, and postwar American society generally, *Head*'s primary target is the Hollywood studio system. Revealing a fully formed postmodern sensibility, the film mobilizes pastiche and various metafictional techniques to pull back the curtain and break the fourth wall on studio-made productions, deconstructing one after another genre system of classical Hollywood (war movies, musicals, melodramas, Westerns) in a series of set pieces anarchically suspended from temporal sequence or internal narrative development. In one scene, an exasperated Micky suddenly becomes disillusioned while standing in costume on the set of a Western. "Stop acting," he belts out. "Come on, stop playing, it's all over." Calling out to "Bob" (director Bob Rafelson) that he is "through," Micky storms off the set, breaking not red ribbon this time but a frontier landscape-painted backdrop, tearing a hole in it on his way out. Versions of this scenario recur throughout the film as the band members attempt to escape from different controlled environments—not only soundstages, but also other figures of confinement: a vacuum, a factory, a jail cell, a giant black box, and finally an aquarium tank. Read as an allegory of the Monkees' made-for-TV fate, the film explores the "box" in which the band, as a corporate-owned and controlled media property, is confined. (As they sing in "Porpoise Song": "An overdub has no choice / An image cannot rejoice.") But read through the prism of Schneider and Rafelson's ambitions for independent filmmaking, the film's deconstruction of Hollywood and struggle against confinement becomes legible as an allegory of Raybert's struggle to break free from the constraints of the studio system.

The Monkees, for their part, never do escape in *Head*. After the film comes full circle in the end with a replay of the opening underwater scene (this time with all the band members), the final shot pans to reveal that the group is trapped in a tank on a flatbed

truck that is leaving—but has not yet left—a studio warehouse in Hollywood. This ending sets the stage for *Easy Rider*—or rather, points toward the exit. In its own way, *Easy Rider* picks up right where *Head* leaves off in exploring the freedom of the open road beyond the enclosed world in which *Head* rehashes Hollywood cliches. Where *Head* stages its revolt against the studio system on Hollywood backlots, the flight from the system dramatized in *Easy Rider* coincides with the production's literal escape from the confines of studio shooting. As *Easy Rider*'s official publicity kit proudly reported:

> Before it was finished the film would entail the travel of thousands of miles and the utilization of the largest motion picture set ever devised—the entire southwestern portion of the United States. Early in the proceedings, it was decided that there would be no studio shooting. All filming would take place in actual locations, the feeling being that to shoot a picture of this type in the confines of a Hollywood soundstage would be to completely stifle the creativity of the personalities involved.[23]

At the time, it was unheard of for a film distributed by a major to be shot entirely on location.[24] It was also novel for a major's marketing team (the publicity kit was prepared by Columbia Pictures) to signal commitment, however retroactively, to "the creativity of the personalities involved" in a production.

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[23] Quoted in Steven Bingen with Alan Dunn, *Easy Rider: 50 years Looking for America* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2020), 66.
[24] The only set used in the film was for the commune scene, which was constructed outside of Los Angeles after an actual commune in Taos, New Mexico denied their request.

In these and many other ways, *Easy Rider* was a harbinger of the future—"avant-garde" in the strictest temporal sense. Besides breaking generic ground as the first fully formed road movie, its innovations included using "found" music instead of a film score. That is, in direct contrast to the "manufactured" music of the Monkees (a rock and roll outgrowth of studio-owned scores), *Easy Rider*'s soundtrack was curated from existing popular songs, many of them already hits at the time. While this required Raybert to license the music from artists, setting the film's relatively lengthy road montage scenes to songs with which audiences were already familiar made for a uniquely immersive viewing experience, and contributed to its legacy as a "time capsule" of the era. Part of what allows for these non-narrative road montages to carry so much screen time is the film's minimal reliance on story. Where *Head* uses a plurality of discontinuously edited story fragments to mark its abandonment of conventional narrative film, *Easy Rider*'s retreat from convention takes the form of its barebones narrative with almost no expository dialogue.[25] In effect, *Easy Rider* is not only a narrative film about the freedom of the open road; it is also a film that subordinates narrative itself in stretches—often scenic montages on the road—that explore new, non-narrative-driven avenues of cinematic freedom and possibility.

At the center of the film's sparse narrative are Billy (Dennis Hopper) and Wyatt (Peter Fonda), two countercultural outsiders. The film follows these "two guys," as Hopper himself once glossed the plot, as they "smuggle cocaine, sell it, go across the country for

[25] Most of the expository dialogue that was shot was cut from Dennis Hopper's original four-hour version, including nearly all mentions of Peter Fonda's character's name, Wyatt, which is only heard once in the film.

Mardi Gras, and get killed by a couple of duck hunters because they have long hair."[26] As the film unravels, details fill in that supplement the film's formal commitment to spontaneous freedom (to which we turn at greater length below) with a thematic exploration of freedom. While making their way across the U.S. by motorcycle, Billy and Wyatt encounter different people on their way to the South, among them a rancher (Warren Finnerty) and his wife (Tita Colorado), a hitchhiking hippie (Luke Askew), and an alcoholic ACLU lawyer from the South named George Hanson (Jack Nicholson) who winds up joining the biker duo on their indeterminate journey. Each of these encounters brings the biker duo into contact with a different model of achieving freedom in the U.S. Where the ranchers harken back to the independence of the yeoman on the frontier, the ACLU lawyer suggests the positive or institutional freedom of postwar liberalism (to which organizations like the ACLU contributed by turning citizens into rights-bearing claimants against the state). As for the hippie, whom Billy and Wyatt give a ride, the commune at which they drop him off registers the era's revival of collective experiments in forging a communal life outside of the organizational nexus of postwar industrial society.[27] Yet none of these iterations of freedom exactly shimmer with viability in the film. Even as Billy complements the rancher husband on his rugged individualism and independence, and Wyatt says that he thinks the commune will be all right, an air of futility haunts these scenes. Shortly

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[26] Dennis Hopper and L. M. Kit Carson, "Easy Rider: A Very American Thing," *Evergreen Review Reader: An Anthology of Short Fiction, Plays, Poems, Essays, Cartoons, Photographs, and Graphics, 1967-1973,* ed. Barney Rosset (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1998), 226-231, 226.
[27] Incidentally, the commune scene is the only scene in the film they built a set for. While the original plan was to film this scene on location at New Buffalo, an actual commune outside of Taos, New Mexico, locals ended up burning the commune to the ground before shooting took place. They ended up building their own in the mountains of Santa Monica. Casting was relatively easy given the countercultural circles in which Hopper and Fonda ran. As Fonda later recalled, "We cast all our likely looking friends as members of the commune.Fonda, *Don't Tell Dad*, 262.

thereafter, the lapsed condition of George Hanson suggests the film's disillusionment with postwar liberalism and the prospects of the Great Society. This leaves only the open-ended freedom of the road, the spontaneous and nomadic model of freedom that Billy and Wyatt embody.

Significantly, the biker duo's freedom from the workaday world—the freedom to follow their own path and "do their own thing" (in the parlance of the time), away from the bureaucratized routines of postwar American society—is made possible by a lucrative drug deal, which is what occupies the first scene of the film. Shot on location near Los Angeles International as planes fly overhead, the drug connection from which Billy and Wyatt receive a stack of cash is played by the infamous Phil Specter, then at the peak of his career as a popular music producer. Spector's brief appearance in the film is usually chalked up to Hopper's friendship with the "wall of sound" inventor. But Hopper's rolodex was expansive. He was friends with everyone from the Rolling Stones to Andy Warhol—to say nothing of his contacts in Hollywood. So why ask Spector, specifically? To put the question more pointedly: Why ask the most famous music producer in the world at the time to play a minor role as the drug connection from which two rebel outsiders receive the money to set off on the road to do what they will? One answer is that *Easy Rider* is allegorizing its own making. Just as Billy and Wyatt receive a stack of cash from a connection (who happens to be played by famous pop music producer Phil Spector) that permits them to set out on the open road and do their own thing, outside of "the system" (the rationalized structures of postwar American society), so too had Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda received money (backing from Raybert's Bert Schneider and Bob Rafelson, the producers behind a hit rock and roll band) allowing them to set forth on the open road to do their own thing—in their

case, making an independent film outside of the Hollywood studio system. Strictly speaking, though, Hopper and Fonda did not initially hit the road to film *Easy Rider*. After securing backing from Raybert early in 1968, the duo flew with a provisional crew out of Los Angeles to shoot at Mardi Gras. Which is perhaps why the drug deal scene with Spector conspicuously takes place next to LAX. Speector, we might also note, was not entirely new to making brief guest appearances. It would not even have been the first time for him to appear in a role subtly associated with "Monkee money." Before *Easy Rider,* Spector's last acting gig had been in "Jeannie, the Hip Hippie," a 1967 episode of *I Dream of Jeannie* in which he plays himself alongside Boyce & Hart, the Screen Gems studio band that wrote, produced, and recorded much of the Monkees catalog. What's more, Spector had briefly agreed to fund an earlier film project that Hopper had come to him with in the mid-1960s, before backing out early on in development. Spector, in this view, went from actually being the backer on Hopper's directorial debut to playing an allegorical figuration of Hopper's backers at Raybert.

In the end, the open-ended freedom that Billy and Wyatt embody in *Easy Rider* appears short-lived. Resembling the ambiguous endings characteristic of other New Hollywood films, *Easy Rider* ends not with Billy and Wyatt riding off into the sunset but with a string of unexpected murders. George Hanson is the first to be killed—in his case, after the trio has a run-in with backwards white southerners at a rural diner. Shortly thereafter, the same fate meets Billy and Wyatt when they are shot by two hunters they pass on the road. Following the auto-allegorical reading suggested above, this ending could suggest something like anticipated failure—a tragic view of the prospects of independent filmmaking. Before Billy and Wyatt are murdered, doubt already begins to cloud the

freedom they embody when Wyatt expresses misgivings about their situation. "We blew it," Wyatt famously intones in the film's final campfire scene. After the film became a runaway hit, discussion among critics and moviegoers often turned on this line, as stark as it is ambiguous. While a number of interpretations have been offered over the years (including a few by Hopper and Fonda themselves), the consensus view has always been that Wyatt's comment is directed at the counterculture itself (which, incidentally, went into precipitous decline not long after *Easy Rider*'s release). This is plausible enough. But we might also hazard the presence of a somewhat more direct resonance. As is well known, Hopper and Fonda's friendship did not survive the making of *Easy Rider*. Largely thanks to Hopper's erratic behavior, production set forth with a chaotic week-long shoot (the New Orleans shoot mentioned above, to which we return again below) that left Fonda with serious doubts about the film's likelihood of success. And though Schneider convinced Fonda to finish the film after Fonda brought his concerns to Raybert, it is unlikely that his doubts were completely assuaged—at least until box office results and critical acclaim proved otherwise. The "We blew it" scene was shot outside of Los Angeles after production had already wrapped up. According to Fonda, they had simply forgotten this scene (though one wonders if it was a last-minute addition). As Fonda tells it, he delivered the famous line against Hopper's insistence that he say "We blew our heritage"—a slightly more specific statement. We might speculate that Fonda opted for the more general phrase because of the way that "it" allowed Wyatt to obliquely communicate to Billy (and audiences) that they, as stand-ins for the broader counterculture, "blew it," while simultaneously allowing Peter Fonda to tell Dennis Hopper that they—having just been handed an opportunity from Raybert to direct, produce, and star in their own independent feature film—blew it.

On the surface at least, the deaths of Billy and Wyatt appear to mark the spontaneous freedom they pursue as unviable, so that in the end, no model of freedom survives in the film. Yet the conditions under which they die only confirm the worldview that the two embody. Their murders differ slightly, but importantly, from George's. Visibly presenting to locals at the diner as a lapsed member of the "straight" world, George is made a target (his crime, presumably, betrayal). Thus, when the trio is ambushed later that night, and George is singled out, the act bears the imprint of premeditation. By contrast, the duck hunters' decision to shoot Billy and Wyatt is entirely unpremeditated; it is altogether spontaneous, the result of a chance encounter in which Billy and Wyatt's only conceivable "crime," as one critic has put it, is living "a bohemian mobile lifestyle."[28] But focusing on the unjust cause for which they were killed is perhaps to miss the point. By ending in a chance encounter with death, *Easy Rider* only upholds the pursuit of chance and spontaneity that drives not only the film's narrative, but also the process in which it was made. The two getting shot from a vehicle in a spontaneous encounter on the road itself puns on the spontaneous road cinematography used to "shoot" Billy and Wyatt for the film. (Incidentally, the crew was pulled over at one point during production by police responding to a report from someone who had mistakenly identified cinematographer Laszlo Kovacs's makeshift 35mm camera set up—installed in the back of a 1968 Chevy convertible to shoot the road scenes—as a gun aimed at two motorcycles.[29])

In what follows, this chapter delves into *Easy Rider*'s formal commitment spontaneous freedom, exploring the film's aesthetic genesis in spontaneous currents of

[28] David Laderman, *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie* (Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 2002), 78.
[29] Fonda, *Don't Tell Dad*, 265.

avant-garde art in the twentieth century. More than a "reflection of the counterculture,"[30] *Easy Rider* embodies, in its very production, the spontaneous vision of freedom which came to a head in the 1960s through aesthetic experiments in self-creation. In the process of developing this argument, I also attempt to draw out the link between the spontaneous freedom modeled in *Easy Rider*'s making to the film's place as a harbinger of the future, not only of cinematic production in the New Hollywood, but of spontaneous social order in the neoliberal era more generally.

In stressing how *Easy Rider* embodies the spontaneous conception of freedom gleaned from avant-garde aesthetic currents, I subtly diverge from the usual practice of viewing New Hollywood films through the lens of auteur theory. Before proceeding here, it is worth briefly recalling the context in which auteur theory first entered into circulation in the U.S. Film critic Andrew Sarris is generally credited with spreading French auteur theory in the U.S.[31] Sarris broke new ground at the time, not by discussing French film theory, but by having the audacity to link French auteur theory to a critical revaluation of American "commercial cinema." (Prior to Sarris's 1962 article, *Film Culture*, the magazine in which it appeared, positioned itself as an avant-garde publication animated by dissatisfaction with the state of American "commercial cinema"—which meant that contributors to the New York-based magazine regularly bemoaned Hollywood in their effort to foster an alternative art film culture in the U.S.) Through the lens of auteur theory, Sarris wagered, critics might begin to appreciate existing Hollywood films by situating them within the corpus and developing vision of individual directors. Serious-minded critics and filmmakers (some in

[30] David Laderman, *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie* (Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 2002), 66.
[31] Andrew Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962," *Film Culture* 27 (Winter 1962/63): 1-4.

the pages of *Film Culture*) were quick to object to the marriage that Sarris sought to perform. In one characteristic rebuttal, art film director Charles Boultenhouse flatly rejected the notion that "commercial film conceals a director of such creative intensity that he can be regarded as an Author." Whatever "plausibility" auteur theory might enjoy in French cinema, Boutenhouse concluded, retroactively claiming that Hollywood directors have, "unbeknownst," "been artists all along," whose work is thus a "developing revelation of artistic intention" rather than the more or less skilled craftsmanship of a studio functionary, amounted to little more than a "strategy to give prestige to the commercial film."[32]

But beyond inspiring *critics* to reevaluate existing Hollywood films (or not)—and setting the stage for future critical modifications, like Jerome Christensen's later account of the studio itself as the "intending author" of Hollywood's "corporate art"[33]—auteur theory also spread as a regulative ideal in the 1960s among a new generation of American directors who aspired, whether or not their predecessors in the Hollywood studio system had, to become auteurs. Nor were young directors entirely alone. Just a couple of months after *Easy Rider's* 1969 release, United Artists executive Herb Jaffe, for instance, articulated a vision of American cinema's future along these lines. Joining a McLuhanite media prophecy about the twilight of print culture to a comparison evoking the process in which individual authors had come to triumph in print through literary fiction, he noted: "The film

[32] Charles Boultenhouse, "The Camera as a God," *Film Culture* 29 (Summer 1963): 20-22.
[33] Jerome Christiensen, *America's Corporate Art: The Studio Authorship of Hollywood Motion Pictures* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2012), 13.

is beginning to replace the novel, and we [distribution companies] are becoming publishers of directors."[34]

Read in this light, as it often is following Peter Biskind and others, the New Hollywood era comes into view, if not as the arrival of a permanent state of affairs, then at least as a post-studio system interregnum during which power *qua* creative control passed—however temporarily and unevenly—from studio producers to young directors for about a decade. To put it mildly, one does not need to look hard to see the impact of young-directors-newly-endowed-with-relative-creative-autonomy (in a word: auteurism) in the usual New Hollywood "canon."[35] Nor, for that matter, does it take an especially nimble imagination to find the cinematic allegories of the ongoing conflict between studios and young directors in the New Hollywood era. Consider, in this light, George Lucas's intergalactic saga about a ragtag group of Force-wielding rebels as they struggle against an imperial Empire.[36] Though admittedly *Star Wars* (1977) is better remembered—its retroactively added subtitle, *A New Hope,* notwithstanding—for having marked the end of

[34] Quoted in Paul E. Steiger, "Movie Makers No Longer Sure What Sparkle Is," *Los Angeles Times* (November 17, 1969).
[35] The New Hollywood canon is commonly held to include, among other potential candidates, *The Graduate* (1967), *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *The Wild Bunch* (1969), *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), *Easy Rider* (1969), *They Shoot Horses Don't They? (*1969), Catch-22 (1970), Little Big Man (1970), MASH (1970), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *The French Connection* (1971), *Klute* (1971), *The Last Picture Show* (1972), *The Conversation* (1974), *The Parallax View* (1974), *Jaws* (1975), *All the President's Men* (1976), *The Missouri Breaks* (1976), *Taxi Driver* (1976), and *Carrie* (1976).
[36] Biskind parenthetically suggests this interpretation in *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls.* Regarding the common reading of *Star Wars* as a "transparent allegory" of the 1960s ("the tumultuous decade in which the director had come of age"), Biskind notes: "The vast, powerful Empire [on this reading] could only be the United States (more specifically, Hollywood), and the raggedy band of rebels, with their improvised, patchwork, rubberband and chewing gum weapons, the Vietcong (or the New Hollywood movie brats)" (Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*, 342).

the New Hollywood movement and the beginning of the franchise-driven era of big-budget blockbusters.

My account does not deny the explanatory power of auteur theory in studying the New Hollywood. But I do want to suggest that there are limitations to this approach, particularly insofar as auteur theory becomes the only framework through which critics register the impact of broader aesthetic currents on Hollywood beginning in the late 1960s. Here, we might draw attention to the ironic timing of auteur theory's spread in the U.S. in the 1960s, at just the moment when French literary theorists began pontificating about the "death of the author." What literary theorists were articulating was not new; in an important sense, it was actually the delayed self-conceptualization of the avant-garde itself—that is, an attempt to theoretically reckon with the eclipse of the individual author/sovereign artist in avant-garde experiments with chance, spontaneity, and improvisation that modeled aesthetic freedom as an open-ended horizon of dispersed creative activity and collaborative possibility over which no single "will" exercises control. In effect, the horizon of spontaneous self-creation onto which avant-garde experiments opened going back to the 1920s—from Tristan Tristan Tzara's Dadaist poems assembled at random by picking words from a hat, to the Surrealists' still more methodical approach to spontaneous creation through collaborative composition in their "exquisite corpse" experiments—involved the intentional suspension of intending authorship. Far from becoming a historical curiosity, these experiments formed the basis of the avant-garde spirit channeled in the work of postwar artists in the U.S. and elsewhere, including John Cage's influential *4' 33"* and *Theater Piece No. 1* (1952). Both of these experimental pieces—the former a "silent" piano piece in which the contingent noise of the audience itself

becomes the music; the latter an unscripted theatrical piece which prefigured "the blurring of art and life" in later Happenings[37]—remake the vertically constructed space and time over which the sovereign artist previously exercised control into an open-ended horizon where prearranged ("scripted") structure gives way to the chance, improvisation, and spontaneity of participants in real-time. In doing so, these experiments anticipated the spread of participatory aesthetic currents in the 1960s that took for granted the obsolescence of "the artist as an author."[38]

While Peter Fonda came to Hopper with the initial idea for *Easy Rider*, and the film was co-written by Fonda and Hopper with Terry Southern, *Easy Rider*'s "auteur"—to the extent that it had one—was undoubtedly Dennis Hopper, who as we will see in more detail below was at the forefront of the aesthetic currents of the era ("Like John Cage," Hopper once commented, "I was very much into the aesthetic of chance"[39]). Significantly, though, precisely this embrace of the "aesthetic of chance" placed Hopper at odds with the auteur theory of art, generally. And this means that there is a certain tension at play within indiscriminate claims to the effect that *Easy Rider* simultaneously captures the spirit of the counterculture and represents the vision of an auteur. To the extent that capturing the spirit of the counterculture means anything—and I think it does—it must mean that *Easy Rider* embodies the participatory ethos of the aesthetic experiments in spontaneous self-creation revived in the 1960s as so many after-images of the avant-garde. In this view, *Easy*

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[37] Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
[38] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "An Interview with Andy Warhol," in *Andy Warhol,* ed. Annette Michelson (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 119-129, 127.
[39] Quoted in Peter L. Winkler, *Dennis Hopper: The Wild Ride of a Hollywood Rebel* (Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, 2012). eBook.

Rider shows the need for a more nuanced picture than tends to be present in attempts to narrative the New Hollywood as the passage from one sovereign (the studio system/the aging producer) to another (the auteur/the young director). While *Easy Rider*'s making is undoubtedly predicated on the freedom opened up by producing an independent film outside the studio system (financially, organizationally, literally), its significance is only dimly illuminated by auteur theory. Much more illuminating is the influence of the essentially anti-auteur thrust of avant-garde experiments in spontaneous self-creation, where prearranged design gives way to creative activity that unfurls among collaborators in real time.

Channeling the spirit of the avant-garde, the spontaneous freedom modeled by *Easy Rider* happens, by chance, to be the aesthetic embodiment or "formal correlative" of the spontaneous order characteristic of social life in the neoliberal era.[40] Written by everyone and controlled by no one, so to speak, the neoliberal era has been formed through and modeled after the spontaneous order of the market. In this sense, Ellen Willis was more right than she knew when she observed, in her review of *Easy Rider* for *The New York Review of Books,* that the film's newfangled "frontier fantasy" is "just hip capitalism." Alas, she was overly optimistic to assume that "It won't work."[41] On this point, Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner come closer when they note that *Easy Rider* can "be read as merely enacting the fundamental principle of capitalist America—the freedom of the market,

[40] I borrow the phrase formal correlative from Annie McClanahan.
[41] Quoted in Steven Bingen with Alan Dunn, *Easy Rider: 50 years Looking for America* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2020), 70-71.

which is in some respects metaphorized as the freedom of the open road."[42] Rather than leaping to ideology critique, however, I want insist in what follows on arriving at the spontaneous order of the market by way of exploring the film's commitment to the avant-garde elevation of chance, improvisation, and spontaneity in art as in life.

"The Cocteau Factor"

Whether acting, shooting photography, or directing, Dennis Hopper fostered chance, spontaneity, and improvisation. For him, the ideal film was a "structured improvisation" in which the script facilitates more than it commands. Written dialogue, he maintained, should in practice be "changed and improvised by the actors to express their own approach. Each actor you cast subtly affects the whole by the way he reacts to situations."[43] This open-endedness, beyond informing Hopper's approach to directing actors, permeated his approach to filmmaking more generally. Rather than checking off boxes on a prearranged shot list, Hopper often made decisions about shots on the fly, improvising as he went along so as to take advantage of opportunities that emerged in real time. This approach marked a stark departure from the highly organized techniques of classical Hollywood, where directors relied on studio scenario departments to produce detailed shooting scripts that planned out scenes and individual shots in advance. Which is not to say that Hopper's approach was always appreciated by crew members, who often experienced Hopper's characteristic spontaneity less as liberation from a rigid production

[42] Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988), 25.
[43] Quoted in Steve Chagollan, "Dennis Hopper, the Director, *DGA Quarterly* (Fall 2018). Dga.org.

schedule than as the unpredictable antics of a demanding boss with little regard for boundaries. Nor did it take long for Hopper's style of filmmaking to result in the kind of explosive incidents for which he would be remembered by many who worked with him. Not long after wrapping for the day while on location in New Orleans to shoot *Easy Rider,* Hopper erupted with enthusiasm about capturing an unplanned for shot after glimpsing the way that neon lights reflected in the rain outside of the motel in which the crew was staying. When cinematographer Barry Feinstein denied Hopper's request to use his personal equipment, a physical altercation broke out in which Hopper is said to have at one point thrown a television set at Feinstein.

In his memoir, Peter Fonda's retelling of this episode stresses Hopper's erratic and often violent nature—a persistent, variously exemplified motif in the chapters on *Easy Rider*. Notably, though, the genesis of this particular outburst (in Hopper's desire to seize on a contingent opportunity to capture a shot for potential use in post-production) ties in with the other dominant motif that runs through Fonda's account of the making of *Easy Rider*: namely, the role played by what he alternately calls "Cocteau's accidents" or "the Cocteau factor."[44] Throughout the shooting of *Easy Rider,* Fonda recalls, Hopper "always quoted Jean Cocteau: 98 perfect of true art was accident, 1 percent was logic, and 1 perfect was intellect."[45] This repeated "admonition about the Cocteau factor"[46] fostered a working ethos that invited those involved on the production not only to stoically accept but to actively embrace and even pursue the role played by indeterminacy, chance, contingency—

[44] Peter Fonda, *Don't Tell Dad: A Memoir* (New York: Hyperion, 2008), 274, 266.
[45] Fonda, *Don't Tell Dad*, 257.
[46] Fonda, *Don't Tell Dad,* 266.

in a word, the "accident"—in the process of creation. When viewed this way, accidents became not a barrier but an opening, a site of unforeseen and unforeseeable possibility. As Hopper explained it, "I believe that you must keep *free* for things to happen, for the accident—and then learn how to use the accident."[47] Much of Fonda's narrative reconstruction of *Easy Rider*'s production takes the form of revealing the extent to which the film embodies or otherwise resulted from the embrace of "Cocteau's accidents." Specific scenes to which he points include famous alien conspiracy speech during which Jack Nicholson forgets his lines (preserved in the final cut because "forgetting what you were talking about, losing the thread" is "part of really being stoned," which Nicholson was); the dialogue and reactions in the second campfire scene (among "the truly improvised scenes"); as well as the special appearance made in the final scene by two nonactors who just happened to drive by during filming and agree to play two homicidal duck hunters.[48]

While this embrace of the accident shows up in any number of ways in *Easy Rider,* the use of lens flares in the photography stands out as especially memorable. Part of what makes the scenes on the open road iconic—and gives *Easy Rider* the recognizably "60s" look and feel that has been endlessly imitated in road movies and music videos ever since—owes to the flashes of light and glowing artifacts contingently produced by the "flaring" of light from the sun in the lens system of the ARRIFLEX camera used by Laszlo Kovacs, the film's director of photography. In Hollywood, an unwritten rule had long prohibited lens flares, which were viewed as technical mistakes and thus marks of

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[47] Dennis Hopper and L. M. Kit Carson, "Easy Rider: A Very American Thing," *Evergreen Review Reader: An Anthology of Short Fiction, Plays, Poems, Essays, Cartoons, Photographs, and Graphics, 1967-1973,* ed. Barney Rosset (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1998), 226, 226-231.
[48] Fonda, *Don't Tell Dad,* 266, 270, 274.

unprofessionalism. *Easy Rider* was among the films to influentially buck this taboo in the late 1960s, forging a path for the general use (and eventual overuse) of lens flares present in contemporary cinema. (Another was *Cool Hand Luke* [1967], in which Hopper had appeared, and whose director of photography, Conrad L. Hall, would later describe his role in this shift as "helping make mistakes acceptable."[49]) To be sure, though, the use of this otherwise accidental effect was anything but accidental. Besides symbolically flipping the bird to the studio system by willfully breaking one of its taboos, using the sun to create lens flares signaled to the audience that *Easy Rider* was shot outside, in the real world, rather than on a soundstage in Hollywood. In this way the effect imbued the film with authenticity—a visual counterpart to the sonic authenticity supplied by both the rock music soundtrack (licensing popular music, as we saw above, was another of *Easy Rider*'s innovations) and the minimal use of an effects track (most of the diegetic sound in the film, including the noise of the farm animals at the commune, is "authentic" in the sense that it comes directly from the scene, rather than being mixed in on a separate track of canned effects designed by Foley artists). The lens flares also produce a kind of psychedelic halo effect in many scenes as multicolored orbs radiate down on the biker duo as if to form aureoles, the circles of light used in religious iconography around holy figures, often martyrs (Figure 1).[50] All of which suggests quite a bit more control than first meets the eye.

[49] Interviewed in the documentary *Visions of Light: The Art of Cinematography* (1992).
[50] The cemetery scene cements this religious parallel when lens flares are used to produce the same effect on a bronze sculpture of Christ on the cross.

As James Chressanthis aptly observes, the lens flares in *Easy Rider* help cinematographer Laszlo Kovacs achieve "an uncareful look that was carefully made."[51]

Other marks of the spontaneity and contingency embraced in the film's making—not all instances of which were so controlled or "carefully made"—feature prominently in the scenes shot in New Orleans, which were filmed apart from the rest of the production on a week-long shoot that took place before Laszlo Kovacs joined the project. Take, for example, the haziness of some of the photography in the famous cemetery scene. Shot guerrilla-style at the St. Louis Cemetery No. 1 (i.e., without permission from the Catholic Church), the scene features Wyatt and Billy dropping acid with two women, Mary (Toni Basil) and Karen (Karen Black), picked up from a brothel. The scene's "curious hazy ambiance" appears to be an effect devised in tandem with Hopper's discontinuous editing to suggest an altered state. In fact, however, it was entirely contingent—a result of Les Blank, one of the cinematographers involved in the early New Orleans shoot, accidentally opening an exposed film magazine. Far from consigning the footage to oblivion (the usual fate of damaged film), Hopper is said to have been "completely thrilled with" it.[52]

Beyond this particular effect, tonal variation is visible throughout the footage shot in New Orleans. When asked about this in a 1969 interview with L. M. Kit Carson for the *Evergreen Review*, Hopper blamed stains and weather changes (different lighting)—but not without signaling his commitment to the accident. Invoking the adage attributed to the French avant-garde artist and filmmaker in just the manner later recollected by Fonda,

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[51] James Chressanthis in "The Cinematography of Easy Rider," *Aari,* https://100.arri.com/interviews/event/5998206ff0c74b7d49b61f90.
[52] Steven Bingen with Alan Bunn, *Easy Rider: 50 Years of Looking for America* (Guiltford, CT: Lyons Press, 2020), 14.

Hopper proclaimed his fidelity to "what Cocteau said: 'Ninety-eight percent of all creation is accident, one percent intellect, and one percent logic.'"[53] In truth, keeping free for things to happen played an even larger role in the New Orleans footage than Hopper let on in this interview. Shot on location before even having a script (a calendar mix-up meant that they had to rush to make it to Mardi Gras in 1968), the idea behind *Easy Rider*'s inaugural shoot had been to show up to the festivities with a small crew and "just film whatever happened, *cinema verité* style."[54] Moreover, the collaborative technique used to shoot at Mardi Gras meant that a high degree of contingency and spontaneity was built-in, as Hopper opted to rent ten lightweight Bolex 16mm cameras so that a lion's share of the barebones crew could participate in gathering footage from the streets. Undoubtedly, many on that early trip, which included a number of young filmmakers and cinematographers (not only Barry Feinstein and Les Blank, but also Peter Pilafian and Baird Bryant) were used to seeing ad hoc measures in low-budget productions. But this level of experimentation was something new—an altogether radical, if chaotic, approach to shooting a glorified exploitation movie. As Fonda later reflected, "We began filming *Easy Rider* from the hip"—an exhausting process which found the crew mired in "general confusion about what to shoot and where, what to say and how."[55] When shooting wrapped up, though, Hopper had 25,000 feet of New Orleans footage with which to later work in the editing room, much of it more or less

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[53] Dennis Hopper and L. M. Kit Carson, "Easy Rider: A Very American Thing," *Evergreen Review Reader: An Anthology of Short Fiction, Plays, Poems, Essays, Cartoons, Photographs, and Graphics, 1967-1973,* ed. Barney Rosset (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1998), 226, 226-231. This interview marked the counterculture's embrace of the film. The *Evergreen Review* was a leading avant-garde publication in the pages of which the Beat sensibility of the 1950s slowly morphed into the counterculture sensibility of the 1960s.
[54] Steven Bingen with Alan Bunn, *Easy Rider: 50 Years of Looking for America* (Guiltford, CT: Lyons Press, 2020), 12.
[55] Fonda, *Don't Tell Dad*, 254.

spontaneously captured during Mardi Gras. And though the different film stock meant that it "doesn't match the rest of the footage," as Kovacs later pointed out, "it's Mardi Gras and kind of psychedelic, so no one notices."[56]

The Corman Connection

Shooting at Marti Gras, *Easy Rider*'s crew embarked on a project that seemed, at once, low-budget B-movie and experimental art film—a union, you might say, of lowbrow schlock and avant-garde shock. At least part of what went into the decision to stage a scene at Mardi Gras was straight out of the B-movie playbook. As Fonda later said, they were enticed by the fact that "there would be thousands of people on the streets, many dressed in outrageous costumes, partying throughout the night." Ergo: "Free background extras in wardrobe"—a cost-saving tactic, Fonda would readily admit, picked up from the king of schlock himself, Roger Corman.[57] In fact, much of the group that assembled to make *Easy Rider* had previously worked together on Corman-directed pictures. In many ways, this experience set the stage for *Easy Rider.*

Before starting his own independent company in 1970 (New World Pictures), Corman spent a decade and a half directing and producing exploitation films for American International Pictures (AIP), one of the most successful and influential independent production and distribution companies in the postwar Hollywood "periphery." Having perfected the art of pumping out low-budget sci-fi, horror, and sci-fi horror movies in the

[56] Quoted in Steve Chagollan, "Dennis Hopper, the Director," *DGA Quarterly* (Fall 2018). Dga.org.
[57] Fonda, *Don't Tell Dad*, 244.

1950s, AIP began to venture beyond established genres in the 1960s, first with its popular Beach Party movie cycle, and then with a string of socially topical pictures—what AIP president James H. Nicholson called "protest films"[58]—dramatizing the rise of outlaw biker gangs, recreational drug use, and the youth counterculture in the late 1960s. The first of these "pictures of the times"[59] (as Corman referred to them) was *The Wild Angels* (1966), a biker movie starring Peter Fonda that Corman directed and produced. In addition to exploiting public fascination with the Hell's Angels at the time,[60] *The Wild Angels* also tapped into the growing appetite for rebellion among its target audience, turning Peter Fonda into an avatar of youth rebellion keyed to the desire "to be free … without being hassled by The Man" (as Fonda's character, Heavenly Blues, puts it). Shortly after the film's July 1966 release, this image of Fonda was further cemented by news reports that the son of screen legend Henry Fonda had been charged with marijuana possession, and again three months later when Fonda was handcuffed on Sunset Strip during a clash between police and young people in the so-called "hippie riots," which brought the era's "generation gap" to life in the streets. Besides positioning Fonda to become a countercultural icon (the idea for *Easy Rider*, Fonda later claimed, was inspired by a promotional still from the film), *The Wild Angels* also became AIP's highest grossing film at the time. Eager to repeat this success, a barrage of biker movies quickly flooded the market—among them AIP's *The Glory Stompers* (1967), featuring Dennis Hopper as the outlaw biker lead, and Fanfare

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[58] Quoted in Nick Heffernan, "No Parents, No Church, No Authorities in Our Films: Exploitation Movies, the Youth Audience, and Roger Corman's Counterculture Trilogy," *Journal of Film and Video* 67, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 3-20, 3.
[59] Quoted in Nick Heffernan, "No Parents, No Church, No Authorities in Our Films," 4.
[60] An unacknowledged debt to Hunter S. Thompson's 1965 article on the Hell's Angels in *The Nation* is especially evident.

Films' *Hells Angels on Wheels* (1967), where Jack Nicholson joined the biker movie craze playing the role of Poet. (According to Hopper, a Hollywood executive lamented to him at the peak of the biker movie craze that "every producer in town has his nephew out in the desert shooting a motorcycle picture."[61]) Simultaneously, AIP set out to diversify its ongoing shift from alien to alienation movies with *The Trip* (1967), a psychedelic drama directed and produced by Corman, written by Jack Nicholson, and featuring performances by Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper. Marking AIP's first directly "countercultural" film, *The Trip*'s commercial success set the stage for AIP to again do what it did best and green-light a cycle of counterculture-themed titles, including *Riot on Sunset Strip* (1967), *Wild in the Streets* (1968), *Maryjane* (1968), and *Psych-Out* (1968). In the midst of this, Fonda and Hopper reached out to Corman to set up a meeting with AIP to discuss a project of their own.

Unlike the major studios, AIP did not have to learn how to cater to the growing youth market in the 1960s. Spinning out flicks for teenagers is what it had always done. "Since its shoestring inception in 1954," an article in *Newsweek* commented in 1966, "American International Pictures has brought forth one unforgettable title—*I Was a Teenage Werewolf*—and some 180 forgettable, trivial, mindless and relatively innocent entertainments."[62] The air of seriousness notwithstanding, AIP's pivot to alienation movies in the late 1960s was not a departure from, but an adaptation of, its high-volume, youth-targeted business strategy. But unlike many of the independent companies that later

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[61] Quoted in Steven Bingen with Alan Dunn, *Easy Rider: 50 years Looking for America* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2020), 84.
[62] Quoted in Gary A. Smith, *The American International Pictures Video Guide* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2009), 3.

formed in the New Hollywood era (including Bert Schneider and Bob Rafelson's Raybert Productions, which ended up backing *Easy Rider*), AIP did not relate to the counterculture as a movement representing values to which it was committed (e.g., aesthetic freedom, experimentation, authenticity). Behind the leadership of James H. Nicholson and Sam Arkoff, AIP responded to the rise of the counterculture in the same way it had responded to market research (of which AIP conducted much) on monsters from outer space: as an emerging niche from which to extract a fresh body of themes and images for use in its pictures. This meant that AIP itself remained alien to the cultural sea changes refracted in its alienation movies. And this, in turn, virtually guaranteed that it would not be backing a project presented in an explicative-laden pitch by a young and inexperienced producer-director duo demanding ample time and creative freedom.[63] It was one thing for AIP to entrust seasoned B-movie directors and producers to make lurid films about hippie drop-outs, psychedelic drugs, and free love. It was something else entirely to hand over the reins to a couple of actors who, after all, AIP had cast in roles that played to their reputation in Hollywood as anti-establishment rebels. Fonda and Hopper could not have been surprised. By this time, they had already witnessed AIP's cautious approach to the zeitgeist kick in on *The Trip.* After Corman had already refused to shoot Jack Nicholson's original script for fear that it was "too risky, too avant-garde,"[64] AIP stepped in during post-production to water down the final cut even further. Narratively framed around a commercial director taking LSD for the first time, the film conspicuously allegorizes Corman's/AIP foray into the world

[63] The poison pill that led Fonda and Hopper to leave negotiations behind was AIP's attempt to stipulate that they could take over on the film if Hopper fell three days behind. See Fonda, *Don't Tell Dad*, 249.
[64] Fonda, *Don't Tell Dad,* 238.

of the counterculture. (Corman—who went Method by dropping acid in preparation for directing the film, and whom no one has ever accused of subtlety—insisted that Paul Groves, the main character, be a television director rather than a film director, to prevent it being too "transparent" that it was a "stand-in" for him[65]). In the print that Corman submitted to AIP, the film ends on a note of hopeful ambiguity. Having spent the night wandering through the psychedelic sounds and sights of LA nightlife after his trip takes a dark turn, Paul (Peter Fonda) awakes the next morning to a serene view of the ocean. The film ends, in this version, with Paul contemplatively gazing outward: a closing shot suggesting renewal, a fresh outlook on life. Finding this unacceptable, AIP broke with its usual practice of releasing Corman's print and ordered a last-minute round of edits, including the addition of a shattered glass effect on the final close-up of the director, transforming Corman's vaguely optimistic open-endedness into a didactic visualization of the life-shattering consequences of LSD. This new ending changed the film's allegory of the commercial director's encounter with the counterculture: where Corman's cut links tarrying with the counterculture to (commercial) renewal, the theatrical release marks AIP's refusal of the artistic ethos of the era, not least by overriding the director. Nor was AIP on track to grow more receptive as the decade wore on. As Corman himself later reflected, by the end of the 1960s "AIP was losing their nerve, maybe shaken by the controversy around the biker and acid movies."[66]

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[65] Roger Corman with Jim Jerome, *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime* (New York: De Capo Press, 1998), 145.
[66] Roger Corman with Jim Jerome, *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime* (New York: De Capo Press, 1998), __. *Gas-s-s-s* (1968) was the final film that Corman directed for AIP, Corman went on to start his own independent production company in 1970 (New World Films).

If it is ultimately unsurprising that AIP passed on *Easy Rider,* though, it is still less surprising that a crew of Corman alumni would go on make the film that "almost single-handedly created the road movie as a vital post-60s genre."[67] The underlying continuity with AIP fare was readily apparent to critics at the time of *Easy Rider*'s release. While one reviewer observed that *Easy Rider* has "all the sheen of a well-made B-picture,"[68] another described the film as a "serious" successor to Corman, a film "fashioned … out of scraps from the American-International formula for teen movies" made "to exploit sex, cycles and violence for a few fast bucks."[69] (The irony, of course, is that *Easy Rider* proved exponentially more commercially successful than any of AIP's alienation movies.) But fundamentally, elements of the road movie genre that emerges fully formed in *Easy Rider* bear the imprint of the "independently produced, on-the-run filmmaking style that Corman initiated."[70] In fact, Corman's flexible approach to filmmaking was in many ways ahead of its time, anticipating the more limber and openly collaborative production ethos that later spread with the growth of independent filmmaking in the New Hollywood era. Taking "a small band of efficient, dedicated, highly trained warriors" as his ideal, Corman would later describe the work environment he sought to cultivate—in contrast to the major studios—as "small" and "loosely stratified" such that it avoids "bureaucratization." Rather than presiding over a highly articulated structure of predefined roles, Corman preferred an "aura" of openness built on the idea that "everybody can—and eventually will—do

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[67] Lee Hill, *Easy Rider* (London, British Film Institute, 1996), 72.
[68] Quoted in Quoted in Steven Bingen with Alan Dunn, *Easy Rider: 50 years Looking for America* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2020), 73.
[69] Martin Knelmann, "The Rebels Create a Legend," *Toronto Globe and Mail* (October 25, 1969), 23.
[70] David Laderman, *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie* (Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 2002), 47.

everything."[71] Those involved in his projects often took on multiple jobs, wore different hats, and in the process gained experience with different technical facets of filmmaking. Whatever his aversion to commercially risky scripts, then, Corman adopted something of an experimental approach to managing the personnel involved in writing, casting, shooting, editing, marketing, and distributing his films. In doing so, Corman is undoubtedly correct to have credited himself with having provided a model—and often invaluable on-the-job training—to what he aptly described as the "generation of filmmakers" "educated in the 1960s counterculture" who went on to pursue their craft outside of the studio system (though whether they saw him as an "uncompromised artist," as he claimed, is less clear).[72] Having contributed to *The Trip* on both sides of the camera, Dennis Hopper was among those to directly benefit from a Corman apprenticeship in independent filmmaking. In addition to playing the part of Max, a psychedelic guru, he also directed second unit on the production. On location in Yuma, Big Dune, and outside of Los Angeles, Hopper oversaw many of the outdoor shots of Peter Fonda that appear in the dreamlike montages simulating Paul Groves' trip in the film. The vision and skill that Hopper displayed in this trial run, during which he directed "some of the best shots of the film" (as Fonda later claimed[73]), convinced Hopper's future *Easy Rider* collaborator that he had not only "the passion," but also "the ability to see form and substance" necessary to direct a feature film.[74] Finally, though, the aesthetic horizon that drives *Easy Rider* owed less to Corman

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[71] Roger Corman with Jim Jerome, *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime* (New York: De Capo Press, 1998), xiii, ix.
[72] Roger Corman with Jim Jerome, *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime* (New York: De Capo Press, 1998), viii.
[73] Quoted in Roger Corman with Jim Jerome, *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime* (New York: De Capo Press, 1998), 151.
[74] Nathan Rabin, "Interview: Peter Fonda," *The AV Club* (October 1, 2003).

than to the growing underground and neo-avant-garde artistic currents in which Hopper immersed himself—and anyone around him—as the renewed spirit of aesthetic revolt in the postwar era evolved from bebop jazz and the Beat Generation into rock and roll and the counterculture.

Rebel without a Contract

Years before bringing down the Hollywood studio system with his directorial debut, Dennis Hopper's first causality within the studio system had been his own career. While he may not have been the son of a Hollywood icon, Hopper was no Hollywood outsider either. In fact, judging by the ease with which Hopper landed a contract in the studio system, one might say that Hopper, of all people, knew something about easy rides—early on in his career, anyway. After signing with Warner Bros. at just 18, the young actor found himself on route to virtually assured Hollywood stardom when the studio launched his big screen career opposite James Dean in *Rebel without a Cause* (1955) and *Giants* (1956). But rather than preparing Hopper to become a Warner Bros. fixture, making these films (Dean's last, it would turn out) unexpectedly set Hopper on a course that would result in his early expulsion from the studio system. As Hopper himself later said of Dean's influence: "He was also a guerilla artist who attacked all restrictions on his sensibility. I imitated his style in art and in life. It got me into a lot of trouble."[75]

[75] Peter L. Winkler, *Dennis Hopper: The Wild Ride of a Hollywood Rebel.*

Above all, it was witnessing Dean's defiantly self-directed performances play out in real time that left a lasting impression on Hopper. "I was flabbergasted by his spontaneity," he later said. In particular, Hopper recalled being struck by Dean's unscripted embellishments in the police station scene, during which the stand-in for juvenile delinquency makes siren sounds and then erupts with laughter when police accidentally tickle him while performing a search. Having "never seen anyone improvise before," Hopper remembered thinking: "Where the hell is this on the page? Where is this coming from[?]" Hopper's classical training in acting had been about "line readings, precise gestures, knowing what you were going to do next": in short, the "preconceived" performance of actions in accordance with a script and director. But "Dean disregarded any direction in the script"—and often the director—doing his scenes "differently every time," not only improvising, but also expressing "real emotional reactions," Hopper recalled.[76] Transformed by the way that Dean's Method-inflected performances emerged "internally" or "in the moment," rather than "externally" from explicit direction,[77] Hopper dedicated himself to emulating Dean in future big screen roles. Predictably, though, refusing to take direction proved maladaptive in the studio system. After Hopper repeatedly locked horns with director Henry Hathaway on the set of his next feature film, *From Hell to Texas* (1958), Warner Bros. promptly canceled his contract. Branded a troublemaker, the self-styled Dean protégé found himself blackballed from roles in major feature films.

During this time, Hopper headed off to New York to study under Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio, where he could drink from the fountain to which he traced the legendary

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[76] Quoted in Winkler, *Dennis Hopper: The Wild Ride of a Hollywood Rebel*.
[77] Quoted in Winkler, *Dennis Hopper: The Wild Ride of a Hollywood Rebel*.

performances of his idols: Montgomery Clift, Marlon Brando, and above all James Dean. An outgrowth of Konstantin Stanislavski's acting system, Strasberg's influential Method school of acting called for personal identification with characters, not least by drawing on affectively charged memories. Ostensibly designed to foster more natural, emotionally compelling performances, the "Method" also proved to be uniquely well-suited to the production of Hollywood stars whose careers increasingly blurred the line between art and life, role and self, performance and public persona. While spending time in New York, Hopper also immersed himself in the emerging Beat scene, spending evenings at jazz clubs in the Village, where he befriended Allen Ginsberg, Miles Davis, and other artists who shared in the spirit of aesthetic revolt that was forming in response to the spread of bureaucratic routinization in the organizations of the postwar social order. As Hopper himself was apt to recognize, the spontaneity that had changed his conception of acting dovetailed with broader artistic currents across mediums—what cultural historian Daniel Belgrad would later term the postwar American "culture of spontaneity."[78]

By the early 1960s, Hopper had moved back to Los Angeles, where he split his time between taking minor acting jobs where he could get them and hanging out with writers and artists at the helm of the art scene that was forming on the West Coast. In 1960, Hopper had gotten his first opportunity to star in a film with Curtis Harrington's *Night Tide* (1961), a low-budget independent production that Hopper himself later credited with being the first American film to be made outside the studio system, "in the streets."[79] This is

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[78] Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998).
[79] Hopper says this in his DVD commentary on *Night Tide.* As pointed out by Peter L. Winkler in *Dennis Hopper: The Wild Ride of a Hollywood Rebel.*

not true. By 1960, independent American filmmakers had started to make films in which on-location shooting "in the streets" replaced studio shooting—including the appropriately titled *In the Street* (1948), made by Helen Levitt, Janice Loeb, and James Agee. Nonetheless, *Night Tide* was certainly the first film to put shooting in the streets on *Hopper*'s radar—a production decision that was later central to the making of *Easy Rider.*

In addition to frequenting the scene developing around Venice Beach, Hopper began spending time at the Ferus Gallery in the early 1960s, where he befriended Walter Hopps, Wallace Berman, and Ed Kienholz, among other experimental artists. After opening in West Hollywood in the late 1950s, the Ferus Gallery had played a key role in fostering the contemporary art scene in Los Angeles. Famously, it held Andy Warhol's first solo exhibition in 1962, where Warhol unveiled his famous installation of Campbell's soup cans. Hopper not only attended the exhibit; he was also among the first collectors to purchase a Warhol soup can. Not long after, Hopper made appearances in a couple of Warhol's short films.[80] Only later, after *Easy Rider* confirmed Hopper's celebrity, did Warhol induct Hopper into his Pop pantheon with a silkscreen portrait series of the Hollywood rebel in 1970-1971.[81]

Yet before *Easy Rider* succeeded in marrying avant-garde revolt to Hollywood—a kind of cinematic corollary of the convergence of high art and popular culture in Warhol's

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[80] *Tarzan and Jane Regained… Sort of* (1964), an amateurish lark that Warhol filmed at various Los Angeles locations in October 1963 during his second show at the Ferus Gallery, and *The Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys* (1964), a film compiled from Warhol's stock of silent screen tests. Incidentally, the title Raybert's Monkees movie, *Head,* is probably an homage to Warhol's controversial 1964 film *Blow-Job*.

[81] The portraits are based on a still from Hopper's upcoming film (the second film he directed), *The Last Movie* (1971). See Andy Warhol, *Portraits of the 70s* (New York: Random House, 1979), 66-67.

work—no one was more familiar with the "two halves" into which art and popular culture remained divided in the 1960s than Dennis Hopper.[82] When he wasn't spending time among artists, Hopper was accepting any role that came his way, which generally meant suffering the indignity of making guest appearances on television shows. One of the more deviously casted jobs he accepted during this time was a guest appearance on the first season of CBS's *Petticoat Junction* (1963-1970). The episode, "Bobbie Jo and the Beatnik" (1964), features Hopper in the role of Alan Landman, a surly "Beatnik" poet from Greenwich Village. While passing through town, Alan gets roped into meeting the family of Bobbie Jo (Pat Woodell), a young woman he has just met at the local library. The stage is set for Alan to wax lyrical against middle-class conformism and hypocrisy in a "scream of protest" directed at "the atrophied ear of a sleeping America." But the sublime summarily gives way to the ridiculous when Alan, having denounced money and work as beneath his poetic calling, quickly changes his tune after he meets Mr. Stanley, the president of a dogfood company that is offering $2,000 for a jingle it can use in a new advertising campaign. Bobbie, for her part, initially justifies Alan's sudden interest in writing dogfood jingles on the grounds that having a job "will give him the freedom to write real poetry" without requiring him to compromise any of his "artistic dignity." But the episode flips the logic of artistic integrity on its head when the dogfood executive hesitates to hire Alan because he is not convinced that Alan is sufficiently passionate about dogs and is "just [in it] for the money." To which Alan responds by improvising a canine-themed rhapsody that, beyond just persuading Mr. Stanley of his passion, culminates in the two embracing as they howl like dogs together (Figure 3). The image of Alan howling, around which viewers in the

[82] Theodor W. Adorno, "Letters to Benjamin," in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 2007), 123.

know gather the episode is constructed, is a gag directed at Allen Ginsberg's "Howl," the poem that defined the Beat Generation. (Before selling postwar American youth on a literary movement, Ginsberg had started his career in advertising.) But Ginsberg is not the episode's only target. By casting Hopper in the role of an iconoclastic rebel whose serious artistic ambitions are belied by lowbrow work, the episode mocks Hopper himself, who was widely known in Hollywood circles at the time for his high artistic pretensions, but who was reduced to accepting television jobs for which he would have been lucky to make $2,000 in 1964.

Nearly a decade passed before Hopper got offered another role in a major Hollywood feature film. Ironically (or maybe not) it was another Hathaway-directed picture, *The Sons of Katie Elder* (1965), a Western starring the Duke himself. The role came with one stipulation: no "Method shit." Needing the work, Hopper dutifully complied. But by this time, Hopper had become a rebel with a cause, or in any case a rebel armed with a prediction suited his plight: the imminent breakdown of the Hollywood studio system. Hopper, of course, was not the only person paying attention as cracks began to form in the studio system. But certainly no one was more vocal about it. At Hollywood parties in the mid-1960s (to which Hopper retained access, despite his plight, through his first marriage, to Brooke Hayward), Hopper was frequently found drunkenly forecasting doom: "Heads are going to roll, the old order is going to fall, all you dinosaurs are going to die."[83] Simultaneously, Hopper began to collaborate with Peter Fonda on independent film

[83] Quoted in Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls,* 43.

projects in which the two set out to bring the spirit of aesthetic revolt that was building at the time to Hollywood.

From the Avant-Garde to Hollywood by way of the Counterculture

While the source of Hopper's favored Cocteau's adage is unclear,[84] it is unsurprising that Hopper should have taken inspiration from the avant-garde poet and artist turned proto-New Wave auteur who had insisted on the art status of his "poésie cinématographique." (Incidentally, Edouard L. de Luarot, in the first issue of *Film Culture* (1955), had noted the "particular predilection for Cocteau" among "those film artists who are some 30 years behind the times in their indefatigable imitation of the European avantgarde of the twenties"—Cocteau having "himself been called a 'pickpocket of ideas.'"[85]) But whether or not Cocteau pickpocketed this idea (great artists steal, right?), the notion that artists should embrace chance might have been gleaned from any number of avant-garde artists. The fascination with chance, spontaneity, and improvisation more or less defined the avant-garde project and sensibility. And this preoccupation was nowhere more legible than in avant-garde forays into the new medium of the moving image going back to the 1920s, where Dada and Surrealist filmmakers set out to produce ever new effects through "experimentation and recording accidental events resulting from

[84] In slightly modified form, Hopper biographer Peter L. Winkler—also without a reference—confirms Hopper's fondness for "quoting Jean Cocteau's adage that 90 percent of art is accident" (Peter L. Winkler, *Dennis Hopper: The Wild Ride of a Hollywood Rebel* (Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, 2011). eBook). *Apocalypse Now* director Francis Ford Coppola would later turn Hopper's cherished adage on its head: "I hire Hopper for the two percent of brilliance, not the 98 percent of horseshit."
[85] Edouard L. de Luarot, "Towards a Theory of Dynamic Realism," *Film Culture* 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1955): 2-14, 8.

improvisation."[86] In 1925, an anonymously published article in *La Revolution surrealiste* (the "official" Surrealist journal) celebrated film's potential as "the workshop of chance."[87] In some cases, avant-garde filmmakers explicitly thematized this fascination with chance in their work. For instance, Man Ray's final completed film, *Les Mystères du Château de Dé* (The Mystery of the Chateau of Dice; 1929), depicts a trip made to the Viconte de Noailles' modern chateau in the south of France by two mysterious men who have decided to live their lives according to the chance dictates of a pair of dice.

Interest in chance, spontaneity, and improvisation continued to inform the development of art film movements in the postwar period. As William Guynn notes, a tendency to break with "the tyranny of the shooting script" and leave "space for happenstance and improvisation" runs through the Italian Neorealism and French New Wave films.[88] In the U.S., the improvisational origins of the performances in art films like John Cassavetes' *Shadows* (1958)—one of the more celebrated examples of the "New American Cinema" movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s—also put this tendency on display.[89] In a 1959 manifesto published in *Film Culture,* editor Jonas Mekas welcomed the new crop of American filmmakers, like Cassavetes, who set out to "free themselves from the over-professionalism and over-technicality that usually handicaps the inspiration and spontaneity of the official cinema" (read: Hollywood) by making films guided "more by intuition and improvisation than by discipline." (For good measure, Mekas closed his piece

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[86] Toby Mussman, "Early Surrealist Expression in the Film," *Film Culture* 41 (Summer 1966): 8-17, 13.
[87] Quoted in Toby Mussman, "Early Surrealist Expression in the Film," *Film Culture* 41 (Summer 1966): 8-17, 9.
[88] William Guynn, "The Stages of the Film Production Process," *The Routledge Companion to Film History,* ed. William Guynn (New York: Routledge, 2011), 39-63, 46.
[89] Jonas Mekas, "A Call for a New Generation of Film Makers," *Film Culture* 4, no. 4 (1959): 1-3.

by invoking the spirit of Rimbaud, calling for "a complete derangement of the official cinematic senses."[90]) For critics who saw little merit in the films of the New American Cinema, spontaneity looked more like a crutch than an antidote to rigid formalization, established conventions, and professionalism. Edouard de Laurot, for instance, criticized the movement's "mystique of spontaneity" as "a protean doctrine intended to camouflage creative impotence, and provide an *a posteriori* self-justification." Laurot went on to satirize the avant-garde pretensions of the NAC by providing a glossary to help the general public understand the movement. The list of (re)defined terms included: Art ("A by-product of fortuity"); Creation ("A passive act"); Director ("He who shoots first and asks questions later"); Improvisation ("Hope"); Prophet ("Any person who denounces Hollywood"); Script ("That which will be written"); and, of course, Spontaneity ("What one resorts to when imagination has failed").[91]

But the very ease with which Laurot could satirize the avant-garde sensibility spoke to its spread in the U.S. in the postwar era. And it was only natural that *Easy Rider*, in its bid to bring an avant-garde sensibility to Hollywood, would itself channel the spirit of chance, spontaneity, and improvisation. To be sure, though, *Easy Rider*'s itinerant exploration of spontaneous freedom had an obvious literary forerunner: Jack Kerouac's *On the Road.*[92] As critic David Laderman notes, *Easy Rider* is readily legible as "a loose film version of" Kerouac's widely read novel.[93] Here, though, *Easy Rider* was not the first to attempt to bring

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[90] Jonas Mekas, "Notes on the New American Cinema," *Film Culture* 24 (Spring 1962): 6-16, 8.
[91] Edouard de Laurot, "The Future of the New American Cinema," *Film Culture* 24 (Spring 1962): 20-22.
[92] A recent book of Hopper's photography from the 1960s is titled, aptly enough, *On the Road.* See ennis Hopper, *On the Road,* ed. José Lebrero Stals (Malaga: Museo Picasso Málaga, 2013).
[93] David Laderman, *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie* (Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 2002), 66.

the spirit of aesthetic revolt dramatized in the Beat odyssey to the medium of film. In a non-trivial way, the spirit of the sixties counterculture itself—as Tom Wolfe famously explores in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968)—began with a failed attempt to make a cinematic successor to *On the Road.*

As recounted in Wolfe's "countercultural origin story," [94] novelist Ken Kesey, after abandoning writing, brought together a circle of collaborators (the "Merry Pranksters") to pursue various aesthetic experiments in spontaneous self-creation in the mid-1960s, first at Kesey's cabin in the woods of La Honda, then by following in the footsteps of the Beats on a cross-country bus trip across the U.S., and finally by hosting a series of "Acid Tests" in various cities across on the West Coast. Not unlike the artists involved in the contemporaneous Cage-inspired Fluxus movement, the Pranksters dissolved the noun conception of art into a perpetual verb, subordinating product to creative process in the various projects they pursued (their mantra "art is not eternal"). But if an earlier Romanticism had modeled its aesthetic conception of life after the novel, thus imagining the creative life in terms of the "forever becoming" of Schlegel's *Romantische Poesie*,[95] the aesthetic conception of life is in the process of leaping media in *Electric,* where life in the "dramatised society"[96] is increasingly imagined in audio-visual terms.

Besides the LSD and the day-glo painted school bus, the shift in media marks the primary advance that the Pranksters make on the earlier Beats, whose mobile revolt the

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[94] Jarvis Cocker, "How Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* Changed My Life," *The Guardian,* May 17, 2018.
[95] Friedrich Schlegel, "Athenäum Fragments," *Germany Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe,* edited by Kathleen Wheeler (New York: Cambridge UP, 1984), 47.
[96] Raymond Williams, "The Dramatised Society," *Raymond Williams on Television: Selected Writings*, edited by Alan O'Connor (New York: Routledge, 1989), 3-12.

Pranksters otherwise imitated in setting forth on the road in 1964.[97] By recruiting Neal Cassady (the inspiration for the "holy barbarian" Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*) to drive the bus on the group's prolonged psychedelic happening across the country, Kesey left no ambiguity as to the coattails he wished to ride.[98] But where the Beats gathered material from the road to produce literature, the Pranksters switched to analogue recording and playback equipment to gather film and audio to be incorporated into what they referred to as "the Big Movie": a feature-length celebration of aesthetic self-creation for a new generation, which was to have the pithy title *Intrepid Traveler and His Merry Pranksters Leave in Search of a Cool Place*.[99] As post-production expenses mounted, however, editing proved more difficult than anticipated—particularly when no clapper was used, stymying subsequent audio synchronization. Ever the improvisers, though, the Pranksters shifted gears, and began showcasing segments of film they were editing, projecting clips alongside music blaring from the sound system wired across the backyard of Kesey's Walden cabin in the woods of La Honda. Audio-visual experimentation continued at the "Acid Tests," where lights and projectors joined live Grateful Dead sets. In staging these events in cities along the West Coast, they began to view them as the true "Prankster movie"—one which others

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[97] Coincidentally, the same year that Saul Bellow would publish *Herzog,* a novel about a scholar of romanticism whose furious bouts of compulsive writing include a letter to Nietzsche in which he foregrounds the quotidian life-world that even Nietzsche's free spirits inhabit: even Dionysian-driven "immoralists," he insists, "ride the bus" (Bellow, *Herzog,* 319). That a Dionysian bus would emerge this same year, stripping away all quotidian connotation, Bellow could scarcely have imagined.

[98] Kesey more or less modeled himself after Neal Cassady in his quest to live life as a work of art. Just as Cassady's life had earlier been the inspiration for the "holy barbarian" at the center of Kerouac's famous roman à clef (Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*), so Kesey's efforts are similarly consummated by the protagonist in Wolfe's novel.

[99] This surprisingly bad working title happened to recall the marketing copy on the UK cover of John Clellon Holmes' *Go* (1952), the first Beat novel (published in the UK as *The Beat Boys*): "America's Teen-age Jungle and a Searing Story of Youth in Search of 'Kicks.'"

not only watched but joined as participants. In the "*lightening*" of spontaneous creation that emerged in these events, which united everyone in "one experience, with all the senses opened wide, words, music, lights, sounds, touch,"[100] the Pranksters arrived at the participatory spirit of contemporaneous aesthetic experiments in self-creation in the art-world and emerging counterculture more broadly.[101]

As for realizing an actual feature film, this task fell to Hopper and Fonda with *Easy Rider* (preceded only by the Beatles' 1967 *Magical Mystery Tour*).[102] Here, Hopper and Fonda enjoyed a decisive advantage. Where Kesey remained hopelessly amateurish as a filmmaker (incidentally, he had first tried his luck acting in Hollywood before making his way up to Stanford's creative writing program), Hopper and Fonda formed part of the "vibrant new counterculture *within* Hollywood."[103] And in this capacity, the two—behind Hopper's lead—were every bit as attuned to the aesthetic ethos of the era. So much so that Julian Schnabel has convincingly suggested that Hopper should be considered a "fluxus

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[100] Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test,* 8.
[101] Rather than the art world, Wolfe turns to popular culture to find a model of the Prankster ideal of self-creation in order to bolster his thesis that Kesey's primary influence is Hollywood and comic books (this is also how Leslie Fiedlder interpreted the sixties in his famous "New Mutants" essay). Specifically, he draws on Arthur C. Clarke's sci-fi vision of an advanced civilization in *Childhood's End* (1953), where scientists and artists converge (not unlike the sublation of the "two cultures" that Sontag announces in the sixties) to pursue a media experience in which "total identification" is realized: a state of indifference between subject and object, self and other, audience and performance, life and art, creator and creation. While the trajectory of the cinema is taken as instructive, "the final stage would be reached when the audience forgot it was an audience, and became part of the action" (Quoted 234). Incidentally, such "total identification" mirrors the Surrealist "future resolution" of "dream and reality" into an "absolute reality, a *surreality.*"
[102] The Beatles' path to psychedelic rock would pass through one Owsley Stanley, the Prankster LSD supplier and Grateful Dead sound engineer to whom the Fab Four turned for LSD in the run-up to their own psychedelic odyssey (in a brightly painted coach: no school buses in England) for the filming of *Magical Mystery Tour*—which, of course, faced no post-production hang-ups on the way to its BBC premiere in 1967.
[103] Roger Corman, *How I Made a Hundred Movies,* 131. Emphasis added.

artist."[104] Fonda's encounter with currents of contemporary art had been through Hopper. While the two were seeking backers for an earlier film project in New York in 1966, Hopper introduced Fonda to a number of artists—among them the veteran Surrealist Salvidor Dali, who convinced Fonda to participate in an upcoming Happening at Lincoln Center.[105] Hopper, for his part, participated in everything from Allan Kaprow's Happenings[106] to the famed Human Be-In event held at the Golden Gate Park in 1967, which he attended alongside his friends in San Francisco's literary and art scene like Michael McClure (who spoke at the event) and Bruce Conner.

Conner, an assemblage artist-turned-experimental filmmaker, was major influence on Hopper's editing. Inspired by the fast pace of early "Coming Attractions" trailers and the rapid succession of stock shots juxtaposed in the final scene of the Marx Brothers' comedy *Duck Soup* (1933),[107] Conner's early short, *A Movie* (1959), set the tone for much of his

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[104] Quoted in Steve Chagollan, "Dennis Hopper, the Director," *DGA Quarterly* (Fall 2018). Dga.org.
[105] Embracing the opportunity, Fonda showed up with a Burns electric twelve-string and an Ampex reel to reel in tow. "My plan for the Happening with Dali," he later recalled, "was to record, direct to the Ampex, free-form music inspired by what I saw actually happening on the stage" (Fonda, *Don't Tell Dad,* 215). Other participants in Dali's Happening included Carl Holmes and the Commanders, the Tony Scott Jazz Quartet, the Free Fantasy Quartet, as well as dancers from Sarah Lawrence College and the Reginald Simmons Company—all of whom joined together in a chaotic blend of song, dance, poetry, and music accompanying the main event, which involved a giant plastic bubble in which Dali and a few collaborators flung paint from the inside in front of a screen on which was projected *Un Chien andalou* (1929), an early Surrealist film which Dali co-wrote with director Luis Buñuel. A bemused headline in the *New York Times* the next morning read: "Dali Concocts a Happening—of Sorts" (Grace Glueck, "Dali Concocts a Happening of Sorts," *The New York Times,* February 24, 1966, page 28).
[106] Hopper photographed Allan Kaprow's "Fluids" happenings in 1967. See Dennis Hopper, *On the Road,* ed. José Lebrero Stals (Malaga: Museo Picasso Málaga), 136-141.
[107] War has broken out in the final scene and Groucho, pleading for help as enemy troops surround the building in which he and few other stand, is assured by a disembodied voice in the distance that "Help is on the way." Rather than military help, however, Groucho's call for help is met with an absurdist montage of footage showing groups of various kinds on the move: firefighters and a motorcycle police squad; long-distance runners, rowers, swimmers; monkeys, elephants, dolphins; and finally soldiers.

experimental filmmaking with its flurry of found-footage montages—cut from B-movies, newsreels, and training films, among other sources—to the sound of three of the movements of Ottorino Respighi's symphonic poem "Pines of Rome." Describing his process, Conner evoked the role of chance in his work: "I snip out small parts of films and collect them on a larger reel. Sometimes when I tail-end one bit of the film onto another, I'll find a relationship that I would have never thought about consciously."[108] Later breaking with his usual practice as a collage and assemblage artist of using found materials, Conner's meticulously edited short film *Breakaway* (1966) features the multitalented singer-actor-dancer Toni Basil in a kind of celluloid fever dream as she appears to dance or otherwise morph between various states to the sound of her rock and roll B-side track "Breakaway," also released in 1966. Made from all original footage and set to the tune of a rock and roll track, Conner's editing technique in *Breakaway*—at once frenetic, discontinuous, and dream-like—anticipates not only Dennis Hopper's editing and use of popular music in *Easy Rider,* but the rise of modern music videos more generally.

Spurred on by their friendship,[109] Hopper freely acknowledged the extent to which "Bruce's movies changed my entire concept of editing." "In fact," he added, "much of the editing of 'Easy Rider' came directly from watching Bruce's films, and, when I look at MTV, it seems they all must've been students of his."[110] In a recording for a retrospective exhibit

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[108] Quoted in David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction,* 9th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 377.
[109] The friendship between the two was sufficiently strong that at one point in the mid-1960s, Conner—ever resistant to signing his works—planned for an exhibition (without telling Hopper) at which a series of his engraving collages would appear with labels identifying their creator as "Dennis Hopper" (Kevin Hatch, *Looking for Bruce Conner* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 8).
[110] Quoted in Andrea K. Scott, "Bruce Conner, R.I.P.," *The New Yorker* (August 12, 2008). As it happens, Conner went on to make a couple of "official" music videos in the MTV era: one for Devo and another a collaboration with Brian Eno and David Byrne.

at the Museum of Modern Art, Hopper—perhaps risking hyperbole—upped the ante. "In my opinion," he stated, "Bruce Conner is the most important artist in the twentieth century." Describing the enduring personal impact of viewing *A Movie* back in 1959, Hopper compared the experience to someone "ripp[ing] a veil off my eyes. It was like somebody took a blindfold off me. The way he was editing, his sensibility … it really just overwhelmed me. His films influenced me ... I was thinking about Bruce's films when I was editing [*Easy Rider*]."[111] Nor was his relationship to Conner's films limited to spectatorship. During the shooting of *Breakaway,* Hopper was not only on site; he held the lights on Toni Basil—who was later to appear in both *Head* and *Easy Rider*—as Conner shot her. Conner is also a frequent subject in Hopper's photography from the 1960s. One 1964 photograph stands out: an apparently candid portrait in which Conner smiles at the camera, his face obscured by clusters of joined puzzle pieces that he is holding up to his face with both hands. Looking at the camera through disassembled puzzle pieces captures something of Conner's disjunctive editing style in a single frame.[112]

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[111] "Bruce Conner - BREAKAWAY - Art + Music - MOCAtv," The Museum of Contemporary Art Youtube Channel, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CHtEASlzG8.
[112] Dennis Hopper, *On the Road,* ed. José Lebrero Stals (Malaga: Museo Picasso Málaga), 124.

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