12

The Vietnam War and the Fragmentation of American Identity

Crises of Public and Private Foundation Myths

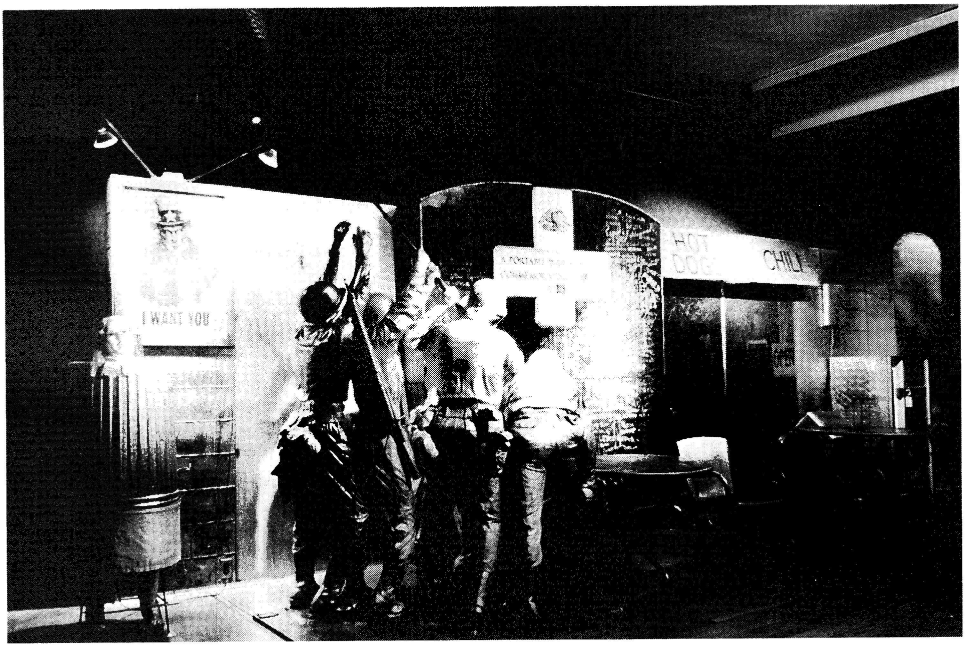
The theory of repression provided artists and poets with a metaphor that shaped their reaction to the Vietnam War. As they defined the structure of American society through a combination of psychoanalytic and mythopoetic theory, they proposed that the root causes of violence lay in a primal scene in American history that had been repressed in public culture but continued to find expression both in everyday life and the affairs of state. "From a revolutionary viewpoint," Lawrence Ferlinghetti (b. ca. 1919) declared in 1969, "it *is* time when shock treatment is necessary!" Gary Snyder (b. 1930) found in an image of the controlled burning of surface shrub a model for renewing the soul by clearing away old dry thoughts and feelings and bringing the raw ground to the surface: "I would like, / with a sense of helpful order, / with respect for laws / of nature, / to help my land / with a burn. a hot clean / burn."[1]

Rather than present rational argument, protest based in this view aimed to exteriorize interior conflict so that each person could confront and overcome the forces that coerced identification with the power of the state. Robert Duncan argued that "the urge to shed our individual responsibility and to become a person of the Nation" provided the foundation to the American concept and practice of democracy.[2] Poets had to awaken their fellow citizens to the crimes they unconsciously committed as citizens through their representatives in government. The slogan "Make love, not war" fit into a definition of American military policy as an outgrowth of repressed sexual drives. Artists and poets in the 1960s helped shatter an illusion of national consensus through a two-fold realignment of categories of the unspeakable: first, a projection of sexual experience into public discourse; second, acknowledgment of the violence upon which United States society had been built.

"Everywhere living productive forms in the evolution of forms fail, weaken, or grow monstrous, destroying the terms of their existence," Robert Duncan observed in the introduction to his 1968 collection of poems, *Bending the Bow.* "We cannot rid ourselves of the form to which we now belong," he continued. With the Vietnam War the American republic had entered the last days of its history because the fictional nature of its founding ideals had become clear. Since death was prelude to rebirth, the duty of poets was to prepare themselves and their readers for the transformation that was underway.[3] In another essay Duncan argued that the first step to rebirth was acknowledging crimes one does not want to face.

> This is the importance we find in tragedy, where Man comes to know the depths of what he is doing, his righteousness is stripped bare. The bomber overlooks the reality he inflicts—he flies high as the politician who directs his action likes to fly high above the reality of his orders. The State Department agent plays, as if it were a game, moves and countermoves in the name of peace and order, of "honor," that involve unrealities of burning cities and countrysides laid waste. The lies of Johnson and his régime are terms of the language of a grand psychopathology of daily political life that belongs to their refusal to face the facts of what they are doing. . . . The language of this history is to be read as the language of a psychotic episode in which there is no recognition of the madness.[4]

Political protest aimed to force national leadership to address the effects of their actions and not to escape into the abstractions of cause or the teleologies of rational planning. (Hence the importance of the mocking, macabre chant, "Hey, hey, LBJ! How many kids did you kill today?" rather than appeals to



50. Edward Kienholz, *The Portable War Memorial,* mixed media, 1968.
The Museum Ludwig, Museen der Stadt Köln.

humanitarian principles, universal justice, or a variation of patriotic sentiment.) Frank confession of the hidden effects of war would wipe away self-righteousness and force each person to face the costs of their desires for power over others. The ideology of nationalism was particularly vicious because it absolved individuals of personal responsibility by imposing upon them an obligation of conformity to group consensus. To shatter the repressive dynamics of nationalism, each individual had to awaken his or her own private conscience through a deliberate act of separation. Identity had to relocate from the abstraction of American patriotism to other ideals more rooted in immediate personal connections that could as easily carry hopes and dreams of a good life.

Psychological separation required rewriting the foundation myths of the United States as a nation. Edward Kienholz's *The Portable War Memorial,* "suitable for any future war," (fig. 50) was the centerpiece of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's 1968 summer exhibit. The source of its imagery was unmistakable to a generation raised on the mythology of World War II as a holy crusade. Kienholz patterned a set of figures after Joseph Rosenthal's famous photograph of marines raising the United States flag over Iwo Jima. But Kienholz's GIs raise the flag over a patio table while a recording of Kate Smith bellows a strained, static-crackling version of "God Bless America." In a corner of the tableau, next to the barbecue stand, is the political heart of the piece: a small bas-relief of an African slave in chains struggling against the suburban utopia that was the ultimate historical product of conquest and exploitation. The small figure dramatizes the force of repression that had screened out, but could not completely eradicate, the origins of American plenty.[5]

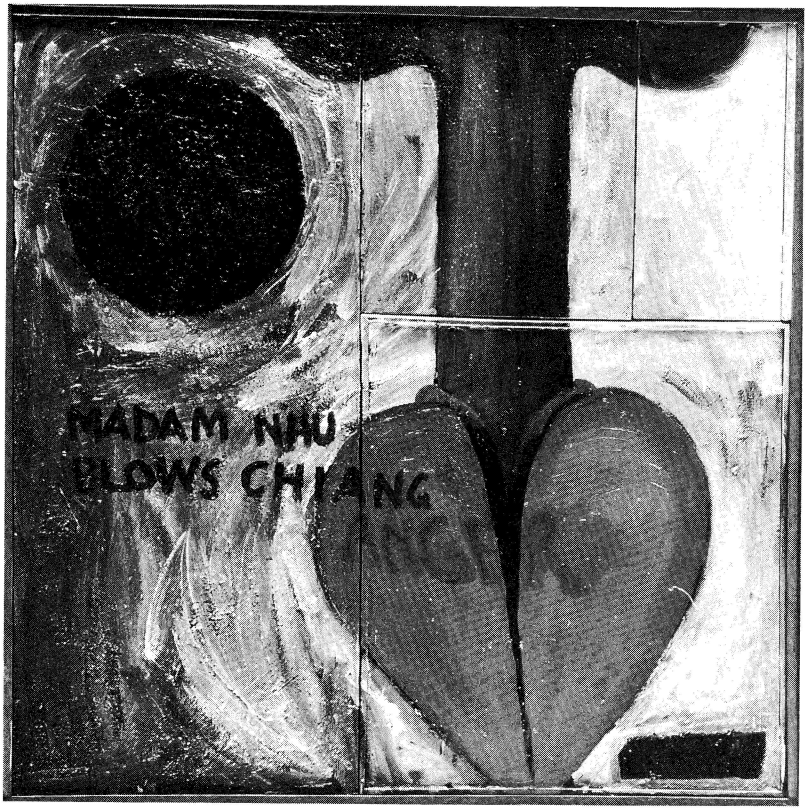
The original crime that Kienholz, among many, believed that the war in Indochina revealed was a long history of racial domination and violence. Michael McClure's long poem *Poison Wheat* described American history as a chronicle of continuous war, beginning with the genocide of the Native American peoples during the westward expansion. He ridiculed one of the most apparently peaceful icons of the United States, the sheaf of wheat. American productivity, however bountiful, was poisoned by the blood of victims and the fears of retribution that prolonged the nation's dependency upon military aggression. His volume outlined a program for new economic and foreign policies that could emerge from acknowledgment of past crimes and contrition. With a perhaps quixotic belief in the power of poetry, McClure privately published his poem and sent copies to 576 prominent journalists and politicians. Not one responded, and McClure began to consider whether acts of violence might ultimately be necessary to sabotage the military machine.[6]

Conquest instead of discovery; slavery instead of enterprise; a funeral pyre of indigenous peoples instead of breadbasket of the world or arsenal of democracy; atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki instead of the "good war": modal events of American history assumed new, ironical meanings that bluntly stated that the American state was simply an historical, hence arbitrary, fact, that it had never been the agency of providential redemption. Avant-garde poets and artists entered into political debate over the war with language calculated to insult rather than convince. Shock therapy meant that audiences would know instantly where they stood when facing art and poetry of this nature. Gary Snyder, loosely translating the Tang Dynasty hermit poet Han-Shan, who abandoned society to live on a mountaintop, succinctly stated the developing polarization that his generation desired:

> My heart's not the same as yours.
> If your heart was like mine
> You'd get it and be right here.[7]

Snyder called the shattering of myths of social unity the revolt of the "back country." His phrase meant first and foremost the explosion of unconscious knowledge into consciousness, but he also celebrated the refusal of despised class, sexual, racial, and cultural groups to accept silence, to accept the demeaning status of "minorities."

Linking sexuality and violence in a critique of American psychopolitics preexisted escalation of the Vietnam War, which served as the instance that confirmed already well-developed beliefs that the United States polity was irredeemably brutal. "The same war / continues," Denise Levertov (b. 1923) wrote in 1966. "We have breathed the grits of it in, all our lives / our lungs are pocked with it / the mucous membrane of our dreams / coated with it, the imagination / filmed over with the gray filth of it." Wally Hedrick's early anti–Vietnam War paintings (fig. 51) assaulted the United States government's East Asian allies with sexual innuendo and a stark image that equated American foreign policy with rape. "We weren't really there overtly," he recalled about his early paintings on Vietnam, "but we were there. I was starting to hear things on the news broadcasts, 'We're sending 20 advisers.' And I said, 'Uh oh, here we go.' But see, I'd only been out of the Army five years, and



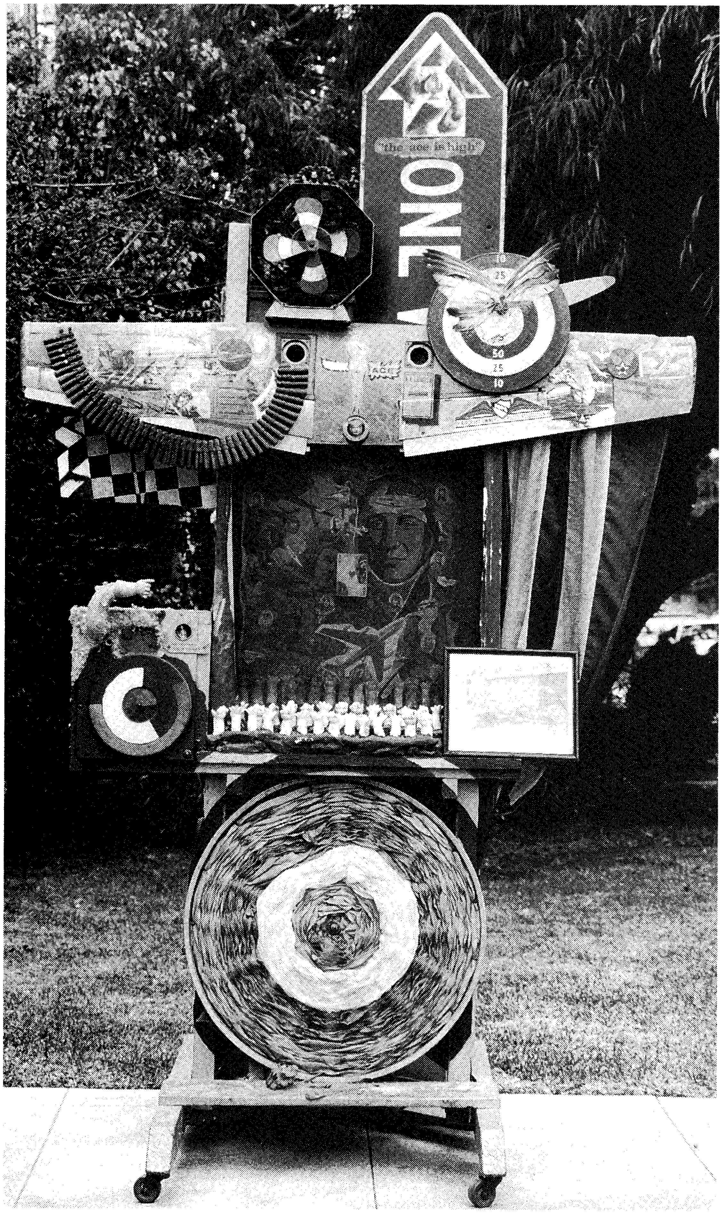
51. Wally Hedrick, *Anger,* oil on canvas, 1959. Private collection. Courtesy of the Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco.

somehow I don't think I knew the difference between Korea and Vietnam. To me it was all the same. All I knew was we were there and we were going to get screwed again."[8] His motif of ignorance functioned to intensify the guilt of those who failed to protest the war: one did not need to *know* the details. Awareness of the evil in American society should be in one's bones. Those who didn't "get it" had a problem: they were still colonized by the attractions of living in the most powerful and power-hungry nation in history. The undercurrent of self-mockery in Hedrick's memory was part of a struggle to burn away the complicity that arose from simply being born in the United States.

Ben Talbert's *The Ace* (figs. 52 and 53) presented a similar critique in a humorous self-portrait that dramatized the satisfactions a military society gave the American male. The work drew on his adolescent ambitions to become a jet fighter pilot. After graduating from high school in suburban Los Angeles County, Talbert (1933–1974) entered Texas A&M College to pursue aviation studies. He dropped out after the first year and was drafted into the army. Actual military experience soured his romantic vision of the warrior life. On the completion of his service, he returned home to enroll at UCLA, where he majored first in aeronautical engineering but then switched to real estate courses in the School of Business Administration. Two years later in 1959, after marrying his high school sweetheart, he dropped out of school once and for all. He pursued his calling as an artist in the impoverished beach community of Venice, where he was one of the most personable and frequently photographed beat characters of southern California (fig. 54).

Talbert had no training in the arts whatsoever. His work developed from his love of comic books, hand-decorated hot rods, surfboards, and pornography. Talbert developed his own private comic strip, "Dick Racy," a parody of the popular fictional detective Dick Tracy. This series of work allowed him to comment on the relation of crime fantasies and repression. Filled with non sequiturs, false leads, and witty delight in Racy's disregard for the law to nail his man or woman, Talbert's version strung together exaggerated sexual conquests with the violent deaths of Racy's enemies. Talbert had three one-artist exhibits at the prestigious Dwan Gallery between 1958 and 1963, but most of his work remained unseen because of its explicit sexuality. His reputation during his lifetime stemmed almost entirely from personal contact. People traveled to his house to look at almost legendary works they had heard about only by word of mouth.[9]

The Ace was the single work by which he was best known during his lifetime, in part because it was one of the few that could be reproduced without publishers worrying if they might become liable for prosecution under then existing antiobscenity laws. Its popularity among his contemporaries also


"the ace is high"
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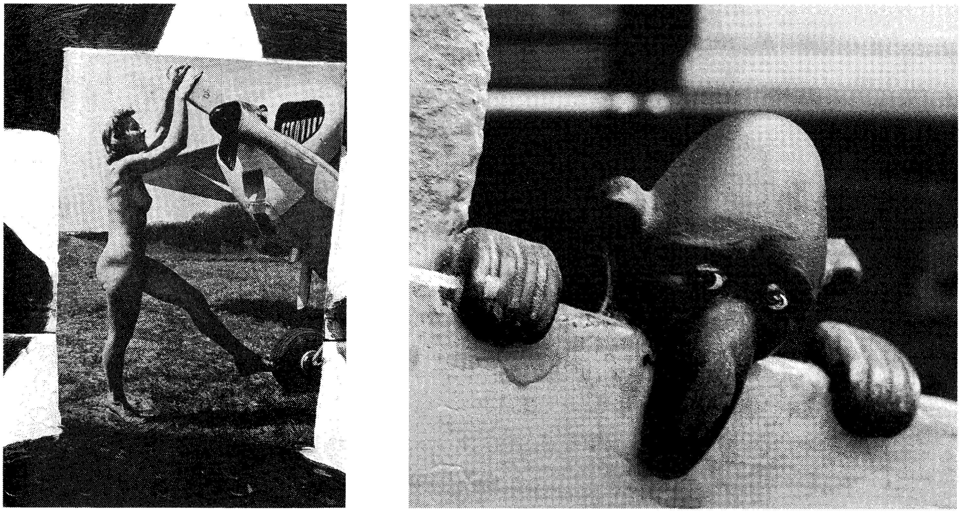
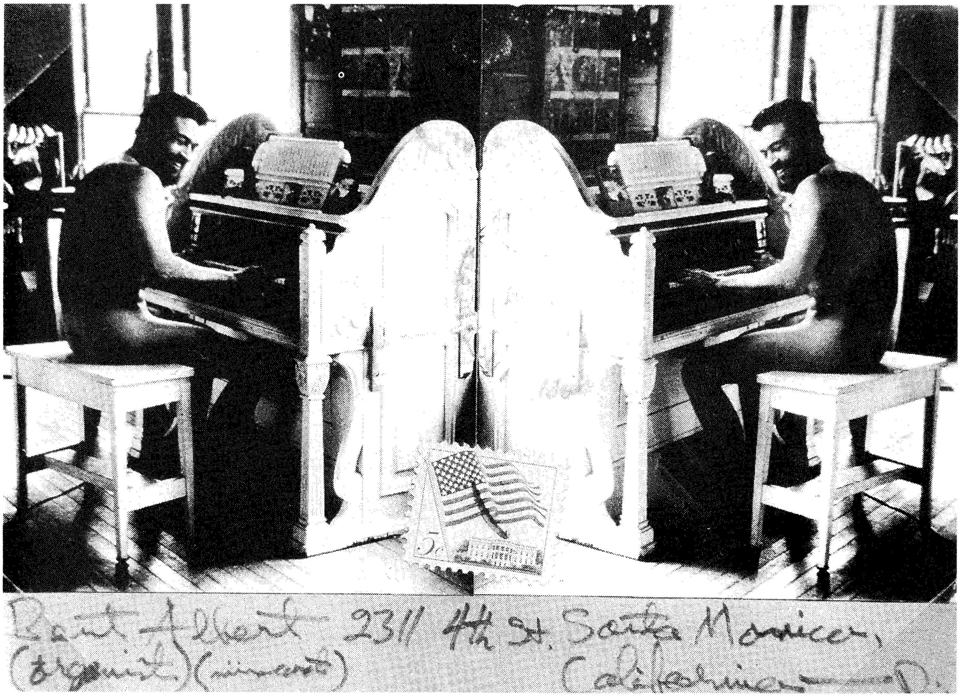
52. Ben Talbert, *The Ace,* front view, mixed media, ca. 1962. Courtesy of Hal Glicksman. Photo: Hal Glicksman.



53. Ben Talbert, *The Ace*, details. Photo: Hal Glicksman.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Bent Albert 2311 4th St. Santa Monica,
(organist) (innocent)
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54. Wallace Berman, photograph of Ben Talbert, ca. 1960. Wallace Berman papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

stemmed from the piece's clear message about militarism and the relation of sexuality to violence. The work reduced imagery drawn from aviation to cartoonlike qualities that made explicit the sexual implications in the design of military hardware. The frame for the work is an artist's easel on which Talbert hung a four-foot-long pair of drone plane wings. Instead of a painting he left a vacant frame into which he dropped a collage about the flying aces of World War I. Directly beneath the pilots he created a collage of doll hands reaching up, in adulation of the flyers. The assemblage contains a variety of iconographic objects, including a cutout of Icarus, a replica of the gum Spencer Tracy put on the aircraft he flew in the World War II action film *Test Pilot,* and two miniature bombsights shaped like erect penises.

Male fascination with militarism, Talbert seemed to be saying, came from the armed services being one of the few institutions in American life where sexual fantasies were openly indulged. The work's delight in its imagery makes it difficult to distinguish glorification of masculine obsessions from a critique of libidinal identification with weapons of destruction. The piece was a particularly honest personal reaction to the opportunities that presented themselves to Talbert when he was a young man. The reverse side of *The Ace* shows bombs raining down on children, sketched with a lighthearted if grisly humor that captured the distanced, casual attitude that air war can encourage toward its victims.

The piece's humor echoes the self-mockery in Wally Hedrick's recollections, but *The Ace* allows us to see more clearly another function to the risqué humor generally adopted by the young men of this generation in their confrontation with authority. Talbert's mockery repudiated the military culture, but without losing the insight that the strength of the American military lay in the satisfactions it provided to men's desires to exercise power over others, an appeal that could be overcome only by providing alternative ways of gratifying those needs. Without the juxtaposition of appeal and repudiation, the critique in Talbert's work would have no substance, nor posit a solution. Uncovering fantasies of destruction submerged in his self-construction as a hero functioned to distance Talbert from his point of origin and affirm the choice he made to abandon participation in a system based on militarism.

The strategy of mockery contrasts sharply with Kenneth Rexroth's elegiac attitude developed in "The Phoenix and the Tortoise." The older poet's World War II–inspired poetry imagined sexuality as a doorway to cosmic process, as a way of escaping through one's inner nature from the controls of social formation. For Talbert, sexuality was ambivalent. "Make love, not war" promised to break the hold of war over the male imagination, but his work also presented search for sexual gratification as the glue that held together social authority. Talbert understood the nature of sexuality in a more psychologized, power-conscious way. Sexuality was a projection of the ego in its power-seeking aspect. Its pleasures came from the exercise of control over foreign bodies through mastery of their operation and imposing one's own will upon them. The object of pleasure could be a car or an airplane or another human body. The romantic imagination had brought the vertiginous truth closer to the surface that the reduction of women into objects of sexual pleasure was not a question of individual character, or a choice between good and evil, but the prime case-in-point in a structure of personality development in a society in which love of power had been the necessary motivating factor since Europeans had embarked on their conquest of the "new world."

The valuable insights in works like *The Ace* depended upon the use of stereotypes drawn from popular culture, but with their psychosexual subtext amplified to reveal the way they covertly expressed repressed desires. Creative work objectified a subjective response to social imperatives, yet without necessarily harmonizing the inner lives of artists who remained opposed to the society in which they lived. Stereotypes helped bridge this gulf, not by creating a harmony, but by dramatizing the interior battle between continuity and innovation. Social criticism blended with self-criticism, although that self-reformative aspect was often hidden behind externalized rage at those not sharing in the act of purging inner desires that the critic had determined were shameful. The fury accompanying so much social comment in the 1960s was part of the exorcism. Brutal exposition of the problem burned shared responsibility in crime to cinders in the trial of self-liberation.

Stereotypical images strengthened the transformation because they appeared to be "natural" ways of thinking about the self. A strength of the counterculture lay in its merger of opposition with utterly traditional, even conservative images of self. This process was true for both men and women. "The women in the hippie community are very, very female," Maggie Gaskin, a college dropout in her mid-twenties, told an interviewer with some pride. "There are a lot of children around that are there because they're wanted, and the women are going back and doing very feminine things, like weaving and cooking with a lot of pride, doing it as a woman-thing." Her images echo Kerouac's vision of Christine Monahan in *The Dharma Bums,* but Gaskin completed her statement with a conclusion that went beyond Kerouac: "The hippie girls are very, very feminine, but they're very competent too." Gaskin argued that countercultural women escaped the imprisonment in the home that was the lot of the stereotyped traditional housewife. Hippie women developed their workplace skills, as well. When their husbands or boyfriends tired of working, the women in the Haight went out to work and their resourcefulness made them good employees capable of mastering the changing work environment. Gaskin presented an ideal self-representation, in which the contradictions involved whenever people live or work together barely surfaced. The themes of cooperation, self-control, and independence defined her life and those of her friends. Knowledgeable in the skills of house and work, these were women able to stand on their own and provide decent, comfortable lives for themselves and their children.[10]

The poet Lenore Kandel, who was arrested in 1967 for violating anti-obscenity laws with her volume *The Love Book,* stressed that clear-cut gender differences were important for women to like themselves as women, to value and trust the skills that women had accomplished over the centuries.

> A woman's job is feeding her man, taking care of those about her. In her way, radiating the feeling of warmth. . . . A woman takes care of the washing and putting the kids to bed. . . . Some women are painters, some women are writers, some women are dancers, and if they're really that, they're really that. And then you have to learn to make those things work. I'm a writer, but I'm a woman. And I wouldn't sacrifice the woman part of it for the writing part of it. . . . I spend a lot of time in the kitchen, I feed a lot of people all the time. I'm a good cook. . . . Here I was with that hysterical [*Love Book*] trial and reporters up my nose, and there I was with a bundle of wet laundry too, because that had to be done.[11]

Kandel thought women needed men who took pride in masculine tasks: "Hunting a deer. Protecting the house. Taking care of enemies, if there be such."[12] A man should be able to wash dishes or change diapers, but those were not his "primary functions." These were fantastic images, but they were part of a transition that resisted a reduction of femininity to merely physical sexual characteristics. Indeed, Kandel's primary complaint was that contemporary relationships forced women to concentrate on their sexual attractiveness rather than developing a broad range of skills appropriate to a life a woman wanted to lead.

In her poem "The Pigs for Circe in May," Joanne Kyger praised the power of the sorceress in the *Odyssey* who could turn men into pigs, untidy domesticated animals that think they are wild but need a mistress to keep their sensual needs satisfied. Circe has done nothing more than make clear what the inner nature of Odysseus's sailors had always been because they were men. She put them into a position where they could follow their instincts without hurting anybody, always a danger with young males. The implication of this poem was that the homemaker was the real magician, not the adventurer or the poet, whose fables and songs served to pass the evenings at the homestead. Woman as mistress of the loom was the source of myth and meaning, not men who jabbered about being explorers of the unknown but wanted the comfort of a home. In an earlier poem, "Pan as the Son of Penelope," written while she was a student in Robert Duncan's poetry workshop at the San Francisco Public Library, Kyger presented the possibility that Penelope was the author of the *Odyssey,* composing it as she wove day after day, keeping the men entertained by "concocting [Odysseus's] adventure bringing / the misfortunes to him" as a warning to men who took stereotypes too seriously.[13] Utilizing the stereotypes of American culture, Kyger, Kandel, and Gaskin began to redefine the nature of female power in specifically gendered terms, a necessary step for the emergence of "women's consciousness" to replace the diffuse degendered sense of mystical power that we saw earlier in the self-representations of Joan Brown and Jay DeFeo.

If stereotypes proved necessary for motivating individual innovation, they acted as limits as well. Negative and positive poles were inseparable. Talbert's pornographic vision of women as inherently willing victims, or the lingering patriarchal ethos of the counterculture, were not regrettable vestigial remains to be sloughed off in time as a more basic libertarian message took hold. The negative features were essential to the total message conveyed and operated as inner contradictions that ultimately fissured movements of the 1960s. In the next two chapters, we will examine how Gary Snyder and Robert Duncan, two poets who established their national reputations in the course of the Vietnam War, confronted the linking of progressive and regressive materials in the countercultural imagination. Their work presented very distinctive strategies as to how to make "poems" effective in both individual and public reform. Snyder, Zen adept and leader in the back-to-the-land movement, became one of the most popular American poets of the 1960s. He was a visible, public figure who, combining innovation with stereotypes, attempted to present the counterculture as a rational way of being and a force for social responsibility. Duncan was known only to a few. Private and hermetic, he crafted a critique that suggested from a point of view internal to the avant-garde why the counterculture, despite its optimism and energy, would collapse. Snyder projected subjective division outward by inscribing boundaries between groups based on ideology. Duncan faced inward to describe the boundaries within the self dissolving and reforming in persistent inner turmoil. These two poets presented contrasting ideas of community and the function of poetry. Snyder returned to ancient traditions to reconstitute a lost whole. He found in domestic utopia, refashioned as "tribalism," an alternative social abstraction with which to oppose nationalism. Duncan examined the constant turnings of the repressed and decided that the whole is never more than fragments, that people spent their lives constantly grasping for the phantom of what might have been. As social turmoil increased during the war's progress, their efforts to propose subjectivities that could mediate needs for structure and freedom made clear the limits of the social and subjective reforms proposed by the mid-century American avant-garde.

Chapter 12

1. Interview with Ferlinghetti by David Meltzer in *The San Francisco Poets,* 141; Gary Snyder, "Control Burn," in *Turtle Island* (New York: New Directions, 1974), 19.

2. Robert Duncan, "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife," in *Fictive Certainties* (New York: New Directions, 1985), 128. Duncan's observation parallels Herbert Marcuse's point that democracy is a system of government for the "introjection of the masters into their subjects" (Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1966], xv).

3. Robert Duncan, "Introduction," *Bending the Bow* (New York: New Directions, 1968), i.

4. Duncan, "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife," 138.

5. *The Portable War Memorial* is currently in the permanent collection of the Museum Ludwig in Köln, Germany. Description based on personal notes taken while viewing the piece.

6. See Michael McClure, "Interview with Michael McClure," BL, 37–39.

7. Gary Snyder, "Cold Mountain Poems, #6," translation from Han-Shan, in Snyder, *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 44; first published in *Evergreen Review* no. 6 (1958).

8. Denise Levertov, "Life at War," in *Poems, 1960–1967* (New York: New Directions, 1983), 229; Wally Hedrick, "Wally Hedrick Interview #2," AAA, 10.

9. On Talbert's background and development as an artist, see Hal Glicksman, "Ben Talbert," in *Assemblage in California* (Irvine: University Art Gallery, 1968), 48–55; "Ben Talbert 'Microspect' set for May, June in Venice," *Ocean Front Weekly* 2, no. 20 (16 May 1979): 2, 13. Robert Duncan's companion Jess also developed a series of collages based on the "Dick Tracy" comic strip that Jess called "Tricky Cad."

10. Wolf, *Voices from the Love Generation*, 90.

11. Ibid., 34–35.

12. Ibid.

13. Joanne Kyger, "Pan as the Son of Penelope," in *Going On: Selected Poems 1958–1980* (New York: E. P. Dutton, Inc., 1983), 2.

13

Gary Snyder on the Responsibilities of Utopia

Expanding the Boundaries of Domesticity

In 1966, while returning home working as a seaman on a petroleum tanker, Gary Snyder pondered the history of the United States and wrote

> Ah, that's America:
> the flowery glistening oil blossom
> spreading on water—
> it was so tiny, nothing, now it keeps expanding
> all those colors,
> our world
> opening inside outward toward us,
> each part swelling and turning
> who would have thought such turning[1]

The lines evoke the mystic image of the rose unfolding, symbol for the soul opening toward God as the mysteries of eternity reveal themselves to the pilgrim on the verge of enlightenment, or in a twentieth-century variant as the conscious mind learns to recognize the coded statements of the unconscious. The idea of America's specter discovered in an oil slick was an ironic statement redolent of social criticism and the inversion of national foundation myths: the image declares that the United States was a pollution, but there was hope for the future. The poison would eventually be broken up and dispersed by the sheer volume of the dark ocean upon which it sits. The United States of the conquest was a temporary phenomenon, capable during its existence of revealing beauty in its poisons, but still one way or another, it would be absorbed back into the natural world.

Snyder's countercultural formulation grew out of a Marxian-syndicalist viewpoint that may have been a family tradition but which took shape during his undergraduate years at Reed College (1947–1952). Snyder's youthful involvement in left-wing activities was superficial, but sufficient for the United States Forest Service to fire him from his job as a ranger in 1953 when a congressional committee subpoenaed him to testify on communist activity in the forest and parks services. Barred from government employment, he went to work as a logger in the commercial timber fields of Washington and Oregon. Labor radicalism was not to be his path, but his experiences as a logger formed a key strand of his second book of poetry, *Myths and Texts*, published in 1960, a work that synthesized his studies in radical labor traditions of the western United States, Native American cultures, and Buddhism.[2]

A later poem, "Revolution in the Revolution in the Revolution," sketched the relationship of these three traditions and effectively proposed a hierarchy among them:

> If the capitalists and imperialists
>   are the exploiters, the masses are the workers.
>   and the party
>   is the communist.
>
> If civilization
>   is the exploiters, the masses is nature.
>   and the party
>   is the poets.
>
> If the abstract rational intellect
>   is the exploiters, the masses is the unconscious.
>   and the party
>   is the yogins.[3]

The yogin in Snyder's metaphysics is not simply a mystic passively contemplating eternity. "Yoga, from the root *Yuj* (related to the English 'yoke') means to be at work, engaged," he wrote.[4] Consistent and disciplined yogic practice unleashed the "dictatorship of the unconscious," essential to break the power of hierarchical social structures created through five centuries of imperial expansion.

Snyder first came to national attention in a fictionalized form as the hero of Jack Kerouac's 1957 novel *The Dharma Bums*, a romanticization of the time the novelist shared a cottage with Snyder in 1956. After one semester at Indiana University, Snyder abandoned graduate study in anthropology and moved to Berkeley to learn Japanese and Chinese prior to leaving for Japan, where he planned to enter a Zen monastery. When Kerouac met him, Snyder was already four years into his self-study of Buddhism. The novel's title referred to the Buddhist tradition of the *bhikku*, young men who abandoned all settled life to search for "dharma" (the path of truth understood as a continuous process of "forming and firming").[5] Kerouac found the image a positive version of the restless journeys of himself and his friends that he had described in several novels. Kerouac turned to Snyder's interpretation of Buddhism as an answer to the nihilism of Dean Moriarty's story in *On the Road*.

On its simplest level, *The Dharma Bums* reads as a "how-to" manual for the counterculture of the 1960s, accurately predicting ten years before its time dress, rituals, living arrangements, and even language that would become faddish. The novel announced that a "rucksack revolution" would sweep the United States as ever larger numbers of people refused to "subscribe to the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming all that crap they didn't really want anyways." Instead of producing mechanical goods, people would become artists, "go about writing poems that happen to appear in their heads for no reason" and "by strange unexpected acts keep giving visions of eternal freedom to everybody and to all living creatures."[6] Snyder, given the name of Japhy Ryder in the novel, was a fictional model for a bohemian saint because Kerouac endowed him with the courage to persevere on his quest against the ties of the heart. For Kerouac, freedom meant having done with women, and Ryder floated along unattached to either mother or mate. Freedom was the ability to call into being a man with no ties to women other than casual sex, a man whose most important ties were with other men.[7]

Ryder "was always practicing charity," the narrator says. "In fact he taught me, and a week later I was giving him nice new undershirts I'd discovered in the Goodwill store. He'd turn right around and make me a gift of a plastic container to keep food in." He tells Kerouac's alterego in the novel, "Smith you don't realize it's a privilege to practice giving presents to others." Smith observes, "There was nothing glittery and Christmasy about it, but almost sad, and sometimes his gifts were old beat-up things but they had the charm of usefulness and sadness of his giving."[8]

Ryder's most important lesson was that it was "impossible to fall off mountains." The two climb the highest peak in the northern Sierra range. Smith cannot make it to the top and stops thirty feet below, terrified to scrabble up to the summit. Ryder, in his typically meticulous and disciplined way, finds each footstep. Arriving at the top, he lets loose a "blood-curdling yodel" that Smith describes as an emanation of the divine hidden in all men. Then Ryder runs down the difficult path at full speed safely arriving below without tripping. Ryder explains, "That's what they mean by saying, When you get to the top of a mountain keep climbing."[9] Smith interprets the event to mean that as long as one has trained for a task, boldness is a safer policy than caution in time of crisis. Action rather than words marked the most appropriate response to the challenges of life.

As the novel comes to an end, Ryder embarks for Japan, where he plans to study Zen. Snyder, with his manuscript for *Myths and Texts* completed, left California for Japan in May 1956. He had planned to leave earlier, but because of his suspected political radicalism, he had difficulty in securing a passport. He entered the First Zen Institute of America, located at the Daitoku-ji temple in Kyoto, while he supported himself as a translator and English language teacher. Aside from one year working as a wiper on an oil tanker, Snyder lived in Japan until 1968. He made frequent trips back to the United States and small press publications of his poetry quickly sold out, but his presence in America loomed through the legendizing portrait Kerouac had crafted, a portrait that seemed confirmed by his immersion in Asian life.[10]

Snyder, however, subjected the philosophies he studied in Asia to a healthy dose of American practicality. He rejected the privileged and parasitical position organized Buddhism had in Asia. Monasteries, whether Christian or Buddhist, he observed, developed in hierarchical societies where the majority labored to support landlords, a warrior class, and religious parasites: "Institutional Buddhism has been conspicuously ready to accept or ignore the inequalities and tyrannies of whatever political system it found itself under."[11] In his Americanized form of Buddhism, everybody worked and everybody was responsible for spiritual development.

Rather than romanticize non-Western societies, Snyder proposed to examine their systems of knowledge and behavior and locate the elements that were useful to modern life. Sensible self-interest should guide cultural interaction as people let go of antiquated loyalties and narrow interpretations of the past to take the best of human inventiveness as a repertory of alternatives to current modes of behavior. Chinese, Amerindian, and Japanese lore, Snyder observed in the introduction to the 1977 reprint of his second published book of poetry, *Myths and Texts*, "are not exotica but part of our whole planetary heritage." Each culture was a storehouse of ideas and experiments in resolving human problems, some successful, many more failed. Thanks to Western technology, there existed the possibility "for the first time in human experience . . . to look in one wide gaze at all that human beings have been and done on the whole planet."[12]

The result, whatever its strengths or weaknesses as social theory, was a synthesis in which neither the European nor the non-European side was caricatured. Snyder's idea of an "international" culture drawing upon all heritages was both romantic and practical. His study of Asian cultural traditions had provided a rupture for Snyder and the freedom to define himself independently of the pressures to conform to a narrow interpretation of European-American behavior. His children turned that rupture into a legacy. Born from his marriage in Japan to Masa Uehara, they, like increasing numbers of Americans, could claim equal rights to both European and non-European heritages. Once the relationship to the past extended into a relationship with the future, Snyder became a transitional figure (as we all are one way or another). The pull to Asia had begun with an artificial element to it, but once accomplished in a way that created responsibilities and ties, there was nothing particularly out of the ordinary or exotic about seeking a synthesis of what had been distinct cultures.

Snyder had been a pacifist in the 1950s, but the success of Castro's revolution in Cuba caused him to rethink his position. Revolutionary ideologies emerging from Cuba and other third world countries emphasizing moral incentives in constructing the "new man" and "new woman" prompted Snyder to think that much more was possible than individual enlightenment.[13] In his 1968 volume *The Back Country,* Snyder explained the fissures of contemporary society through an extended metaphor that he adopted from the Maoist theory of revolution succeeding through peasant uprisings engulfing corrupted urban centers. On a global political level, the wisdom of backward countries such as Vietnam and Cuba would overpower the materialism of the West and establish the basis for an equitable distribution of the world's wealth. On an ecological level, the primal truths about natural process found in the wilderness would scatter arbitrary social formations and help people return to a stable position within the world's "food web." At the same time, liberating the experiences locked in the "back country" of the mind, that is, the unconscious, would disintegrate the hold of rigid social structures as personal experience replaced abstract law as the guide for the good and the true.

Snyder made explicit aspects of New Left enthusiasm for the third world. The poverty of peasant societies wedded ecology, political strife, and the unconscious so that the challenges to American hegemony promised victory of the unconscious as well and the collapse of the imperial personality that had developed around the pursuit of power.

Snyder returned home in the autumn of 1965 to participate in antiwar activities in the San Francisco Bay Area. He designed an antiwar poster, joined in Vietnam Day Committee protests at the army induction center in Oakland, and organized Zen-meditation sit-ins at the Oakland harbor against shipments of military materiel.[14] He soon played a role as well in the developing counterculture. Snyder, Michael McClure, Allen Ginsberg, Lenore Kandel, and the Diggers organized the Human Be-in and Gathering of All the Tribes in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park on January 14, 1967. To speed the "awakening of consciousness" Snyder urged those prepared to rebel against the dominant values of United States society to take LSD. As the Jefferson Airplane played, approximately 20,000 people who attended the self-styled festival took LSD or smoked marijuana.

In 1968, after his marriage and the birth of his first child, Snyder relocated his family permanently to California. They settled first in the Bay Area, but his royalties and reading fees allowed him to buy property in the San Juan Ridge area of Nevada County, in the Sierra foothills ninety miles northeast of Sacramento. In 1971 he designed and built a home that borrowed from both Japanese and native Pacific Coast architectural traditions. He named his settlement Kitkitdizze, the Indian name for a native shrub uprooted during the mining period but beginning to return to its original ecological niche. Others came to live in his vicinity, many with the idea of forming a model community.

He refused to call the grouping a commune, but he did use the word "tribe" to describe a group of people sharing work and living arrangements. Communes, he observed in 1974, were a phase of "sheer romanticism." "The survivors," he thought, "were the ones who became practical, so to speak, realized their limits and realized that they would have to do a lot of hard work and realized that they would have to get along with their neighbors." Those who came to learn poetry from Snyder found themselves given household tasks to do so that Snyder would have more time for his writing. His critique of their work might easily focus more on their carpentry or gardening skills than on the poetry they drafted, for Snyder believed that the roots of a philosophy of life come to the surface in one's approach to everyday tasks. In an interview, Snyder argued that he himself had learned much of his poetry craft from a master mechanic he knew:

> Whenever I spend any time with him, I learn something from him. . . . About *everything*. But I see it in terms of my craft as a poet. I learn about my craft as a poet. I learn about what it really takes to be a craftsman, what it really means to be committed, what it really means to work. What it means to be *serious* about your craft and no bullshit. Not backing off any of the challenges that are offered to you.[15]

He hoped his community could "hit a balance between American individualism and the need for cooperation."[16] He and his neighbors organized a school district to educate their children. They improved the roads and built a Zen center on Snyder's property, where Snyder led meditation and training until they had enough money to employ a roshi to tend the growing congregation.

His roles as a father figure to the hippies, antiwar activist, ecological propagandist, and a model for the back-to-the-land movement helped make him one of the most popular poets of his generation. His life also encapsulated what Joseph Campbell called the "monomyth," a story Campbell found in all societies and believed was fundamental to most religions: a youth leaves his home, is initiated into the wisdom of the world during his travels, and then returns to his community to become a leader, imbued with knowledge he could never have acquired had he stayed within the parameters of everyday life in his society.[17] Since Snyder's books largely followed his life experience, they presented a model history of a young man who explored and experimented but ultimately returned and tried to make his experiences meaningful to contemporary American society. Restlessness, adventure, wisdom, and an ever-deepening sense of belonging formed the primary motifs of his books, which achieved remarkable popular and critical success. His 1974 volume *Turtle Island* sold 70,000 copies in the first year of its publication before it won Snyder the Pulitzer Prize for poetry.[18] His work could satisfy a large number of readers approaching him with different levels of sophistication. His central message stressed the importance of personal connections and everyday acts such as hiking, work, sexuality, and prayer. His income was modest, less than he might have made in another profession, but he gained a large enough readership to support himself and his family entirely through his poetry.[19]

"Zazen/fucking/working [art, craft, job]/revolution," Snyder wrote Kenneth Rexroth in 1966 were the four steps of the bodhisattva path: "each step is a fantastic amplifier of the power being passed along, in the proper order" (Snyder's brackets in quotation).[20] It was a telling description that could operate as a model of the progress of his generation, particularly if we accept zazen as a counter standing for a more general mystic apprehension of the cosmos that dwarfs mere historical reality.[21] An erotic relationship to universal process was confirmed through sexual relations with other human beings. The third step on the path to liberation, "working," or developing a new practical sense of responsibility, made a new sexualized relationship to life the basis for a transformed society. Work was the category most likely to be missing from the counterculture in practice and one that Snyder insisted needed constant stressing in the United States. Despite the presence of a puritanical strain to American culture, young Americans did not have to be told to honor freedom and break conventions. Rebelliousness and a love of change for change's sake were so ingrained in the general culture that Snyder felt it was vital that young Americans hear that freedom and unconventionality were pointless without discipline and commitments.[22]

To be what Snyder called a "dharma revolutionary" meant first and foremost being able to support oneself and one's family through one's own work. The parallels of his philosophy and his community at Kitkitdizze to the European settlement of the Americas were clear, so clear that Snyder had to confront and deny them: "The return to marginal farmland on the part of longhairs is not some nostalgic replay of the nineteenth century. Here is a generation of white people finally ready to learn from the Elders [all indigenous peoples of whatever race, hunting and gathering cultures, Native Americans]. How to live on the continent as though our children, and on down, for many ages, will still be here (not on the moon). Loving and protecting this soil, these trees, these wolves" (my brackets).[23] A desire to erase the founding crimes of American society led to a form of ritual reenactment. This time settlement would be done right, in cooperation rather than conflict.

Snyder thought that the correction to conquest lay in seeing that self-sufficiency was a false goal. The health of the entire community depended upon each person contributing his or her labor or, as Snyder phrased in it in his 1961 essay "Buddhism and the Coming Revolution," "working on one's own responsibility, but willing to work with a group."[24] The revolutionary desire to eradicate the perceived bases of hierarchy, privilege, and violence returned to a reformulation of relatively traditional values. One should enjoy the simple pleasures of work, as Snyder did when he echoed a traditional male viewpoint of having practical know-how and taking pride in his skill at the domestic tasks associated with householding: "I like to polish mahogany! I like to sharpen my chain saw. I like to keep all my knives sharp. I like to change oil in the truck."[25]

Nestled within the rebellious and cosmopolitan embrace of Buddhism and Native American culture were the male craft values of the skilled artisan and the small, self-reliant proprietor. These craft ideas were common to many of the creative men of his generation. Assemblagist John Bernhardt expressed a similar sense of masculine pride at self-sufficiency when he described the creative act by stating, "I solder, I weld, I braize, I glue, I nail them together, I screw them together, I bolt them together—all the standard techniques of the handyman." He wanted to emphasize, and his point was seconded by Edward Kienholz, who had participated in this discussion for radio, that there was no fundamental difference between "art" and the activities of nonartists. It was all "work."[26] On another occasion, Kienholz confessed that he did not want to be boxed into being an artist: "You know, like I make art, I buy and sell some real estate, I shoot some pool, and you know, like that."[27]

"His poetry is based on his own conception of the taste of a reasonable man," Robert Duncan said of Gary Snyder.[28] Snyder agreed: "I guess I must be a reasonable man because people keep telling me that. What I think I would be doing is trying to win the credibility of the reasonable man and then take him deeper. And I have to do that because I live in a very common-sense world. I always lived in a world where you had to be pretty straight because nobody would tolerate too much bullshit."[29] He avoided the rhetorical excess or the grand eschatological vision of Allen Ginsberg, and in another interview Snyder dismissed the literature of alienation as an anomaly: "It belongs only to the last two centuries and does not reflect the overall function or use of literature in culture, which is to go with the culture, not against the culture, which is to serve larger purposes of human sanity rather than to demonstrate craziness. . . . poets and writers who have to be alienated are like soldiers you sacrifice in the battlefield. It's a pity that they have to go that way. I have had too many friends commit suicide or die of alcoholism or die of drug overdoses because they thought that was part of being a writer. And that's not interesting to me. I don't think the writer's purpose is to kill himself."[30]

The central metaphor for Snyder was learning to be "at home" in all one's relations. This began with the family, and all work was focused around one's responsibilities to the ties one had made. His emphasis on the "real work" placed tasks above ambition, yet his overlays of Native American and Buddhist philosophy placed domesticity in a significant design of recognizing one's home as an outgrowth of the material and spiritual processes of the universe. This replicated the Judeo-Christian tradition, but the exotic form gave a sense of novelty to what was in truth a continuity. Snyder's utopia preserved and gave even more primacy to the immediate social connections that mattered most to daily emotional life. "The niches that I occupy," he said of his work, "or that I hope to occupy, are the warm humane mammal family niche, the archetypal and mythic niche, and the transparent intuitive direct perception niche."[31]

Debunking the myths surrounding the development of the United States polity without providing an alternative vision of social order and justice would lead only to cynicism and distrust of the public sphere. Snyder was one of many who tried to provide new foundation myths. Against a social order perceived as dangerous and dying, he postulated an alternative order that could provide structure, and it consisted of concepts with which Americans were familiar if only on an ideal level: the ability to support oneself through one's labor, domesticity, tolerance for individual differences, the use of intelligence to create abundance, belief in a higher meaning underlying the immediate. The fantastic elements gave an aura of excitement to Snyder's ideas, but they also could seem feasible because they rested on stereotypes that men in particular knew and respected.

His 1970 book *Regarding Wave* brought together the poems in which he worked out his developing ideas that family was the foundation for social revolution. In the earlier *Myths and Texts*, completed in 1956, the central figure had been Coyote, the Native American trickster figure who showed through his jokes the tentative, illusory character of all human institutions. With a penis as large as his body, Coyote was an alterego for a rootless young man. The coyote figure acts to reveal the well of potentiality underlying all being by disrupting social expectations; he sets the fires that allow new growth and seduces women in order to have his pleasure while overthrowing the complacent authority of older men. As a fantasy figure, Coyote sprang from desires for change without responsibility for the consequences. In *Regarding Wave* the central figure was the wife through whom the procreative, potential-revealing energies of the universe were manifested in human form. Unlike Coyote, the wife shows the permanent, "natural" ground from which the ever-changing forms of human society grow. "Wave," the opening poem in the collection, parsed the etymological connections of the word "wife" and the cognates of the Anglo-Saxon root:

> Wave   wife.
>   woman—wyfman—
> "veiled; vibrating; vague"

The feminine in its form as mate to the masculine connects Snyder as a man to the plenitude of natural process:

> Ah, trembling spreading radiating wyf
>   racing zebra
>   catch me and fling me wide
> To the dancing grain of things
>   of my mind![32]

"Wife" in this context does not mean a woman as a personality, an individual with projects to achieve and problems to solve. Such a potentiality is not precluded; it is simply irrelevant to the poet's unfolding scheme. Woman is the "wife-man," the human through whom the wave unfolds, that is, the mother, woman as instrumentality, not of their men, but of cosmic process because their babies reveal the "Great majesty of Dharma turning / Great dance of Vajra power."[33]

In a later poem, pride in craft and pride in one's son as the vehicle of a legacy merge. Speaking of Ezra Pound as the mentor Snyder had followed in the craft of poetry and of his teacher at the Department of Oriental Languages at Berkeley, Chen Shih-hsiang, Snyder observed after reading the Chinese proverb, "When making an axe handle the pattern is not far off":

> And I see; Pound was an axe,
> Chen was an axe, I am an axe
> And my son a handle, soon
> To be shaping again, model
> And tool, craft of culture,
> How we go on.[34]

Connection and achievement could link in the form of a legacy that gave meaning to individual action by positing a value for heirs. The underlying stereotype of male craft values in Snyder's work established a ground on which his contemporaries could approach his poetry because the poems idealized and dignified activities of ordinary male life. Snyder's scope of experience was both unusual and limited, but he transcended the aspects of his biography that theoretically limited his appeal by creating a dramatized self with a perspective both relevant and attractive to a much broader spectrum of masculine America. Snyder's renovation of the pioneer image separated his readers from psychic responsibility for the original crimes moving through American history. Robert Boyers unfairly dismissed Snyder in the *Partisan Review* as the Marlborough Man of beat poetry, but the self-representation as a practical, independent-thinking, self-sufficient man with lots of know-how was attractive because it was familiar, an ideal for successful male identity. Snyder's stance included confronting the emotionally complex problems of love and work with a simple, though not simplistic can-do attitude that pruned away anxiety. Life itself was a project which would prosper when approached with the same craft values a person should adopt when beginning a carpentry or auto repair job.[35]

His solution to the acknowledged inequities and physical violence of male-centered families was to advocate a "return" to matrilineal families. His poetic images suggest that the vocal matrifocal framework he espoused was not in opposition to patriarchal authority, for the man remained the source of specialized knowledge and technique. Women literally provided the matrix around which social units cohered, while men expanded society's boundaries of perception. Snyder discussed marriage as a balanced relationship of co-equal partners. He doubted that biological difference required social differentiation between men and women, but his images that drew upon the stereotypes of male and female principles kept pointing in that direction.[36] In search of universal meaning, his poems empty his figures, including his own persona, of quirky character, of whatever might make them individual or historical. The poems convey little of Masa Uehara's biting humor or her well-known delight in puncturing Snyder's tendency to pedantry. Categories of identity reduced all to traditional visions of male and female difference: men as householders basing their worth on skill, but prone to apply their craft to violence; women as housekeepers nurturing those who enclose them, but liable to "devour" their loved ones.

The structure of abstract polarity grew from Snyder's reflections on his own experiences, which have validity, even if dubious universality, as expressions of male aspirations. His system became more problematic when it dissolved female experience into abstraction because he, at least, faced an acknowledged imaginative gap about the actual choices available to and the demands placed upon women. Discussing psychological factors he thought important in becoming a poet, Snyder confessed, "I don't know *what* applies in the psychology of female poets." He thought that poetry generally grew out of "an intense and deep connection between mother and son, and that the son relationship to the complext [*sic*] tooth-mother ecstatic-mother type is apt to produce environmentally, psychologically, genetically, by whatever means, the lines of magic that produces poetry." Aside from eliminating women from what he theorized as the root source of poetic inspiration, Snyder also abstracted the mother role:

> To be a poet you have to be tuned into some of the darkest and scariest sides of your own nature. And for a male, the darkest and scariest is the destructive side of the female . . . Most people only witness the light side of the mother. Literally. They only see the bright side of the mother, in one way or another. But some people see the *dark* side of the mother. If you only see the dark side you probably go crazy. The poet holds the dark and the light in mind, together. Which by extension, means birth and death in its totality. . . . there's also death, there's also the unknown, there's also the demonic. And that's the womb and the tomb, that's samsara, that's birth and death, that's where the Buddhists go in. And that's where poetry goes in: That's where poetry gets its hands on something real.[37]

Women stand in his vision first as symbols: wives are the gate through which dharma, "forming and firming," enters the human world; mothers provide sustenance toward death, so that the gift of life is also the fattening of the sacrifice.[38]

An irony of his poetry is that Snyder presents "intimacy" but seldom personalities, an apparent contradiction that is a recurrent stylistic feature contributing to the "Buddhist" overtones of his poems. To describe women also as individuals would explode the schematic, formalistic quality of a view that finds support for a sense of relationship with the cosmos in the most intimate of human relations. At the same time abstraction respected difference because Snyder assumed he had no knowledge of the interior states of women. He did not speak for them, but only of the role women and the feminine principle played in *his* interior life.

After 1967 Snyder's poems became increasingly nondramatic. As he found an identity that included social influence and responsibilities, his conception of the "real work" ceased to depend upon the magic of the unique action. The universe itself with its never-ending permutations sufficed as the locus of drama. One finds salvation by extinguishing the desire to be a hero and accepting the roles one receives from nature. If we view the heroic quest as a search for identity and place, his new position confirms that he had completed his task by establishing a family. That Snyder's representations of his family were abstract does not mean that they were not deeply experienced or lacked a strong emotional substrate. The abstraction of the personalities may indicate how important his personal ties were that he needed to elevate them to a level of universal law independent of the people involved.

Snyder presented his most extensive and radical political program in his 1969 volume of essays and selections from his journals, *Earth House Hold.* The title played on the root meanings of "economy." The earth was humanity's house, which needed better management if we were to hold on to it. The old science of economics needed to give way to the more extensive and expansive study of ecology. Ecological vision merged with the politics of repression as Snyder found the source of damage to the environment in the primal crime of European conquest following Columbus's invasion and the dispossession of the land in the English-speaking settlements from their previous Native American possessors. In Snyder's concept of "energy exchange," the conquerer paid his debt to his victims by assuming their characteristics. America had to become "Turtle Island," translation of a traditional Native American term for the North American land mass. The continent had to return to its network of bioregional cultural zones.[39] The karma of Americans of European ancestry was therefore to become non-European, which might simply mean no longer taking pride in a legacy of conquest and ruthless power exercised over others.[40] The "real work," that is, the work that for millennia had structured the development of human being, was the provision of food and shelter (life in the present), the building of mutually supportive ties between lovers and the raising of children (life toward the future), and the search for meaning through poetic invention (the past as tradition we hand down to the future and which inspires us to do the daily chores necessary to continue surviving), would replace power as the source of identity.

Snyder's focus on the personal and private as an alternative to a corrupt public order ignored the possibility that the private grew out of public life and might itself be as corrupt. Such a consideration, however, contradicted the assumption that the private was more intimately connected with cosmic process and hence relatively independent of the accident of historical circumstance. Forms of private life were culturally determined and variable, but at the core private life revolved around the universal needs of eating, procreating, and finding meaning. Snyder's goal was the construction of a tradition that was usable on a local level, but denied its strengths to the national mythos.

He had no illusions that an economic and governmental structure based on economics of scale and scope could be dismantled. He assumed that the principle of large-scale, uniform planning was inherently crisis-prone. The future for fundamental reform relied therefore on apocalypse. "Industrial society indeed appears to be finished," Snyder announced with confidence in *Earth House Hold*; the coming age of computers promised that the future belonged to "hunters and gatherers," of information, if not of nuts and berries.[41] In *Turtle Island*, Snyder published his program for social revolutionaries, "Four Changes."[42] The contribution, developed in 1969 as the basis for a political program to unite the counterculture, sketched the need to reduce population, pollution, and consumption, while transforming personal and social ambitions from material to spiritual objectives. Snyder's program intentionally was not "original"; after long discussions with many friends, including Michael McClure, Buddhist popularizer and radio personality Alan Watts, ecological activist Stewart Brand, and poet Diane De Prima, Snyder summarized the objectives for an ecological wing of the counterculture, but the document also stretched the ideal of domestic utopia to its ultimate. "Four Changes" imagines the family as the foundation of all social activities and then proposes a plan for global reorganization.[43]

The piece is torn by a conflict between his desire to see change imposed upon a global society he believes is dying, and his fear that such changes would augment the power of governments over citizens. ("Great care should be taken that no one is ever tricked or forced into sterilization. The whole population issue is fraught with contradictions: but the fact stands that by standards of planetary biological welfare there are already too many human beings.")[44] He hoped that spiritual conversion could effect the changes he outlined, but he knew that structural reform could not be achieved on a piecemeal basis. The only way public power over individual behavior could be limited and a severe program imposed on society was in the aftermath of a climactic global crisis, which he viewed as both inevitable and just, given the crimes from which modern industrial society had grown. The dream of apocalypse, a terrible but cleansing fire burning away the rubbish of society, provided an imaginary focal point where the contradictions of social responsibility and libertarian values could be resolved. ("'In the fires that destroy the universe at the end of the kalpa, what survives?'—'The iron tree blooms in the void!'")[45] Redemption would come through crisis because personal loyalties would be more important to most people than institutional loyalties. At that point the ideas of the counterculture, rooted as they were in protecting and preserving personal ties, would appear as a logical way to develop a technological society in equilibrium with natural resources. The opponents of the Vietnam War would develop a life-style devoted to problem-solving rather than power, and the force of their experiments would impress their fellow citizens as the benefits of their country's bloated power vanished. The rhetoric carefully balanced a need to make apocalypse not only inevitable (a stance that was easy) but reasonable, desirable even because it would save and elevate the features of everyday life that were most personal, shorn of all public complexity.

The lapse into apocalyptic thinking was an unconscious confession that "Four Changes" was not a programmatic manifesto but a prayer for change. It contained proposals for how ecologically minded people could live their daily lives in greater conformity with their principles, but Snyder could not present any strategy for achieving the larger change he believed necessary. He called for a 90 percent reduction in world population, returning to levels demographers estimated for the total world population around 1500, half a billion people. The ideal resulting would be "a totally integrated world culture with matrilineal descent, free-form marriage, natural-credit communist economy, less industry, far less population and lots more national parks."[46]

Unrealistic as his long-term proposals were to the immediate economic and social construction of the United States, his Turtle Island approach nonetheless squarely confronted the possibility that a redefinition of priorities for living standards might be required if global disparities between rich and poor were to be eliminated. He could not imagine the earth as a whole living at Japanese or Western European standards, much less North American, where waste had been enshrined as the symbol of mastery over every thing and every process.[47] The only way to maintain quality was to reduce quantity without somehow stifling individual creativity. Snyder was not opposed to technology, but he stressed the importance for people to develop their perceptive and creative skills. Intelligence rather than machinery was the basis for any practical standard of living, a theme he aptly illustrated in one of his haiku:

After weeks of watching the roof leak
I fixed it tonight
by moving a single board[48]

His ideas on credit addressed the need to support creativity. Property was not the source of wealth, he thought, only intelligence was. Therefore, borrowing from Ezra Pound, he proposed that any individual be able to receive immediate credit from the government to initiate projects. By having the government as the primary source of credit, society prevented monopoly from clogging innovation. The result would be less industry because concentration and economy of scale would no longer be as important. Individual initiative would find a variety of ways and means to solve human problems in their particularity. A custom-trade economy would replace mass production, but do it in a manner that would be just as cost-effective in total allocation of resources. He argued that the system of large-scale production developed primarily from what he called the "fossil fuel subsidy." As coal and petroleum resources depleted and their costs rose, labor-intensive work would become more cost-efficient than mass production.[49]

Just as the stereotype of the competent craftsman stabilized personal innovations, the fantastic and the reasonable form a whole in Snyder's outlook. His famous practicality in no way restrained the free operation of the imagination in developing an alternative future. Anything is possible, but ultimately the discoveries of the heart have to make sense. The counterculture had to pose an alternative to the normative, including the humdrum details of work. Otherwise it was simply a temporary escape, a bespangled and glittery rock-music costume that brightened but did not change the relationships that constituted social reality. This has been the dilemma of the aesthetic avant-garde since its emergence at the beginning of the nineteenth century: are poets and artists mere entertainers, poseurs whose spectacles explore the limits of bourgeois identity, or pioneers grappling through the imagination with the contradictions of a rapidly developing society to propose alternatives that might in fact prove meaningful to those with no professional ambitions as artists or poets?[50]

Stereotypes, besides providing an anchor to the individual in a period of personal experimentation, gave ballast to social analysis and utopian proposals. The fantastic element spoke to dissatisfactions and a desire for change; the familiar added an aura of reason and practicality. Stepping outside existing boundaries of social reality could appear feasible. Change need not require an obliteration of the past. It could even mean a selection of those elements that were most emotionally meaningful in contemporary life. The private realm could overthrow the public order and construct a new, more intimately scaled public life. Snyder's ideas may not have been practical, but poets have no responsibility for administration. Their job, to the degree that they have any function outside of pleasure, might be to suggest possibilities—even if not practical, maybe especially if not practical. The "original" vision of the avant-garde was utopian. As the Vietnam War prompted poets like Snyder to address the immediate concerns of social organization, the more absurd their position within society became. Utopian vision cannot become practical without losing its own character.

The ecstatic revisioning of public life rested on a relatively static image of nuclear family, friendships, neighbors, and work, that is, of the network of relations that most Americans shared. Snyder's family was the center around which he claimed everything revolved that gave him roots. Yet it was a relatively traditional nuclear family, typical of its period. He had taken his children to see the graves of both sets of great-grandparents in Kansas and Japan, but his family lived without daily or even frequent contact with the living grandparents in a home unconnected on either the Japanese or American side with an extended sense of generations. The tribe was an imagining of already existent personal connections as ultimate authority and detaching them from the larger social frameworks that linked together overlapping imaginary communities through law, commerce, and so on. "What history fails to mention," Snyder observed in one short lyric, "is / Most everybody lived their lives / With friends and children, played it cool, / Left truth & beauty to the guys / Who tricked for bigshots, and were fools."[51]

Even on the question of sexual liberation, Snyder's poetry included direct images of sexual passion, but were not a celebration of dionysian energy. Poems in *Riprap*, *Myths and Texts*, and *The Back Country* present youthful sexual adventures as stepping stones in the process of maturation. The tone is often elegiac and self-accusatory, regretful that finding a lifetime companion remained an elusive goal: "Because I once beat you up / Drunk, stung with weeks of torment / And saw you no more, / And you had calm talk for me today / I now suppose / I was less sane than you, / You hung on dago red, / me hooked on books."[52] Other poems show an unsatisfied, even guiltridden male sexuality deflected onto sordid rituals that turn women into objects of humiliation: "The shivering pair of girls / Who dyked each other for a show / A thousand yen before us men / —In an icy room—to buy their relatives / A meal."[53] The casual encounters and affairs charted in the course of his books are part of a growing-up process. He moves past the meaningless aspects of casual sexuality to reflections on his failed marriages, lessons that propel him to the successful consecration of a family. This aspect of his work is one of the chief links between Snyder and Kenneth Rexroth, who stated in his 1944 preface to *The Phoenix and the Tortoise* that the coming together of male and female opened up cosmic multiplicity and established the possibility of sacrifice. Sexuality as a means of imposing a man's will on others becomes through voluntary acceptance of responsibilities the key to imposing discipline upon himself.[54]

One interview that Snyder gave in 1974 contained hints that the social experiments at Kitkitdizze also involved forms of open marriage, that in practice experimental family structures might loosen into less proprietary relationships:

> Part of my personal world is erasing some parts of my ego increasingly into the cooperation of the group, and the decision-making of the group. And a third thing which I won't say too much about because it's too personal, is the ongoing erasure of sexual roles and sexual jealousies that all of us in our community are learning with each other, which is a difficult but very profound learning for us. And I don't know where that's going to lead. And that involves my wife, and others who . . .[55]

These kinds of concerns have not appeared in his published work, at least not in a form as direct as other accounts of his personal life. His poetry presented readers with a model countercultural yet traditional monogamous marriage, denuded of individual conflict, the product of a process of maturation and sign of successful individuation. The importance he placed on his marriage for his public image as poet was emphasized by the illustrations used for the cov-

55. Gary Snyder and family, cover photograph from *The Real Work*, 1980.
Left to right: Masa Uehara Snyder, Gary Snyder, Gen Snyder, Kai Snyder,
Nanao Sakaki. Courtesy of New Directions. Photo: Aka Kitsune.

ers of the New Directions paperback editions of his books in the 1970s, which always show him with his wife or, on one volume, the couple with their children (fig. 55). Life in a postapocalyptic world would not be so strange or deprived. It would be, if anything, a dream come true.

Snyder's propositions assumed that the end of American civilization was at hand and the 1960s were a prelude to a major transformation. His opinions were shared by many, although it is curious that aside from the extreme right, few dared imagine the collapse of communism, in 1969 less than twenty years away. Fantasies for apocalypse projected instead onto the presumed unavoidable death of the West. The tapping into cosmic force through one of its most fundamental expressions, sexuality, resulted in a sense of change starting from within, a change powered by what Ellen Willis, a critic for the *Village Voice*, later termed "the dream of a beneficent sexual energy flowing freely."[56] Actual sexual behavior contrasted so sharply with official morality that a sense of a new self emerging through rupture with social conventions was so strong that the energy radiating from within seemed likely to expand indefinitely in a vortex that altered everything it touched. Since change emanated from the self, its effects would first be seen close at hand. That which was most powerful would be known by its erotic appeal, so that ecstatic feelings could mark, as if objectively, the truth of phenomena experienced. The counterculture's inability to achieve the transcendent change it imagined, Willis believed, came from an enthusiasm for change that blinded people to the risky side of freedom. They had not considered sufficiently the negative, destructive force locked into sexuality.[57]

The limitation of the imagination as a guide to the future was its tie to the here and now. Snyder was well enough aware of this contradiction that he rejected spontaneous approaches to writing and pursued the more ascetic ethics of zazen. Releasing fantasy, he argued, actually acted as a block to perceiving the variety of possibilities existing in the universe. By restricting the scope of a socially constructed personality to define perception, new visions of the world arose, not independent of the self, but not constructed from its repressed elements either. Snyder was proud of the fact that his group at Kitkitdizze faced the contradictions of living in a real world, where the necessity of surviving forced one to think hard about goals and needs. Many of the men found they could make the most money by working as carpenters in the construction trades building new homes, shopping areas, and vacation cabins. They had become, like it or not, economically dependent upon the cycle of real estate booms that had fueled so much of California's economy since the gold rush. The community became active in county planning so that economic diversification might provide stable but less environmentally exploitative work for county residents. They also lobbied for changes in the county's building codes, monitored the uses of public land, and fought proposals to reopen the county's gold mines.[58]

Nonetheless, the men's positions and self-images as heads of household placed them in conflict with the ideals that had led them to abandon urban society and move to a rural county. One interview, first published in a local newspaper, captured the complexities of Snyder's relationship to those who admired his example and tried to imitate it. A neighbor, Colin Kowal, a carpenter and poet, wondered if it would ever be possible to escape a growth-based economy. Snyder could afford to meditate upon other possibilities, Kowal argued, because Snyder could survive financially from his writing. He could afford his ideas, but "living off arts and crafts is not for the many." Most had to live off technology and development. They had to transform the Sierras into something different if they and their families were to survive, and indeed even by coming to the mountains, however idealistic their original impulse to reunite with raw nature, they had already contributed to transformation and urbanization. They wanted the county's development to be of a positive, thoughtful nature, but they needed development of some kind if they were to feed their children.[59]

Snyder's locally focused, craft-based philosophy could not really provide an answer to the contradictions Kowal had discovered in trying to bridge innovation and continuity in his own life. "First of all," Snyder told Kowal, "you must realize that these are abnormal times," referring to all social developments that had occurred in the preceding 10,000 years, but with particular reference to the industrial revolution and its aftermath. Kowal needed to maintain faith in apocalypse to correct imbalances. Until then, action meant trying "in your personal lifestyle to do what is right." Work for developers was unfortunate, but if necessary, it could be balanced by working on community projects. For every resort built, the work crew could erect a community library or medical clinic and contribute the structures to nonprofit organizations to run. He admitted that his practical side told him that ideologies were secondary to economics, but still he hoped that attitude could create new political and economic facts. Each American had to make a choice between being an invader or a native: "Some people act as though they were going to make a fast buck and move on. That's an invader mentality. Some people are beginning to try to understand where they are, and what it would mean to live carefully and wisely, delicately in a place, in such a way that you can live there adequately and comfortably. Also, your children and grandchildren and generations a thousand years in the future will still be able to live there. That's thinking as though you were a native."[60]

Abstraction of immediate experience and its projection onto a universal plane proceeded by repressing the contextual and structural conditions that shaped both the objective and subjective aspects of everyday, immediate experience. The operation was not necessarily retrograde because it focused on the potential meanings of direct experience and opened up questions about the necessity of current practices. Even its ideal, imaginary character allowed poets like Snyder to propose a way of seeing alternatives to existing structures of daily life by honing in on the satisfactions that one did have as the foundation upon which to build a new life.

The problem that hindered, if not prevented, the utopian from breaking through to the practical, was blindness to the complex conditions by which fantasy operated and revealed potentialities for new ways of living. The flaw with the utopias proposed under the rubric of the counterculture lay in their projecting what was genuinely nearest and dearest as the basis for salvation without considering, indeed refusing to consider, how the positive, enlightening aspects of their lives might be the products of what they hated most. Their haven could not exist outside the catastrophe of oppression. The very theory that allowed the avant-garde to criticize the dominant structures of American society applied to their hopes as well, but, with few exceptions, they did not apply their critique to their own lives, so they did not see, except intuitively, how radical utopia was dependent upon and derivative from the society they hoped to overthrow. The "dictatorship of the unconscious" blocked itself by remaining unconscious of its own roots, or of the necessity of an executive power that could enforce utopian dictates, thus undoing the familial autonomy that a domestic utopia strove to render eternal.

Chapter 13

1. Gary Snyder, "For the West," in *The Back Country* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 117.

2. Carol Baker, "1414 SE Lambert Street," in *Gary Snyder: Dimensions of a Life*, ed. Jon Halper (San Francisco Sierra Club Books, 1990), 27. This was a brief reminiscence written by one of Snyder's college roommates for the festschrift prepared in honor of Snyder's sixtieth birthday. Robert Duncan likewise had received a subpoena to appear before the California state legislature's Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities for his activities as an editor of the American Student Union newspaper at Berkeley. The same committee summoned Wally Hedrick for his involvement in the Progressive Art Workers, a club of young artists organized in 1946 at Pasadena City College.

3. Gary Snyder, "Revolution in the Revolution in the Revolution," in *Regarding Wave* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 39.

4. Gary Snyder, "The Yogin and the Philosopher," in *The Old Ways* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1977), 11.

5. See Snyder's definition of dharma in "The Etiquette of Freedom," in *The Practice of the Wild* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 10. Dharma has no fixed meaning. The word is used interchangeably to refer to universal law, the collectivity of all phenomena, truth, or Buddhist doctrine (Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, 328). In addition to formal training at a Zen monastery, Snyder found the Vajrayana and Shingon Mikkyo schools of Buddhism attractive. Vajrayana is part of the Tantric tradition, the predominant form of Buddhism in Tibet. Tantric schools plunge their practitioners into their passions, which can when confronted become vehicles of enlightenment. See Chögyam Trungpa, *Cutting through Spiritual Materialism* (Berkeley: Shambhala, 1973), for an exposition of Vajrayana Buddhism. The dialectic between the ascetic Zen and the theatrical Vajrayana traditions of Buddhism appeared very early in Snyder's studies into Asian religion, long before he actually left to live in Japan. Shingon Mikkyo is a branch of Buddhism devoted to esoteric knowledge and the study of the keys to locate and interpret hidden messages in the world of phe-

nomena. It is associated with wilderness and mountain retreats. See Katsumori Yamazato, "How to Be in This Crisis: Gary Snyder's Cross-Cultural Vision in *Turtle Island*," in *Critical Essays on Gary Snyder*, ed. Patrick D. Murphy (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1991), 236–238.

6. Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, 78.

7. Snyder has repudiated the sexual portrait of Japhy Ryder as having little relationship to the way he actually lived in the 1950s. At the same time, he has conceded that Kerouac's presentation of Snyder's early studies into Buddhism were generally accurate, taking into account the distortions and exaggerations necessary to a popular novel. See Snyder's letter to Sherman Paul printed at the end of Paul's *In Search of the Primitive: Rereading David Antin, Jerome Rothenberg, and Gary Snyder* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 298–301; and interviews with Snyder in *The Real Work: Interviews and Talks, 1964–1979* (New York: New Directions, 1980), 62, 163. Snyder's three marriages suggest a continuing search through his youth for a mate rather than a desire to escape from women as Kerouac described. Snyder's political and aesthetic philosophies after 1967 explicitly assert that male-female bonding is the essential and necessary social fact.

8. Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, 61.

9. Ibid., 68–69.

10. Anecdotal accounts of Snyder's life in Japan are found in *Gary Snyder: Dimension of a Life*, 53–109. See also Janwillem van de Wetering, *The Empty Mirror: Experiences in a Japanese Zen Monastery* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1973), reminiscences of a Dutch student of Zen who entered Daitoku-ji in 1958; and the accounts of Snyder's second wife, Joanne Kyger, in *The Japan and India Journals, 1960–1964* (Bolinas: Tombouctou Press, 1979).

11. In another interview, Snyder observed: "The danger of Zen is not that people become moral anarchists—it's quite the opposite. It's that they become complete supporters of whatever establishment is around. That is the *real* moral anarchism of Zen. 'Morals don't matter, so support the government'" (Dom Aelred Graham, *Conversations: Christian and Buddhist, Encounters in Japan* [New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968], 61).

12. Gary Snyder, *Myths and Texts* (New York: New Directions, 1978), vii–viii. In this volume, Snyder used "text" to represent "pure natural process" and "myth" to stand for imaginative value. See Charles Altieri, "Gary Snyder's Lyric Poetry: Dialectic as Ecology," *Far Point* 4 (1970): 55–65, for a discussion of how Snyder developed these two critical terms poetically. Snyder, in the introduction to his undergraduate thesis, defined myth as a "reality lived" that contained "at the moment of telling, the

projected content" of "unarticulated and conscious values: simultaneously ordering, organizing, and making comprehensible the world within which the values exist. One might even reformulate the statement to say 'Reality is a myth lived'" (*He Who Hunted Birds in His Father's Village* [New York: New Directions, 1979], 109–110).

13. Gary Snyder, "Moving the World a Millionth of an Inch," interview taped in 1974, published in *The Beat Vision: A Primary Sourcebook*, ed. Arthur Knight and Kit Knight (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1987), 10–11. Lawrence Ferlinghetti also felt that the Cuban Revolution had been a decisive factor in changing the attitudes of United States poets, moving them from the "disengaged" stance of the beat period focused on individual self-improvement to a renewed faith in the possibility of radical social change (interview with Ferlinghetti by David Meltzer in *The San Francisco Poets*, 136). Allen Ginsberg, however, expressed a contrary negative evaluation of the Cuban revolution in a pamphlet, "Contribution Towards the Cuban Revolution," published in 1961 by *Pa'alante.* Ginsberg assailed the new regime for its policies persecuting homosexuals, which he viewed as the first steps toward curtailing all forms of free personal expression.

14. See *Gary Snyder: Dimensions of a Life*, 188.

15. Snyder, *The Real Work*, 61.

16. Interview with Ekbert Faas, 1974, in *Towards a New American Poetics: Essays and Interviews*, ed. Ekbert Faas (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1978), 113–114. See Gary Lawless, "My Apprenticeship at Kitkitdizze: Summer of 1973," and Scott McLean, "Thirty Miles of Dust: There Is No Other Life," in *Gary Snyder: Dimensions of a Life*, for accounts of apprenticeships with Snyder.

17. See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 30ff.

18. Brisk sales of his poems began with his earliest volumes. The first edition of *Riprap* (Ashland: Origin Press, 1959) sold out very quickly, and *Myths and Texts* (New York: Totem Press, 1960) sold at a steady thousand copies a year until 1969, when New Directions reprinted Snyder's work in larger editions.

19. Snyder, *The Real Work*, 121.

20. Gary Snyder to Kenneth Rexroth, 10 May 1966, correspondence files, Rexroth papers, DSC. A bodhisattva is an enlightened being who helps others achieve enlightenment.

21. Yet in his opinion the perspective that historical formations are not divine came from the West and not from Buddhism: "One of the most interesting things that has ever happened in the world was the Western discovery that history is arbitrary and that societies are human, and not divine, or natural, creations—that we actually have the capacity of making choices in regard to our social systems. This is a discovery that

came to Asia only in this century. We in the West have an older history of dealing with it" (Snyder, *The Real Work*, 101).

22. Graham, *Conversations: Christian and Buddhist*, 69.

23. Gary Snyder, "Energy in Eternal Delight," in *Turtle Island*, 105.

24. Gary Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, 92; essay originally published in 1961 as "Buddhist Anarchism" for Michael McClure's and David Meltzer's *Journal for the Protection of All Beings* no. 1.

25. Snyder, *The Real Work*, 41. In another interview, Snyder cited Rod Coburn, a master mechanic, as the single person from whom he learned most about craft values and an approach to poetry (ibid., 61).

26. Secunda, "John Bernhardt, Charles Frazier, Edward Kienholz," 33.

27. Kienholz, "Los Angeles Art Community," OHP/UCLA, 397.

28. Quoted in Bruce Cook, *The Beat Generation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 131.

29. Interview with Ekbert Faas, in *Towards a New American Poetics*, 141.

30. Inger Thorup Lauridsen and Per Dalgard, *The Beat Generation and the Russian New Wave* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1990), 74.

31. Interview with Ekbert Faas, in *Towards a New American Poetics*, 131.

32. Gary Snyder, "Wave," in *Regarding Wave*, 3.

33. Snyder, "Kyoto Born in Spring Song," in *Regarding Wave*, 18. Vajra literally means diamond or adamantine. In Buddhist terminology, vajra is a symbol of the highest spiritual power that reflects all other powers in its light and that can cut every other material but cannot itself be cut by anything (Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, 349).

34. Gary Snyder, "Axe Handles," in *Axe Handles* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983), 6. Although Snyder's themes are closely connected to Rexroth's, Snyder's choice of Pound as a poetic mentor broke with the anti-Pound orthodoxy of the Rexroth circle.

35. Robert Boyers, "A Mixed Bag," *Partisan Review* 36 (1969): 313. See also Charles Altieri, *Enlarging the Temple: New Directions in American Poetry During the 1960s* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1979) for an argument that Snyder's experience is too limited to support "his claims to totality" (p. 150). Any one individual's, or for that matter society's, experience is too limited to be an adequate base for a "total" description of reality. In this respect, the situation of poets is no different from that of any other professional group. The problem is not whether authors' lives are too narrow, but how the rhetorical and narrative models they use resonate with the life experiences and dreams of their potential audiences and provide meaningful symbolic resources for efforts to understand the world. Given that poetry audiences are consid-

erably smaller than those for many other art forms, Snyder's book sales make him one of the more popular American poets of the 1960s and 1970s despite all the features, both biographical and stylistic, that ought to have limited his appeal.

36. For women poets who, like Snyder and Duncan, accepted the importance and validity of symbols developed across the centuries as a way of expressing fundamental truths of contemporary experience without succumbing to the dictates of contemporary ideology, the relation of experience to natural "process" was complex. Denise Levertov in her poem "The Son," about the maturing of her teenage boy, began the poem with a reference to Eros: "He-who-came-forth was / it turned out / a man—" (Levertov, "The Son," in *Poems, 1960–1967,* 168–169). The child as well as the mother is a symbol of strife and change, an observation provoked by his silent, moody moving through the house. What prompted her to write the poem, she later explained, was "the capacity for suffering that I had become aware of in him, the suffering for instance of the painful silences of adolescent shyness in a rather conscious and not merely frustrated way." She noted that these emotions of his were beginning to find positive transformation in the fabrication of visual art. She was aware of a general process moving through her only child, a replication of the forces that turned strife into creativity, yet he remained her son Nik. The universal repeated itself in the local, which nonetheless did not lose its individual character no matter how much behavior manifested the power of myth as an expression of irrepressible but unpredictable patterns. Levertov discussed the process of composing this work in "Work and Inspiration: Inviting the Muse," in *The Poet in the World* (New York: New Directions, 1973), 25–42; quotation on 39.

37. Snyder, *The Real Work,* 80–81. Snyder has been reticent in discussing the details of his family background or his childhood. He lived on a farm as a small child, but when he was ten, his parents separated. He and his sister lived with his mother, who moved to Portland to work in the circulation department of the *Oregonian.* She later achieved her goal of becoming a reporter. As a single working mother, she had to struggle to provide her family with a modest standard of living. She was, however, ambitious for her children and pushed both to plan for professional careers. Snyder has suggested that he and his mother often quarreled, but after he left home to attend Reed, he became financially independent and had little contact with her. See J. Michael Mahar, "Scenes from the Sidelines," in *Gary Snyder: Dimensions of a Life,* 8–11. The hint he gave in his interview with Ekbert Faas that his mother was somehow similar to Allen Ginsberg's mother, who had spent the last twenty years of her life in and out of mental hospitals because of schizophrenic behavior, was misleading. The hint however revealed the emotional pain of his relationships with his absent father, a farmer and craftsman that Snyder sought to emulate, and his mother, who in the context of

other statements Snyder has made, appears to be the prime model for the stereotype of the psychologically devouring female.

38. The observation that without death there would be no birth was mythically expressed through the symbol of the womb representing the tomb. This mythic image was then projected on women as social beings. Because they give birth they are also the bearers of death, the devourers, so that the rage that women expressed at the conditions of their existence could be transformed into another instance of women consuming those with whom they live. Myth abstracts and personalizes at the same time, so it appears to conform to and explain the facts but is independent and reductive of the specific manifestations.

39. In 1972 Snyder dramatized his view that the United States needed to be dismembered into biocultural units by insisting that no copies of his collection *Manzanita* (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1972) could be sold east of the Rockies. He explained, "It's a different country over there; it's not the same place. . . . It's on the other side of the turtle's backbone" (referring to North America as Turtle Island; quoted in Katherine McNeil, *Gary Snyder: A Bibliography* [New York: Phoenix Bookshop, 1983], 69).

40. Laguna Pueblo novelist Leslie Marmon Silko criticized Snyder for being an "Orientalist" who appropriated other peoples' cultures to enhance the power of his own, without ever addressing the question of restitution ("An Old-Time Indian Attack Conducted in Two Parts," *Shantih* 4 [Summer-Fall 1979]: 4).

41. Snyder, "Passage to More than India," in *Earth House Hold,* 111.

42. Snyder, "Four Changes," in *Turtle Island,* 90–102.

43. Snyder published a mimeographed version of "Four Changes," which he distributed widely in 1969. Four other editions appeared in 1969 and 1970, as the Berkeley-based environmental newsletter *Earth Read Out,* Robert Shapiro from Chicago, Noel Young of the Unicorn Book Shop, and the Whole Earth Truck Store in Santa Barbara each independently reprinted Snyder's mimeographed text. They distributed approximately 300,000 free copies, and in 1974, the Ecology Center Bookstore in Berkeley republished the essay as the second number in its pamphlet series on environmental subjects, while Snyder included the manifesto as the conclusion to *Turtle Island.* For a publishing history, see Snyder's introductory note to "Four Changes" in *Turtle Island,* 91, and McNeil, *Gary Snyder: A Bibliography,* 47–50.

44. Snyder, "Four Changes," in *Turtle Island,* 92.

45. Ibid., 102.

46. Snyder, "Buddhism and the Coming Revolution," in *Earth House Hold,* 92.

47. Compare Herbert Marcuse: "[Contemporary society] delivers the goods bigger and perhaps even better than ever before and it exacts, for the delivery of these

goods, the constant sacrifice of human lives: death, mutilation, enslavement ("Art in the One-Dimensional Society," *Arts Magazine* 41 [May 1967]: 26).

48. From "Hitch Haiku," in Snyder, *The Back Country,* 25.

49. Snyder, *The Real Work,* 132.

50. For treatments of the dilemmas of the aesthetic avant-garde in Europe see: Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987); T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973); T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); Jerrold Seigel's *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830–1930* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1986).

51. Snyder, "What history fails to mention is," in *Left Out in the Rain: New Poems 1947–1985* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1986), 161.

52. Snyder, "For a Far-Out Friend," in *Riprap,* 13.

53. Snyder, "This Tokyo," in *The Back Country,* 80.

54. Curiously, Snyder did not publish poems explicitly about the failure of his marriage to Joanne Kyger until 1986.

55. Snyder, "Moving the World a Millionth of an Inch," 21–22.

56. Ellen Willis, "Coming Down Again: After the Age of Excess," *Salmagundi* 81 (Winter 1989): 129.

57. Ibid., 135.

58. Snyder, *The Real Work,* 119–120; "Residents Fighting Modern Gold Rush," *Los Angeles Times,* 26 December 1979, I, 30. See also Snyder, "Moving the World a Millionth of an Inch," for an earlier assessment of the Kitkitdizze experience.

59. Gary Snyder, *The Real Work,* 88–89.

60. Ibid., 86.

14

Eros' Double Face

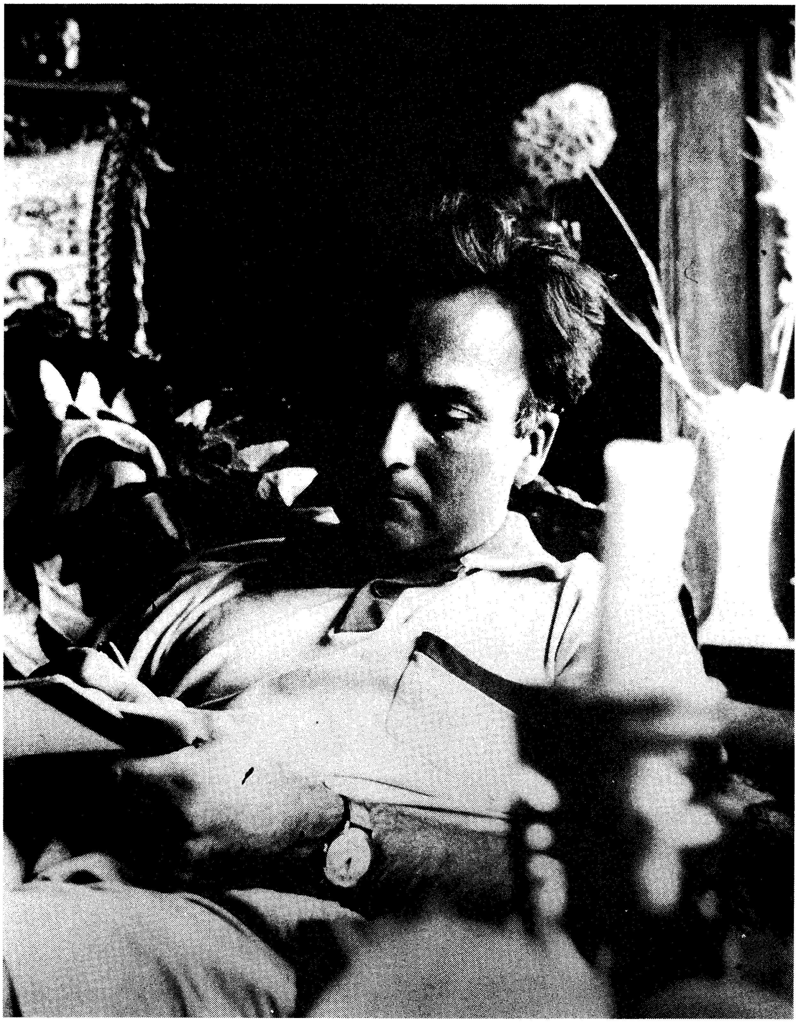
Robert Duncan on the Limits of Utopia

Seven years after the Human Be-In and Gathering of All Tribes in 1974, Snyder expressed regret that he had urged the taking of drugs on as wide a scale as he had. He still believed from his own personal experience that psychedelic drugs could have positive effects on both individuals and social interaction, but the responsibility of being a public figure required him to advocate restraint and "to project an image of a little bit more sanity." The sudden revolution in consciousness he had hoped for, but not really expected, had not taken place. The government had lost its war, but remained, even with the then-recent resignation of Nixon, for all practical purposes invincible, if distrusted. Those who had rebelled had paid a price for asserting individual vision against public authority. Neither the government nor the alternative "community" had been prepared to deal with the fear and hatred inside so many people, and Snyder had to admit that he had not considered adequately the high numbers of disoriented and potentially violent people who had gravitated toward the counterculture.

"I've had people turn up at my door who are half insane, who told me that I had set them on their path," he continued. "I've had to deal with them, and it's not easy, because we're talking about real people, real situations. . . . [I] sat down with them and talked and [they] scared shit out of me and my wife one time, and my kids. And you know, like, not knowing where these people are at, and trying to find out where they're at. You've got to realize that there's an underside to this, that at its bottom is Charlie Manson. But we have to live with that underside too, and in California we see that underside, and it's dangerous."[1]

Robert Duncan (fig. 56) was also concerned with the dark side of the counterculture that arose as people he knew attempted to become a social force. In 1966, just as the often arcane speculations of poets were mobilizing a mass movement, Duncan worried that a system of ideas focused solely on liberating humans from oppressive social dictates would not be well prepared to provide an effective philosophy of government, much less a practical structure of administration. He looked at fellow poets trying to convert their experience of community into projects for social rectification and saw at best naiveté. At worst, poets who had begun their careers as crusaders for personal truth had allowed their utopian hopes to obscure their perception of their own complexities. Gently chiding Snyder's fascination with resurrecting the "old ways," Duncan thought that the "myth of the return" was not innocent, because our imagination of the past was always imbued with passions and hierarchies of the present. The golden age was simply a picture of the best aspects of the present apparently stripped of its ugly features, which nonetheless reappeared in a thirst to eradicate contradiction.[2]

Duncan was one of the most influential and respected American poets of his generation, but he was known only to a select group who took pride in the time needed to work through his texts. His poems seldom told a story that revealed itself in a single reading. He demanded that his readers struggle as he did and reconstruct the poet's contradictory, often misleading responses to images and ideas he had experienced in the course of assembling his work. Duncan knew what he wanted to say when he finished writing, but what made a poem "poetic" for Duncan was that the text was a record of the discovery of meaning that can come only from the process of writing. The payoff for the reader was not the message, or the use of language, or well-crafted images, but a reenactment while reading of the experience that transformed Duncan's initial chaotic emotions about some event or person into a form that



56. Patricia Jordan, photograph of Robert Duncan, late 1950s. Patricia Jordan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

could convey a message. In the emergence of meaning from the confusion of raw experience Duncan created himself as subject, knowing who he was and where he stood through the act of narration. This was not a simple task because narration involved many snares, first and foremost the lure of desires to escape the complexity of reality through the creation of personal utopias. To write his poems, Duncan had to learn to listen to the conflicting voices within him, but then say no to the words he often liked best.

The self-image to which Duncan returned throughout his life was that of a contrarian, always searching for the hidden meanings locked in all phenomena in ways that made everybody else uncomfortable:

> The reason I really was only a poet (it was clear even in high school that I wouldn't have a second profession, and that I would be just a poet, which was very distressing to my family) was that I was incapable, absolutely incapable, of living in the double standard. I would just blabber too much; I'm not talking about some great moral courage or something. I was literally incapable. . . . without thinking about it, I understood that no one cares who or what is washing dishes—but by the time you're a busboy they care, and they're patting your bottom or whatever—and nobody cares who's typing his manuscript. . . . But if you try to get an office job! I would take a Civil Service examination and would be A-1 or whatever is the top bracket; but when you'd go to get the job that's at the other end of that, they simply read you out, in no time at all. You never got the job and, more than that, they'd ask you to tell them why. . . . So no wonder I didn't, luckily, remotely believe that I might grow up and be a teacher, maybe, as well as a poet.[3]

Far from being practical, he was "lurid," excitable to the point of helplessness. If somebody said yes, he had to say no. His homosexuality and his parents' participation in theosophy had established his difference from the middle-class American culture to which he otherwise fully belonged. But his differences went further and deeper. He enjoyed contradicting people, he enjoyed exposing the limitations of all views, his own and those of the people with whom he came into contact. He knew it made him insufferable, but any distinction he received in his social activities seemed to derive from his penchant for contrariety: "I was on the freshman staff of the college literary magazine and had already discovered that when I thought something was good there would be a whole staff full of 'nos' and I would be the only 'yes'; when I thought something was lousy, there would be a whole staff full of 'yeses' and I'd be the only 'no.' Actually, this made me feel like I had an identity for the first time."[4]

Turning contrariety into a positive feature, Duncan found a consolation for the anguish he had experienced growing up feeling that he was somehow a defective member of his society. "What I remember is some utter misery in me that showed up in whatever I did there [as a student in high-school shop class], so that all could see I was not somehow a man, showed up in my crying and being afraid of what a man must do." In an interview, Duncan proposed, "I play heretic so that ideas are moving, and I'm entertaining their ideas, and I know they're entertaining mine." It was no fun to play heretic to fanatics, and Duncan thought the transformation from the 1950s to the 1960s from private to public concerns had involved a suspension of openness. "There was no play left." Being in opposition on principle made him acutely sensitive to the effects of retreating into one's own imaginary community. Difference had given him his particular voice as a poet, but its "play" came from contesting other conceptions of poetry.[5]

The Vietnam War refocused Duncan's long-standing concern over the relationship of poetry and politics. Unlike Snyder, Duncan felt no pressure to propose programs for social reform. He was not personally capable of such a task, but he also believed that programmatic thinking was antithetical to the unique contributions that poets could make toward the resolution of social conflicts. In an interview given as the war was ending, Duncan stated that he believed that "poetics, like politics, is an art of the intensification of what we take to be the principle of individuality in the realization of its identity and unity (or fulfillment) as an essential part of a society. It is not in whatever social attitudes we protest that the *politics* of our poetry is to be read, but in the actual society of events that that given poetry presents and in the character of the life of the members of that society." Learning how to gauge the ways poetic practice related to social debates had long concerned him. In 1958, he had written that political work involved poetic thinking because laws were accumulated metaphors. A community was a "body of people living in the same place under the same laws"; a community could be defined by its laws, that is, by the collective meanings assigned to shared experiences.[6]

Duncan did not believe that all members of a community shared equally in constructing those meanings, but the broader the basis of experience encompassed, the more stability and cohesion a society had. For poets to argue a specific point, to treat readers as if they were piggy-banks into whom knowledge and preset opinions were to be deposited was to miss the unique ways poetic activity functioned in the social meaning-making process. If poets became aware of the multiplicity of experience moving within them and recaptured those levels within a work that others could share, all would become more conscious of the contradictory forces they contained.[7] Their relationship to their experiences would change as they faced those elements they had not known existed. "The poet of the event," he argued in the introduction to *Bending the Bow,* "senses the play of its moralities belongs to the configuration he cannot see but feels in terms of fittings that fix and fittings that release the design out of itself as he works to bring the necessary image to sight."[8]

The poem was an experience in its own terms, not simply a statement. Because it was an experience, it was personal and private, but because poetry was a collective form of assessing experience, it was also public. The social value of poetry was eviscerated when the balance of public and private foundered. If imagination could enrich politics, might not politics equally be likely to deplete imagination through a transfer of energy into a black hole of unacknowledged, repressed desire? So a dangerous balance existed: if poets threw themselves into the affairs of the immediate, imagination might disappear from society entirely.

A poem could not be "opposed" to a war, or any other social fact, though the poet as a citizen could and should. The poem proposed another level of experience, so that historical realities, such as war, might not devour people and become the limit of their perspective. Multiplicity of view provided distance rather than engagement, but distance was needed to function effectively as a responsible householder (to use one of Duncan's favorite political terms). By widening the scope of experience, poetry could change political relations, but not without poetry first having changed as it moved from the confrontation of the psyche with the cosmos. The ideas that Lundeberg, Rexroth, and the California School of Fine Arts painters struggled with in order to find aesthetic forms that best linked inner and outer realities had reached a logical culmination. Poetic process was an end to itself, a form of religion without dogma or doxology. For the believer, faith in God has no reward other than itself. Faith does not, cannot, depend upon social amelioration. Poetic experience, to the degree that it provided an experience of the numinous, exercised the same demands upon its practitioners as a religion did.[9] "The State of grace, the Laws of nature, the Structures of the universe, the Force of life," Duncan observed, "all these suggest that we are not wrong to envision our orders as poets as proceeding from an arbitrating Poetic not an arbitrary poetic and proceeding toward that Poetic. We to be realized in it, not it to be realized in us."[10]

In his 1966 essay "The Truth and Life of Myth," first delivered as a series of lectures at the San Francisco Art Institute, the renamed California School of Fine Arts, Duncan elaborated his argument that poetry worked to release and harness the powers that rational thought vainly sought to control through repression. Rationality was driven by the desire for how the "story should be." He inverted the commonsense understanding of the relationship of desire and reason by positing that irrationality, understood philosophically as that which cannot be predicted, was a return to "what the story demands." It let those factors back into human perception that "official stories" repressed so that nothing need be taken seriously that reason cannot explain or technique quantify.[11] Irrationality allowed us to see features of our lives that were present in our lives, but were seldom useful for predicting what would occur. Lying within the sphere of pure potentiality, the irrational capacity blurred the distinctions between improbable, possible, and probable. Rational functions sharpened those distinctions and provided a necessary, though not infallible basis for planning, but at the cost of reducing the complexity of the present only to those factors that fit the story. In a topology that mimicked Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, one could see either the present or the future, but not both at the same time. This distinction underlay the differences between what Duncan termed mythopoetic truth and likely (which Duncan thought really meant likeable) truth.[12]

Nuclear weapons had increased the need for rational administrative control in government because the price, Duncan argued, for failing to prepare for the future adequately was apocalypse. On the level of the greatest danger, the global contest between the United States and the Soviet Union, Duncan conceded the probability that military planning would succeed in averting conflict—although the possibility of mistaken calculations remained. It was at lower levels of action where rationality could collapse, those areas where predictive decisions were based on information of a too general level. The Vietnam War struck him as a typical mistake of a system that could not take into account adequately the gaps in its knowledge, yet tended to act as if it had sufficient information upon which to judge competing potential futures.

Where history becomes myth, Duncan observed, rationality inevitably fails. The desired ends of economic or military violence often were not achieved because decisions always involved more than "matters of reason and plan."[13] In failure historical actors discovered the fates lurking for them, "the ends they deserve." Only when rationality verges into hubris and the hidden aspect of desire governing purposeful action is clearly revealed do the true meanings of social actions stand forth for all to contemplate. Hitler revealed a "terrible truth" about Europe, while Johnson betrayed "the character of Babbitt swollen with his opportunity in history." Political leaders and their followers alike believed that leaders were all-powerful, but they mechanically acted out truths that humanity had enshrined for millennia in mythic accounts of chaos, wrath, and envy.[14]

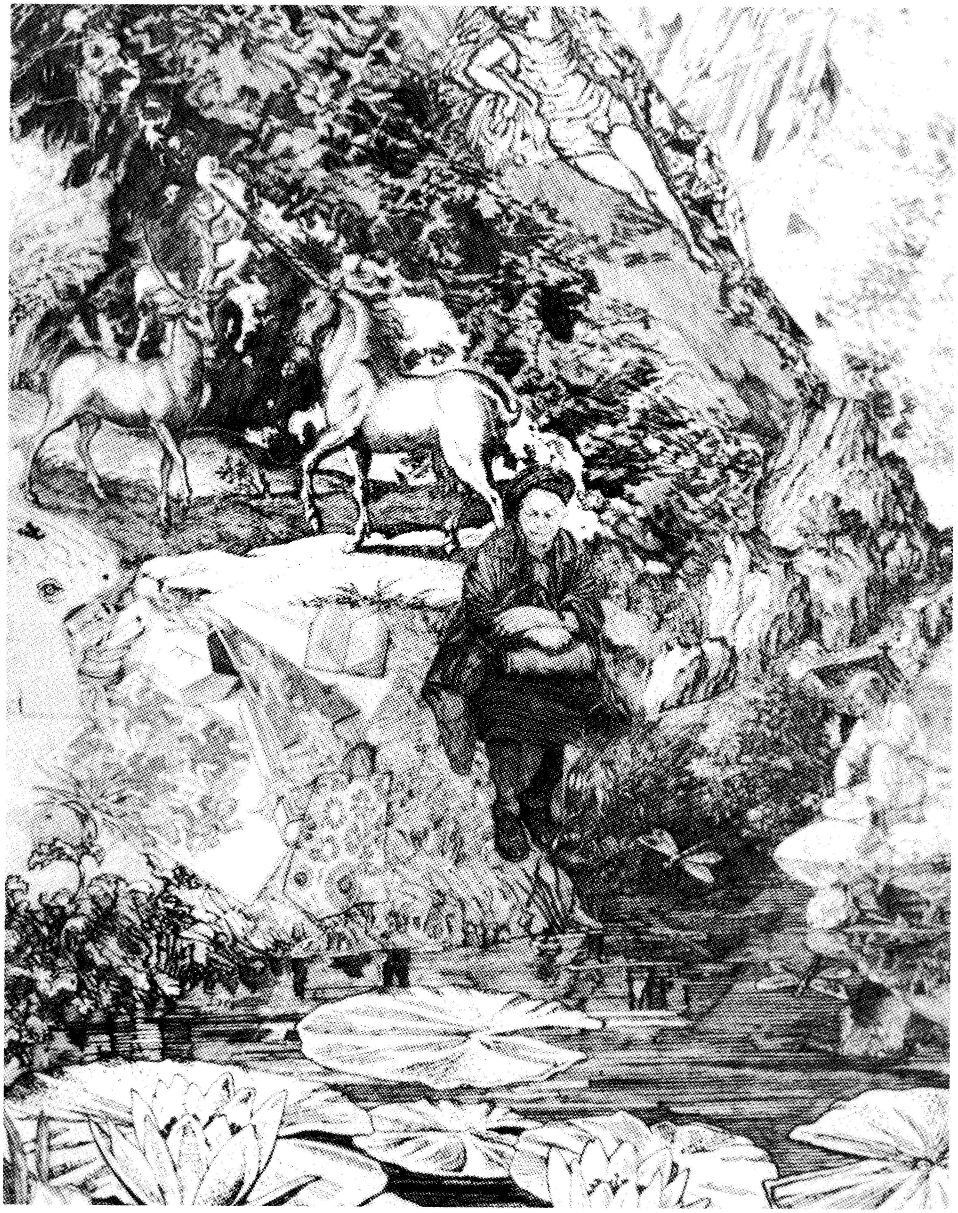
In this situation aesthetics had a new, but limited role. The price of social structure is revealed most clearly on the symbolic level, where images carry the fears and desires that pertain to specific sets of relationships. The mythic, Duncan argued, was exterior reality refracted through personal reaction into a form that corresponded to and revealed actual powers and forces that exist on a supernatural level, that is, as Platonic ideals. The individual, historical moment makes sense because it is part of recurrent, universal patterns that occupy the attention through myth and poetry. Individual experiences, as concrete and unique as they are, are instances of constantly repeating patterns, which the pre-twentieth-century societies personified in the gods, elves, and angels populating their literature and art.[15]

Yet the universal validity of such figures did not contradict their irrational character. These processes could not be reduced to laws, a process that arose from reason's desire to impose order upon forces greater than the capacities of the human intellect. The natural processes that led to myth and poetry were patterns that returned again and again, without ever being exactly identical. Poetry was the "real world" because it pointed to a level of existence that persisted despite the permutations that constituted history. Societies and individuals alike found meaning in their actions by projecting them against the cycles of life and death. Until this had been done, one felt as if one's experience were somehow inauthentic and alien. This suggested to him that the self was the sum of intersecting forces rather than a distinct, autonomous entity, a conclusion similar to Snyder's conception of the ego derived from his studies of Buddhism. If experience, in and of itself, were the ground of reality, then there would be no need to search for meaning. "What does it mean," Duncan asked in 1972, "that in order for [an experience] to come real in the poem we must *imagine* even what we have actually felt? We must make it up in order to make it real."[16]

The self, he argued, took shape in the story that unfolded. The critical aspect to a narrative was not the events, but meaning, "the sense of truth and life" that the story revealed. The struggle over storytelling was fundamental to the sense individuals made of their daily lives and societies made of their histories. As they told stories, they turned themselves into subjects capable of acting in the world. They had selected those attributes and desires which would give an illusion of continuity. Self-narration was always an innovation, but one that attempted to assert that the created subject was "always" so. There was no understanding of self except as a position within a narrative: "The *psychosis* or principle of the soul-life is its belonging to the reality of what we know to be true to our story-sense." Yet meaning did not lie in the "philosophy" or overt theme of a life-story. Duncan believed instead that people found meaning in the "sense of drama," in their visceral responses to conflicts that revealed patterns of motivations, potentialities, and relative position.

In this sense the self contained within it as an experience a language of boundaries. Identity, temporary as it was, came through regular patterns that established relationships. Changes to those patterns that brought out other potentials of an individual were also a change of identity and often experienced as a threat (they could also be felt as a liberation), to be resisted by repressing the errant potentials that escaped into the realm of consciousness by assuming symbolic form. Symbols embodied potentialities consigned to the churning realm of the repressed, but returning from the unconscious to remind us that the identity constructed for superficial everyday existence was transitory.[17]

Our senses split between official versions and subterranean responses that showed the "dark side" of official reality. Freud had revealed that the child growing into words "hears not what his parents mean to say but what that saying is telling about them." Language was first and foremost about pleasure



57. Jess, *Narkissos*, graphite, pencil, and drawing paste-up, 1979/1991, detail.
Courtesy of the artist and Odyssia Gallery, New York.

and pain derived from relationships and only secondarily about the communication of specific information.[18] Language established power relations by imposing speakers' images of others upon them so they might conform to the roles assigned them. Those with greater social authority, be they parents, employers, or men of affairs, had greater linguistic authority. Hierarchy found expression first in statements of hate and love that proceeded as if people were simply objects, extensions of the speaker's will. Language worked to turn others into instrumentalities contained within by a cage of speakers' conflicting needs, desires for power, and feelings of guilt.

Rationality allowed citizens to accept either as their own or as inevitable the desires of those at the top of hierarchy, but the experience of pain and pleasure involved in relationships remained as a residue of despised emotionality. The expressions of those experiences were inevitably distorted and inaccurate on one level, but they were nonetheless the only record of the emotional price exacted in the attempts to reach an "official story." Those records came from within, but in an externalized, objective form that had to be read and reread carefully to understand the messages conveyed about one's actual place in and response to society. Myth therefore was always a "matter of actual times and actual objects" that revealed the fundamental cruelties, and therefore inadequacies, of specific social relations.[19]

In his poem on Berkeley, "Heavenly City, Earthly City," written in 1947, Duncan proposed an explanation for the mysterious emotional power that unexpected images had upon people, the same power that Lorser Feitelson had observed as a young man when he came across a street sign post and felt lifted out of everyday reality. Images, Duncan argued, appeared mysterious when they connected to experiences repressed into the unconscious. Poetry was the means by which those emotional reactions could be orchestrated to liberate the preverbal from the unconscious and catapult it into a form that allowed the total being, conscious as well as unconscious, to reflect upon and learn from a broader range of experience. The power of hierarchical social structures lay in the ability of its image makers to call forth these compelling images without explaining them or making them verbal. In Duncan's terminology, "first things" remained "inaccessible" in manipulative art, that is, creative work with a preconceived agenda. In liberatory work, such as poetry in which the writer discovered meaning through the act of writing, the conscious mind became aware of how primal forces moved within it. These forces were neither dispelled nor vanquished. They had to be accepted as part of one's being before they could be used to accomplish specifically human purposes. Mysticism need not be obscurantist if it allowed men and women to apprehend experiences that might be valid, but the conditions of which could not (yet) fit into a rational explanation.

In a 1967 interview, Duncan observed that many poets did not "read" their poetry or their experiences as if they were texts outside their control and therefore visions by which they could learn rather than teach. "For instance, take an awfully good poet like Robert Frost," Duncan went on. "While he writes a poem, he takes it as an expression of something he has felt and thought. He does not read further. It does not seem to be *happening to him*, but coming out of him. Readers too who want to be entertained by [or] to entertain the ideas of a writer will resent taking such writing as evidence of the Real and protest against our 'reading into' poems, even as many protest the Freudians reading meanings into life that are not there." Instead of taking the poem as an "immediate reality," Duncan treated his work as puzzles: "What does it mean that this is happening here like this?" The poetic significance did not dwell in the what of the message but in the why: why these images, why these words, at this time and place? They appear as experiences, but they open onto other orders of human reality from which our "experiences" are constructed as so many illusions.[20]

To discover the hidden message in poetic experiences, one had to surrender the "I" or the ego, which emerged, Duncan thought, as a denial of and defense against subordination, and accept the potentiality of the subject, which Duncan defined as a "readiness" or position in social structure. The ego tried to lift the self outside of time, a factor that made stereotypical thinking particularly attractive to a threatened ego attempting to stabilize itself. The subject, on the contrary, placed the self back into the web of discourse and its forms and rehistoricized self-understanding by constantly "rereading" the texts which had constituted it. The subject emerged as part of an ongoing dialogue, sometimes acrimonious, between the contending elements of a social structure. Individuals had as many subjects as they had texts in their lives, but the subject was always the record of an engagement with others. It marked the ability to change or, to use Duncan's phrase, to "repropose" oneself.[21]

This conception of poetry as a process of analyzing the messages one receives from various levels of reality led him to criticize antiwar poetry attempting to serve an agitational political program. Like many other poets, he demonstrated and spoke out, but he believed that was behavior pertinent to the order of polity, not of the poem, even if he did write poetry with agitational purposes. One of his poems, "Up Rising," protesting Johnson's escalation of the bombing of North Vietnam, was printed as a broadside and posted around the San Francisco Bay Area. Another type of antiwar work was the distribution among artists and poets of *Tribunals,* a mimeographed manuscript of poems on the war. He was interested in engaging other poets as to the correct poetic response to social tragedy and in the process understanding his own work better through evaluating the responses he received. Out of this process, many of the poems in *Tribunals* appeared in *Ground Work: Before the War,* Duncan's later volume published for the general reading public by New Directions.

Strangely, however, for a poet so disregardful of the general public, a poet whose focus on deciphering the fragmentary nature of his own life made his work difficult and arcane, Duncan had a broad vision of who his readers might be. In the introduction to *Bending the Bow,* Duncan described his experience at the October 20, 1967, March on the Pentagon, where he was scheduled as a speaker on the second rally planned at the front entrance.[22] His speech was aborted as National Guard soldiers and police charged the demonstrators, arresting those who refused to (or could not) retreat to the parking lot. Duncan, at the front of the line, found himself caught between the soldiers and the crowd behind him, in which there were many prepared to fight back. Monitors from the march organization advised people to sit down and confront the military with nonviolent, passive resistance instead.

> "Look into their eyes," the doctor's wife tells me. To my right, the onlookers call out, the soldiers are kicking the body of a woman who is everything they despise: they kick her rich clothes; they kick her cultured tone. . . . they kick her meekness that, courageous to lie there affronts their victorious movement forward. "I am all right," she calls back to us.

Duncan considered if there was anything he could possibly say that could defuse the tension. The speech he had planned to give seemed futile, for the soldiers "were under a command that meant to overcome us or to terrify us, a force aroused in the refusal to give even the beginnings of a hearing." In this confrontation, Duncan sensed that a new "we" was in formation, a "we" that at first seemed to be the demonstrators separating politically and morally from the bankrupt authority of the United States. Yet as soon as he suggested that a schism was sundering the American polity, Duncan threw out a second and surprising idea. The soldiers and the police were also his readers. By being part of the same drama, they had formed a community with the demonstrators: "We were, in turn, members of a company of men, moving forward, violently, to overcome in themselves the little company of others kneeling and striving to speak to them."[23]

The protestors had come "to fulfill their humanity," but so had the soldiers. Each had a poem to read to each other: one involving a testimony of opposition in hopefully nonviolent action; the other to express rage, fear, and the "shock of what they were to encounter." Without the other, each "poem" was meaningless. Yet there was a tendency, coming from the highest office of the land, to erect boundaries so that the poems of others were no longer recognized. To think of a community as a group with *common* goals is actually to sunder the community and seek isolation from contamination. The existence of other human beings as historical actors fell into the dark and churning mass of the repressed. When confronted by external evidence of interior chaos, one reaction was a sense of defilement. "And the people who feel that," Duncan thought, "—and they certainly are to be found in the dominant, ruling majority and in lots of little minorities—want authenticity within their group and then everybody else is experienced as corrupting. . . . One feels a challenge and wants it to be eliminated. Those things are there to be eliminated. . . . Or not even thought of which is the worst pattern of all. . . . The characteristic of the totalitarian is they can't repropose themselves."[24]

Duncan discovered that community was common action, not despite but *because* of conflict and contest. Without drama there is no action and therefore no community. Separating oneself from every instance of a hated enemy was natural for both sides. The contrary logic that Duncan identified as the clearest representation of his self had arrived at its own political conclusions: difference is the basis of unity, commonality is a sundering. Both protestors and soldiers became angry because every person in the situation "knew" that within lay all possibilities and only historical circumstance defined one's position in the drama. Any of the protestors could commit atrocities, and any of the soldiers could find the courage to speak truth to power. The refusal to listen to others' poems was "the nature of all dying orders, a death so strong we are deadend [*sic*] to the life-lines." The antiwar movement was an integral part of the dying social order of America, rather than the transcendent force its adherents believed.[25]

The poetic truth the Vietnam War awakened in Duncan was the conviction that separation was a will-to-death. Social commonality as codetermination of opposites contested a widespread desire for absolute authority. There was no saving remnant because in willful isolation the conscience ossified and "officized."[26] The elements from which people constructed identity were polysemous because they linked both surface continuities with the underlying chaos of potentiality. Meaning came from the specific relationship of conscious and repressed contents. The individual reader of all the "poems" that constituted social relations possessed the freedom to transpose all given contexts, as a musician switching a melody from one key to another changes its emotional resonance.

"Where there is no commune, / the individual volition has no ground," Duncan inscribed in "The Multiversity," his poem on the Berkeley Free Speech Movement of 1964, quoting the critique the anarchist leader Bartolomeo Vanzetti had made of Lenin and the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. Vanzetti and Duncan continued, "Where there is no individual freedom, the commune / is falsified."[27] The separation of poets into coteries, of homosexuals from heterosexuals,[28] of the peace movement from the government was a dissolution of identity because each boundary severed a relationship that, however antagonistic, helped a person find his or her position in society. Differences were necessary and productive, but only to the degree that they remained in connection. The question was how to understand the nature of conflict in modern society. Was it inherently disruptive or an indispensable attribute? Duncan's answer was clear and derived from a reinterpretation of the place of chaos in the universe: "Order can't possibly be threatened. Disorder is one of its terms. . . . The themes of possible disorder are interior and orderly to the poem."[29] Duncan was speaking in this particular instance about the use of collage technique in poetic composition, but the term "poem" always contained for Duncan the idea of any experience-making, meaning-revealing action.

His refusal to find in the antiwar movement saving grace constituted the basis for Duncan's disagreements with his close friend Denise Levertov.[30] He was dismayed that she believed that the brutality of the Vietnam War, rather than her own psychic development, could be the "subject" of her work. Commenting on Levertov's "Advent 1966," first published in the *Nation* in 1967, Duncan wrote her that her work gave him "an agonizing sense of how the monstrosity of this nation's War is taking over your life, and I wish that I could advance some—not consolation, there is none—wisdom of how we are to at once bear constant (faithful and ever-present) testimony to our grief for those suffering in the War and our knowledge that the government of the U.S. is so immediately the agent of death and destruction of human and natural goods, and at the same time as constantly in our work (which must face and contain this appalling and would-be spiritually destroying evidence of what humankind will do—for it has to do with the imagination of what is going on in Man) now, more than ever, to keep alive the immediacy of the ideal and of the eternal."[31]

Levertov, however, responded that she had found relief from the disasters of war in *group* action, while Duncan could only suffer while bearing his conscience. "While the war drags on, always worse," she began her poem, "An Interim," "the soul dwindles sometimes to an ant / rapid upon a cracked surface." She listens to mendacious, soul-tricking language in a laundromat and hears echoes of rationales government officials used to defend the absurdities of their policies: "It became necessary to destroy the town to save it." Language itself had become part of the perversion. Against this only action sufficed, and the hunger strike of an antiwar demonstrator, fasting to protest her jail sentence and prolongation of the war, gives Levertov hope. "We need / the few who could bear no more," she continued, "who would try anything, / who would take the chance / that their deaths among the uncountable / masses of dead might be real to those who / don't dare imagine death." When the daily news brings only accounts of unimaginable suffering, then only the most serious action can awaken the sleeping ("Might burn through the veil that blinds / those who do not imagine the burned bodies / of other people's children") and restore meaning to language, that is the truthful, unveiled expression of experiences and desires.[32]

Duncan's poetic theory left him an individualist, fearful of submitting his voice to the group cause, because it would be less authentic, subservient to the rationalist desire of the group for power to force the future into the projected end, stripping away all aspects of experience that might undermine the predictive power of social theory. For Levertov, collective solidarity founded upon a sense of shared urgency made her poetry more authentic and opened her voice to share in a process of group imagination. The work carried not only her experience but, she hoped, those of the men and women with whom she worked on a daily basis. The need for collective action against a very powerful opponent went against the fundamentally individualistic drift of postwar avant-garde theory. The war forced all to consider the proper relation of group and individual. For Levertov, it was no longer sufficient to claim the sanctity of individual experience, if that sanctity was incapable of prevailing against concerted power. Poetics that was not also effective as politics was deficient because it did not build the "community" she believed that struggle could cement. The goal of poetry, she wrote, was to wake the "sleepers" from their apathy. While she agreed with Duncan that the primary effects of a poem lay in the nonpolitical, nonsocial realm, of awakening people to a spiritual life within them larger than everyday meanings provided, poems also always had specifically social effects.[33]

In an essay on her experiences as a teacher, she recalled the term spent in 1969 at the English department at the University of California, Berkeley. During her brief tenure, third world student organizations initiated a student strike that led to particularly violent clashes with the police. Conflicts escalated as well over the use of vacant land near the campus that some students had reclaimed as a "People's Park." In May the Highway Patrol and the National Guard occupied the campus area, and a nonstudent was killed during protests.

In the course of deepening crisis, Levertov found her poetry classes transforming into a community "that stayed together each day throughout the terror, and most truly—and with a love and mutual care that made that terror into a time of joy and wonder—practiced the injunction with which a list of points of conduct and tactics for the demonstrators . . . concluded: *'Be your brothers' and sisters' keeper.'*" The experiences at the "barricades" had disrupted the class but also taught her "a new vision of what life might be like in a world of gentle and life-loving people." From this grew a conception for a reformed communal and egalitarian educational system in which a group would live together as well as study, "cook together . . . and grow vegetables and flowers together, and mend each other's clothes—and study not only one subject as a group, but several related and unrelated ones." Education would become the widening of intellectual horizons upon the foundation of a common emotional life.[34]

It was precisely this utopian vision of community that Duncan disputed, though he did not deny the appeal of apocalyptic thinking. He saw in her imaginary communities a replication in countercultural form of the conformist impulse present in all social interaction. Instead of liberating individual potential, such communal arrangements, to the degree that they could work, would impose another set of dogma and related linguistic clichés upon its members, so pervasive that even Levertov unabashedly professed that the student movement did not need to pressure anyone into participating. Adhesion always appeared "voluntary," Duncan pointed out, because social lies gained their power by granting individuals release from responsibility, an absolution experienced subjectively as ecstatic union.[35]

In Duncan's view, the antiwar movement was a false community, a fragment pretending to be the nucleus for a future whole. Community, he believed, grew from the long-term relationships into which individuals entered. The nucleus of the polity was the hearth, the household linked in immediate practical needs. Daily affections and sexual pleasure protected men and women from their primal desires.[36] In his "Dante Études," Duncan wrote,

> The household   to provide shelter
> and to prepare its members
>   to live well   even
>
> in atonality   setting free
>   rearrangement of atonement,
> daily new keys in dreams,
>   reappearance of the "home"
>   note in the melody.

Each household community emerges from "chance encounters / as far as our neighborhood extends." Any broader concept of "community" was an illusion of psyches seeking to augment their power and impress their will upon the world. Will-to-power was one expression of adventurous needs, but it was the "grand exception," the "tragedy the city needs," but gained its meaning for people in its relation to the harmonies of the "home key."[37] Communities that based themselves on thrusting after glory destabilized themselves and ultimately collapsed from the psychological and social tensions such goals promoted.[38] The belief in one's own potential exceptionality enheartened, but it also ultimately increased fear and anxiety as hubris overcame the rational veneer.

> the only king I see
> sickens in our sickness and every night
> ripens to an illness in our need.[39]

What was often good politics subjectively in that it galvanized human action ("the king") was bad politics on a practical level of measuring material accomplishments.

Yet Levertov's position involved an inescapable practical truth: oppositional social movements needed more than wisdom to confront the power of the state. The imagination of community had been a continuous feature of the avant-garde's interaction with itself. As an imaginary category it had a peculiarly static quality. Its growth followed the spiritual development of those who turned to their fellows for sustenance and support. Levertov's antiwar "community" was of a different nature. Constituted in action, be it picketing or simply discussing what to do next, it was dynamic. The poet was engaged in activities outside her craft, outside her psyche. "Robert reminds me *revolution* / implies the circular," Levertov argued back in her poem "Entr'acte," "an exchange / of position, the high / brought low, the low / ascending, a revolving, / an endless rolling of the wheel."[40] She admitted that etymologically the word was wrong, but it was the only word the English language provided to describe the desire for radical change. The word might be inadequate, but the desire, growing from the bodily experience of a society at war and unable to "focus" on justice, was true and therefore necessary to follow. Its potential meanings would unfold as the community growing around a shared desire for change discovered the terms of that change through its own actions.

Still the psyche, Duncan warned, could never be left behind. Its demands lay behind every political step, just as cosmic forces, the process of the universe renewing itself through continual recombination of its basic units, lay behind every psychic motion. The release of the repressed required us to live in a perpetual state of doubt over the nature of United States society, the nature of one's sexual interests, the nature and origins of one's own actions. He found her statement in one poem—"there comes a time when only anger / is love"—a sign that love of violence had seized her imagination. She delighted in the prospect of destruction.[41]

Yet in a political struggle, radical doubt was counterproductive. ("Self-reproach can be a form of self-indulgence," Levertov observed.)[42] There was a need to externalize the enemy in a form that was easily targeted. Eradicating doubt was necessary to accomplishing the social goals developed within the avant-garde, though Duncan was correct in arguing that such a step was contrary to the movement's philosophical foundations about the unique truths found in myth and poetry.[43]

The crisis of the late 1960s fostered efforts to transform the dream of community into an actual practice. But what would be the basis sufficient to ground the dream? Gary Snyder turned to the creation of utopia by actually living his poetics at Kitkitdizze as if it could also be a politics.[44] Even at this local level, the complexities of human interaction and organization overwhelmed and disrupted the ideal. When it came to the much larger question of influencing American foreign policy, the situation was even more daunting. Few believed that their actions, in and of themselves, could end the war. Demonstrations therefore were like poems. Even when violence occurred, events had symbolic rather than practical purposes. Not until the Eugene McCarthy campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1968 and the movement in 1971 to pass the Hatfield-McGovern resolution, expressing the mandate of Congress that the United States withdraw from Indochina, did opponents of the war have vehicles for their position that promised immediate practical consequences. The inability of the political system to accommodate debate about wars forced opponents into an existential rather than a political position. This as well increased the tendency toward demonology, since there was no point to dialogue.

On this level, Duncan was no different from Levertov. In "Up Rising," Duncan linked Johnson to Hitler and Stalin as one of the great criminals of the twentieth century. In "The Fire: *Passages* 13," Duncan describes Johnson and his generals bearing "the faces of the deluded" torturing Jesus in Hieronymus Bosch's painting *Christ Bearing the Cross.* Consumed by the mythic force of wrath, they were instruments of evil, which Duncan understood etymologically to mean a will that placed itself above law.[45] Connecting media images of American politicians with earlier renditions of the demonic, Duncan observed, "as if to drown sweet music out, / Satan looks forth from / men's faces: / Eisenhower's idiot grin, Nixon's / black jaw, the sly glare in Goldwater's eye, or / the look of Stevenson lying in the U.N. that our / Nation save face."[46] In another poem, American politicians, their souls destroyed by their blind choices, were transformed into archaicized caricatures:

In the great storm of feer and rage
the heds of evil appeer and disappeer
heds of state, lords of the cold war,
the old dragon whose scales are corpses of men
and whose breth blasts crops and burns villages

demands again his hecatomb,
our lives and outrage going up into his powr
over us. Wearing the unctuous mask of Johnson,
from his ass-hole emerging the hed of Humphrey,
he bellows and begins over Asia and America
the slaughter of the innocents and the reign of wrath.[47]

The debates between Levertov and Duncan were not about how to make poetry a more effective political tool or about who could utter the most profound personal truth about the war. Both were angered, dismayed, sickened. Both were enheartened by the response of so many young people. "The beautiful young men and women!" Duncan wrote about student protestors. "Standing against the war their courage / has made a green place in my heart. / . . . Love in His young innocence / radiant in His depth of time and night / has waited and now—this is / the message of Christmas—returns once more, / bearing the light of the Sun / fair in His face."[48]

The question that divided them was how they interpreted the emotional aspect of their response to the war as effectively transformed into poetry. Because their dispute was about the craft of poetry, it was about the nature of human action, for in both writers' terms poets were any people constructing themselves through the "poems" they gave each other. The dispute then was about the nature of being in opposition in the United States and the image of self that one could objectively derive from participating in the antiwar movement. Where Duncan differed from Levertov is that he refused to see his anger as the basis upon which a new society might be built. His anger was a reflection of the everpresent rage that had erupted into human affairs yet once again in Vietnam. In "A Lammas Tiding," Duncan observed that as a man he was a hawk, not a bird of peace. He was a ravenous devourer of weaker creatures, if only psychologically.[49] The lust for power over others ran through his poetry. This was not to be condemned, simply recognized. He had focused his ambitions and aggression onto poetry. He had a "lust for vision" rather than a desire for body count, had the chance of history directed him into the military.[50]

In 1972 in a note appended to the republication of *Caesar's Gate,* Robert Duncan announced that he would refrain from further editions of new work while he focused on completing what he believed would be his two final volumes of verse. He projected publishing the first volume in 1983 and the second in 1989. This was no vow of total silence, since Duncan occasionally submitted work-in-progress to literary journals and circulated photocopies of sequences to friends. He also continued to lecture and tour the country on poetry-reading circuits. Still, the hiatus in publication of new work after the 1968 *Bending the Bow* historicized Duncan's work. He largely disappeared as an active voice in the continuing dialogue of contemporary work, exactly the social interaction that Duncan wished to avoid because it distracted him from the completion of his life's work. He did not want to be "current": "When I say I'm not current, I don't mean my work might not be of influence, but the influence will not be the vital one."[51] This quixotic action followed a pattern we have seen before in the careers of Joan Brown, Frank Lobdell, and Jay DeFeo: resolving the contradiction of ambition and ideals by withdrawing to refocus on the work itself.

Duncan had no apparent desire to reach a mass audience, but he wanted to engage those for whom poetry was a serious enterprise, first of all himself: *Ground Work,* he wrote a friend in 1971, was part of an effort to refocus his creative attention onto the creation of an intensely real, but fully private world.[52] In 1983, exactly on schedule, New Directions released Duncan's *Ground Work: Before the War.*[53] Further ensuring that the book communicated his and only his thoughts to the reader, Duncan insisted that the book not be typeset but that the printer prepare photographic plates of Duncan's typescript.

Ground Work: Before the War joined Duncan's meditations on the functions of myth and poetry in society with his responses to political events, particularly the Vietnam War and the role of poets in the crisis of American institutions that developed with the war. The Vietnam crisis had become, for Duncan, an instance of how psychosocial repression inevitably led to strife and the possibility of cleansing through confrontation with the larger forces that contained human action. "This is the creative strife Heraclitus praised," Duncan wrote, "breaking up, away from what you know how to do into something you don't know . . . Angry, confused, . . . the workers are released from the old order into the Great Work beyond their understanding."[54]

In "Santa Cruz Propositions" Duncan presented poetry as a form of surfing, riding the waves of memory and anticipation, of daily speech, the "facts of the polluted stream," and "the roar / of the giants we begin from." Poetry is the force of Eros, the desire of fragments to combine and bring change into the world. Its muse is "Old Mama Mammemory," the original unity that existed between infant and its mother. Myth, as Duncan liked to point out, derived from the Greek μύζω (múzo), literally murmuring. The sounds that children made to attract the attention of the mother were the origins of myth and poetry, and as poets created their works, they sought to return to the primal community, to "Old Mummummymurmurur."[55] The identification of poetry and dream with primal memory maintained a sense of universality, but stripped the aesthetic of an ability to establish a privileged direction to personal development. The process to which the soul unites precedes any idea of morality: the projections of myth can bless but also harm. "I turn on the flow, / the flickering TV picture feed, / to watch the news, the mind's noose / of violence," he wrote in "In Truth Doth She Breathe Out Poisonous Fumes."[56] Television lets loose the repressed into society in the form of mythic images: "juices from the meat at the mind-trough, the murders, / rapes, conspiracies of evil men." "I know in truth she is deadly," he concluded, moving on to a line from Dante, "exhaling infection whence the neighboring sheep pine even without knowing it." The mythic consciousness "tires the will towards overwhelming heaviness and / night."[57]

In the poem on the facing page, Duncan turned to the Christian myths of

America: "We have long wept upon this shore / confused and without ceasing have implored / the protection of a righteous king." Christ, in Duncan's mythic framework, was the embodiment of Eros, the principle of strife and division that brought hope by separating primal unity. But under the control of the negative face of psychological unity, Eros "sickens in our sickness and every night / ripens to an illness in our need."[58]

In "Santa Cruz Propositions" Duncan presented image making as a way of establishing identity. Therefore it was part of the process of separating the subject from the original "maternal" matrix, "arousing out of Her dream of Chaos / eggs of those forms that await the coming of Man."[59] Or as Duncan observed in another poem, "The Missionaries," "To man the advancing line / carries a message of manliness in its stride." Eros "was our Language come in to the Mothertongue / awakening Images, fecundities / . . . Chaos expiring in the Speech of the Winds."[60] A sense of direction established identity through images strung together to give an illusion of purpose, making poetry the basis of a quest. But the secret object of that quest was the repressed unity in which self was reabsorbed into a chaotic potentiality. The repressed then was the continual rebellion of the not-existent against the direction set in place, which always had in its exclusionary fantasies an imperial aspect. The choices humans made appeared to have the rightness and certainty of law, but within and around was the turmoil of all possibilities rising up to destroy not only faith in change, but the products of change. An underlying desire for multiplicity, a polymorphous being, was inherent to the process of differentiation. One could suppress it brutally as puritan regimes attempted, or channel these desires into carefully controlled environments where their potential for harm was reduced as in the mystery cults of the ancient premonotheistic Mediterranean world, but they could not be eliminated since they were in Duncan's view fundamental to the process of maturation.

The original state and its desires did not evaporate, but rooted in the core of the soul and yearning to return, invaded one's dreams. The reality of death gave the lie to the stability of progress and showed the ultimate triumph of potentiality. The most fundamental biological aspects of being always broke down the achievements of the individual and returned him or her to the flux of energy exchange. Only the social persisted, only human institutions stood as proof that directionality could persist. But those institutions proved their point through their representation of and identification with death. They were the "monuments" of people long gone. Society could persist only by making death more important than potentiality and suppressing all those elements of memory and culture that tended to remind people of the transitory nature of life and its accomplishments. Society was a system of memorials that denigrated the most important aspect of human being: that each life was finite, that humans had a limited space in which to find each person's mission, in which to nurture hopes and ambitions and achieve individual nonmaterial culminations. The repressed truth that life was finite took hold in myths and elements of culture, but also inevitably in the irrational actions of human beings.

Duncan then turned to a recent murder case. In 1972 a high school dropout and unemployed auto mechanic who lived in a cabin in the Santa Cruz mountains read the tarot while on mescaline and turned over the card of "Eros before Eros, / the terrific first Mover at work toward Love." A conviction within him arose that only massacre could bring the hoped-for return to chaos that would reopen the question of possibility. He went to the home of a dentist half a mile away, tied up the family with scarves, shot each member, and threw the bodies of father, mother, and two small children into the family swimming pool. The murderer left a note claiming that World War III had begun and all who "misused the natural environment" would be killed without mercy. "Is Eros then evil and foul?" Duncan asked, quoting Socrates in Plato's *Symposium.* "He is always poor," Socrates remembered his teacher Diotima of Mantinea answering this question, "and anything but tender and fair, as many imagine him. He is rough and squalid . . . on the bare earth exposed he lies under the open heaven / . . . and like his mother he is always in distress."[61]

Duncan continued his poem by quoting news reports on the distress of members of the local community, who feared that all hippies would murder them in the night. They bought guns, while the county sheriff tried to assure the populace that there was no reason to believe that the crime was part of a conspiracy. Duncan saw the new ideology of law and order arising from unconscious fears. People wanted to protect what was from the mere possibility that something else could be, that is, to protect themselves from their own nightmares, which on the logical level could not be sustained by the insane acts of one man, whose actions suddenly seemed to say all experimentation was dangerous. His crimes were socially powerful because they stimulated forgotten desires for chaos that had to be repressed again by projecting them onto those who could more easily symbolize disorderly change.

At the same time, Duncan observed that the counterculture was not innocent in this drama, for its adherents liked to pretend that they heralded the dawn of a new age without considering the violence and tragedy that accompanied all change. They desired chaos, but were not willing to embrace the price. They thought they stood for a "new age" that could simply superimpose itself upon the old. No one looked at the passions within them, not even the overtly political New Left, some of whose leaders tried to rationalize the murders as an unfortunate by-product of class warfare in the United States. In the final section of "Santa Cruz Propositions" Duncan returned to his controversy with Levertov. What dismayed, but did not surprise him, was that Levertov thought her anger was an expression of positive change, that she too had a law that she intended to impose on others. "SHE appears," he wrote, "Kālī dancing, whirling her necklace of skulls, / trampling the despoiling armies and the exploiters of natural resources / under her feet. Revolution or Death! / Wine! The wine of men's blood in the vat / of the Woman's anger, whirling, / the crackling—is it of bones? castanets? / tommyguns? fire raging in the ghettos? What / is the wrath of Jehovah to this almost blissful Mother-Righteousness / aroused by the crimes of Presidents?"[62]

Kālī was, as a female figure, the giver of birth and therefore the revealer of death. She gloried in destruction so that room would be made for the new. In assigning this mythical position to Levertov, Duncan made a knowing but cutting reference that implied that her political enthusiasms grew from a female archetype having seized control of her. By refusing to see the mixed sources of her desires, Levertov had lost control and become an agent of passions rather than a shaper of values. It was neither change nor anger that Duncan worried about, but the refusal of those with whose social ideas he felt comfortable to recognize that their ideas sprang from two sources: one was the surface level of political disputation, but the other was the unconscious repressed desire for change at any cost. One level was responsible, the other infantile. He pointed to an image from Levertov's "Life at War" as proof that underneath the politics lay a psychological drive that Levertov did not understand:

> the scheduled breaking open of breasts whose milk
> runs out over the entrails of still-alive babies,
> transformation of witnessing eyes to pulp-fragments,
> implosion of skinned penises into carcass-gulleys.[63]

Duncan argued that the image of the skinned penis was more than a shocking image of wartime brutality. Since *none* of the prominent antiwar poets had directly experienced the effects of combat in Southeast Asia, the particular images they deployed sprang from deep wells of fantasy that were completely independent, Duncan believed, from the desire to end the war. The images, as poetry, were transcriptions of inner obsessions. "When you look at her poetry it tells more to look at that flayed penis and realize that her earlier poems are talking about stripped stalks of grass! She's got one that loves peeling. Suddenly you see a charged, bloody, sexual image that's haunting the whole thing, and the war acts as a magnet, and the poem is not a protest though she thinks she's protesting."[64]

Poets who had devoted their careers to the uncovering of the mythopoetic process also shared this blindness to the forces within them. Duncan noted that anti-Semitic, profascist Ezra Pound as the master for the American avant-garde had set a disastrous model for poets attempting to catapult their work into a quest for utopia. Even if the succeeding generation abhorred his particular politics, they shared the belief that a truth could be forced from poetry. In this sense, the ambitions of the avant-garde made them doubly susceptible to hubris. Both as Americans and as poets they asserted control over forces much grander than any human capacity: "In the fateful nature of his genius I saw the infection as deep, as the fateful nature of my nation itself—festering America—and as the fateful nature of Poetry too."[65] This surrender to the will-to-power meant that poets had not listened to themselves carefully or understood the messages of their work, which revealed the interaction between levels of being that rational thought could not see.

Much like the avant-garde poets, the New Left and the counterculture saw only their righteousness, but not their complicity, and thus Duncan had consistently predicted that the erotic politics of the 1960s was bound to end in disaster rather than a breakthrough to enlightened social consciousness. The aspect of sexuality as dependence upon and power over others, the desire to use one's spirit and body to force others to do one's will, would overcome the idealistic hope that free sexuality could be the basis for mutual relationships. Rock music would become increasingly misogynistic, Duncan observed, and poets would celebrate the hatreds they felt as a form of purifying love.

On this point, he found Levertov's poems fulfilling his expectations that the antiwar movement was drifting to expression of "terrible longing and outrage."[66] Folk singer Judy Collins, Levertov had reported in "Looking for the Devil Poems," had attempted to calm down a rowdy crowd at an antiwar rally by singing a song about the power of love. The crowd greeted Collins's efforts with stony silence, and Levertov found their reaction cheering. "Judy, understand," Levertov concluded, "there comes a time when only anger / is love."[67] Duncan summarized the scene he imagined from reading Levertov's poem:

to put down the age of revolt with *Love, Sweet Love,* she cries

from the center of terror
that is the still eye of the storm in her:

"There comes a time when only Anger is Love."[68]

Duncan later said about this poem, "I didn't say it was wrong for her to have [violence] on her mind, but I said if it's on your mind the poem had better go into that, because that's its real ground—how come these things are here? . . . you can't scold an earthquake and you can't scold a war. . . . It isn't a moral question at all. It is a catastrophe." Humans are caught up in social events as they are caught up in natural disasters. To cope with them one has to be aware whether one's responses are part of the social catastrophe or an attempt to repair the damage. "I early thought, 'Well, how do I feel about good and evil?' And, then I'd realize that I thought you did good as good, not because it was going to win. I made something beautiful in order that something beautiful exist." Good and evil, beauty and ugliness would always exist because they were equally part of creation. A human worked for one or the other, but the dream of vanquishing evil meant only that good became its opposite.[69]

In "Report," Levertov responded,

And meanwhile Robert
sees me as Kali! No,
I am not Kali, I can't sustain for a day
that anger.
'There comes
a time
when only anger
is love'—
I wrote it, but know such love
only in flashes.[70]

She confessed that the daily love of her husband and child did sweep her away from the fearful commitment to do whatever was necessary to bring change. Politics was a responsibility she forced upon herself. In the spring of 1965 she had resigned as poetry editor of the left-wing weekly journal *The Nation* in the hope she could withdraw from all immediate social responsibilities. Explaining her decision in a letter to Kenneth Rexroth, Levertov observed, "I occasionally galvanize myself into (what for me is) political activism but only in somber desperation. It gives me no satisfaction and I can't keep it up for more than a few weeks. It makes me feel I am wasting away. If I stuff envelopes when I might be writing a poem, it is wrong."[71] Escalation of the war in Vietnam and participation in the first teach-ins against administration policy drove her to subordinate poetic work to the antiwar struggle, but the new level of sociality she began to experience confirmed and strengthened her new direction. She argued that the war forced her and everyone else to choose between health-seeking action or disaster-enchanted imagination. She could testify that when the former triumphed, one felt free to sing because "the pulse rhythms / of revolution and poetry / mesh."[72] Instead of politics and poetry existing on two separate, if occasionally interacting, planes, Levertov committed herself to a situation where poetry became the expression of immediate, collective experience, became the potential basis for constructing memory, identity, position.

If Gary Snyder projected a practical side to the counterculture, Duncan faced what he thought were the monsters hidden within it. Not in order to condemn, or, as Levertov thought, to disparage collective action in favor of individual purity, but to plead that the new politics not ignore the application of its theory of repression to its own development. Mythopoetic politics brought the repressed to the surface so that everyone might learn about the complexity of their own motives and avoid replicating on a more banal level, as revolutionary movements had done since 1789, the crimes of the regimes they opposed. The project of enlightenment was false, and would be seen as false by the public at large, if the construct of confronting the repressed were not applied for self-enlightenment. The project would fail because that anger and desire for change for its own sake would lead to crime: to Charles Manson, to the murder Duncan described in "Santa Cruz Propositions," to the Weatherpeople, to the collapse of the Black Power movement in mutual assassinations, and to the theatrical coups of the Symbionese Liberation Army in murdering the reform-minded African-American superintendent of education in Oakland or kidnapping Patricia Hearst. Turning to the more benign if equally "foolish" phenomena of the "love generation," Duncan observed that anxiety had increased as the expected results of a new millennium failed to materialize and the initial impulse of college dropouts to turn their backs on the "pride and power of the world" quickly decayed into institutional structures. Business organizations that sold New Age mystiques developed to assure those who had once embarked on experimentation that there was indeed a Truth. Each claim would fail to deliver the desired freedom from indeterminacy, and the countercultural movement of the 1960s would fragment into a plethora of secessions, each attempting to protect the little piece of the worldly pride and power it had seized in what had originally been a quest for transcendence. Neither violence nor hypocrisy nor confusion was unnatural, Duncan thought. Eros, the creative force, was first the spirit of strife before its transformation into the spirit of choice (which Duncan located as the symbolic meaning of Christ's sacrifice).[73]

The role of the counterculture had been to reintroduce strife into white American society, tottering toward disaster with interminable conflicts with subjugated peoples, so that white Americans could face at last the penalties of lusting after power over others. Called into being by the arrogance of the war, the counterculture and New Left had been unable to focus on the specific issues of foreign policy because their true, but unknown task was to bring to the surface spiritual states that the "conventional" mind of twentieth-century America had repressed. Rebellion had assumed the language of a psychotic episode to break through the limitations authority had imposed on the understanding of human relationships.[74] Responsible and irresponsible at the same time, Eros organized dissatisfaction into resistance, at times rebellion, until institution-building forces mobilized to preserve the changes that had been accomplished. At the point that agents of change had something to protect in the new life they had created (be it social or purely individual), the idealism that had generated the change ossified into dogma and a new hierarchy came into being that would in its turn generate new dissatisfactions, desires for change, and a rebirth of idealism from the ashes of cynicism. Community was a subjective illusion. Its sense of connection lasted only as long as its shared hopes, unless a legacy developed that limited the free play of potentiality and bound people together in a shared environment. The source of real community was not utopian hope, but the limitations created by genuine human interaction, by the oppositions that lovers, mates, children and parents, fellow professionals, or even political combatants proposed to each other.[75]

Duncan argued that poets might have helped the movement confront its own rage that sprang from a liberating irrationality that also consumed those who surrendered to its power. Poets could channel passion into forms that would not destroy the moral standing or the psychological health of the "movement." Instead, they helped direct the nascent political and cultural opposition toward self-immolation by singing of anger and rage, as if any merely human position could ever be "correct." The antiwar poets had surrendered the powers unique to poets to influence society, their ability to reveal the source of evil in "the ever-returning scene of brutality and will."[76]

"Bring up from the dark water," he said in a companion poem, "It will be news from behind the horizon." When we can see nothing, he admonishes, we can do nothing. The repressed force of violence burst forth first in government policy, but "The great house of our humanity / no longer stands," and the "worm of man's misery" coils in the heart.[77] In his epigraph to the "Dante Études," Duncan wrote, "It is in the social definition of freedom / that we most sense / the presence of the Law: / pluralistic, multiphasic, / liberal, radical." A poetics of tragedy was needed to confront "the mixture of smooth and / rough" that exists in the search for brilliancy endemic to civic life.[78] For Duncan, rooted like most of his contemporaries in a vision of domestic utopia, the household provided the most secure model for freedom: "to provide shelter / and to prepare its members / to live well even / in atonality."[79]

Throughout *Ground Work* Duncan returned to the meaning of his forty-year relationship with painter and collagist Jess.

How has your face
aged over these years to keep company with mine?

ever anew as I waken endearing. Each night
in the exchange of touch and speech blessing,

prepared thruout for rest. Is it not
as if He were almost here? as if we were
already at rest?[80]

"He" refers to the Eros of homosexual love that had first spoken to Duncan as an adolescent in Bakersfield and drawn him through his unexplainable desires for physical contact with other men inexplicably but ineluctably into the profession of poetry.[81] When he wrote "I did not have to reach for *your* beauty, / Radiant, it entirely flowd out and thru me,"[82] he spoke of both sexual pleasure and the force of poetry bringing him into a "community" where his self-confessed idiosyncratic behavior and attitudes could be shaped to render service to his fellow men and women. Eros was an angel whose message was more than satiate your pleasure:

Contend with me!
you demand. And I am surrounded by wingd
confusions. *He*
is everywhere, nowhere
now where I am.

In every irreality there is Promise.
        But there
where I am not   *He*   really is.

        In Whose Presence
it is as if I had a new name.[83]

The lines evoke the myth contained in the biblical story of Jacob wrestling with the angel at Bethel, a theme to which Duncan had repeatedly returned. Poetry was a vocation, a "calling," brought into being with the same emotions, perhaps the same physical acts, aroused by love. The result was a changed person, renamed as Jacob was to Israel, "he has wrestled with God." Through an ongoing struggle with love, Duncan feels, "I am falling into an emptiness of Me."[84] The self was actually nothing, which in both Buddhism and Western gnostic traditions meant neither absence nor lack, but a fullness of being expressed as potentiality waiting to be called into form, in this case by the actual relationships to which one makes a commitment:

Let us speak of how these perishing
        things
uphold me   so that

        I fall

                into *Place.*[85]

Emotional commitment and profession brought Duncan to contemplation of human finitude. The acceptance of love through domestic companionship led to confrontation with death, through observation of the changes moving through body and soul of one's companion and contemplation of inevitable loss. Sexuality linked to responsibility forced one to face the limitation of time each man and women had. Choices had to be made of what one wanted to accomplish and leave behind. The legacy was the "Identity," "the Ever-Presence," the character of a poem, which placed each human in a spiritual community that was entered fully only in death. The end of love was to bring into being one's own place

In the Grand Assemblage of Lives,
the Great Assembly-House,
this Identity, this Ever-Presence,   arranged
rank for rank, person for person,   each from its own
sent out from what we were to another place
now in the constant exchange
rendered true.[86]

By revealing the finitude of each life and by preparing one slowly but surely for the dissolution of all that one valued most highly, the companion becomes the embodiment of the cosmos *and* of one's place in history. The infinite variety of experience fits into a structure of meaning where all attain their place by giving their example as a gift to every other soul, even the monsters. To die *in* one's dream was to create a new self imbued with divine power. Death was the "condition of eternal forms," for only at that most inward moment did the apparent fantasies with which one struggled through one's life vanquish all historical accident and the soul entered an apotheosis of the desires that had constituted its development.[87]

Through Eros nature and society are rejoined, but at the cost of exposing the imaginary nature of community in modern life. Community was a psychic factor that promised unity by containing and balancing the "multiple sets of fields turned in different directions" within the individual. If public order was rotten and new identifications were needed to replace the malaise of nationalism, Duncan suggested as an alternative locus of one's loyalties and concerns confrontation with the limits of one's existence. By focusing on the hard concreteness of one's life as an object heading toward death, a person became a subject narrating the possible stories of that life and the plenitude of its connections.[88]

Duncan's application of poetic vision to the drives of the countercultural movement provided a self-critical vision of forces within the 1960s protest movements that would subvert their ability to act with social responsibility and thus effect structural change. He revealed the desire for community to be a pious, religious hope for spiritual union. It had no material basis around which to consolidate except the transitory forms that sprang up to protest specific government policies. Ultimately the only real communities Duncan could visualize were the one-on-one relations between lovers and the practical tasks bringing together those engaged in parallel but limited goals. It was a vision that could provide sustenance only to the most ascetic, but it affirmed the tradition of bohemia as a refuge for those who refused standardized, predictable patterns of individuation offered in middle-class society. Their experiments amused and shocked, but the truths they learned remained within their own tradition. Bohemia was a place where truth had to be individual and each victory could only be personal.

Chapter 14

1. Snyder, "Moving the World a Millionth of an Inch," 10–11, 23, 24.
2. Duncan, "The Truth and Life of Myth," in *Fictive Certainties,* 35–36.
3. "An Interview with Robert Duncan, Conducted by Jack R. Cohn and Thomas J. O'Donnell," *Contemporary Literature* 21 (1980): 520.

4. Duncan, "On Pound and Williams," transcription of monologue on tape, recorded 22 April 1983, *American Poetry* 6 (1988): 31.

5. Duncan, "A Letter," in *Roots and Branches* (New York: Scribner's, 1964), 17; "An Interview with Robert Duncan, Conducted by Jack R. Cohn and Thomas J. O'Donnell," 517.

6. "Interview with Robert Duncan," *Maps* 6 (1974); Duncan to Robin Blaser, 14 January 1958, in Duncan, "Letters on Poetry and Poetics," *Ironwood* 22 (1983): 118.

7. Thus in his 1965 dispute with Robin Blaser over translations of Gérard de Nerval's *Les Chimères,* Duncan opposed the idea of the poem as a "thing in itself" and urged the view of poems as meanings in process. He continued, "What I experience . . . in my extreme persuasion to the reality of the world created by the written and read word, where the meaning in language has its definitions in the community of meanings from which I derive whatever meanings I can, is at time a feeling that there is no real me, only the process of derivations in which I have my existence" (Duncan, "Returning to *Les Chimères* of Gérard de Nerval," *Audit* 4, no. 3 [1967]: 49).

8. Duncan, Introduction, *Bending the Bow,* iv.

9. Duncan's philosophy of the poetic experience as a connection to the numinous also considered the poet to be a voice of cosmic forces which he or she had touched. To the degree that poets had "statements" to make, their egos interfered with or even screened out genuine connection to the transcendent. As a teacher, Duncan disliked what he called "evaluation" and "appreciation." Poets as readers had to learn how to experience other poets' work as objects. Attention to meaning dissolved the ways rhythm, leading sounds, syntax, and rhetoric created an experience for the reader. See Duncan, "Letters on Poetry and Poetics," 95–133.

10. Duncan to Blaser, in "Letters on Poetry and Poetics," 118.

11. Duncan, "The Truth and Life of Myth," 2.

12. Ibid., 5. Duncan also observed that Schrödinger's thesis that "every electronic event in every molecule is unique, not entirely equivalent to that of others" was essential knowledge for poets. Assuming that all cosmic phenomena existed in analogical correspondence, Duncan inferred that the very uniqueness of symbolic creation referred back to orderly processes that could not be equated with any one manifestation. Therefore, "poetry enacts . . . the order of first things" ("Towards an Open Universe," in *Fictive Certainties,* 78, 81).

13. Duncan, "Ideas of the Meaning of Form," in *Fictive Certainties,* 101.

14. Duncan, "The Truth and Life of Myth," 15, 33.

15. Ibid., 30. Compare Roland Barthes's conception of mythology as contempo-

rary social practice that has been naturalized. Duncan sees myth as those characteristics of human behavior, the expressions of which are historically determined, but the content derives from basic biological drives. See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

16. Duncan, "The Truth and Life of Myth," 41; Robert Duncan, "Preface (1972)," *Caesar's Gate, Poems 1949–50* (San Francisco: Sand Dollar, 1972, first published 1955), xii.

17. Duncan, "The Truth and Life of Myth," 2, 4; Duncan, "The Self in Postmodern Poetry," in *Fictive Certainties,* 230–231. In the latter essay Duncan argued that the constant search for narrative and image pattern made Narcissus the model for the self, but only if one understood that Narcissus was not admiring his reflection but trying to decode it for the clues it revealed to the mystery of his being (p. 223).

18. Duncan, "The Truth and Life of Myth," 7.

19. Ibid., 10, 13. In an interview, Duncan observed, "Where I don't join Eastern philosophy at all, is that I think that everything we see is posited in the material world. So that an archetype doesn't get to be very arche. Instead of looking at an archetype, we'd better look at a tree or a particular individual" ("Interview: Robert Duncan," in Ekbert Faas, *Towards a New American Poetics,* 72).

20. Quotations from *Robert Duncan: Scales of the Marvelous,* ed. Robert J. Bertholf and Ian W. Reid (New York: New Directions, 1979), 109.

21. Duncan, "The Truth and Life of Myth," 17.

22. Mitchell Goodman, a leader of the Mobilization Committee for the march, was married to Duncan's close friend Denise Levertov. Norman Mailer published an extensive account of the march in *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, the Novel as History* (New York: New American Library, 1968).

23. Duncan, Introduction, *Bending the Bow,* ii.

24. Carl André Bernstein and Michael Hatlen, "Interview with Robert Duncan," *Sagetreib* 4 (Fall and Winter 1985): 117–118, 120.

25. Duncan, Introduction, *Bending the Bow,* ii, iii.

26. See Duncan, "The Multiversity," in *Bending the Bow,* 70.

27. Ibid., 71.

28. In August 1944 Duncan published in Dwight MacDonald's journal *Politics* the article "The Homosexual in Society," in which Duncan argued that the distinctions between heterosexuals and homosexuals were superficial. He refused to see homosexuals as either superior or inferior. The difference was important, but only as proof that the body taught homosexuals a truth different than cultural conditioning. However important social construction was for surface behavior, the persistence of homosexuality demonstrated that there did exist layers of experience that defied social

control. After the rise of gay liberation, Duncan continued to question whether the idea of a norm for gay subculture was not antithetical with the foundations of gay experience.

29. Robert Duncan in class, 11 November 1977, audio tape-recording, tape II, side 1, Archive for New Poetry, University of California, San Diego.

30. The two met through correspondence in 1954 when both were contributors to Cid Corman's journal *Origin*. They found their poetry mutually exhilarating and they stayed in close contact over the next fifteen years because each viewed the other as a virtually ideal reader. In 1959 Levertov wrote in her statement as part of Donald A. Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry* that Duncan was one of the two chief poets among her contemporaries (the other was Robert Creeley). In 1973, after their well-publicized break, she affirmed the importance of Duncan's work as a model for her own and observed that his *Passages* series contained some of the best poems she had read about the chaos emanating from social life. See "A Testament," in *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960*, ed. Donald A. Allen (New York: Grove, 1960), 411–412, and "A Testament and a Postscript, 1959–1973," introduction to Levertov's selected essays, *The Poet in the World* (New York: New Directions, 1973), 5.

31. *Robert Duncan: Scales of the Marvelous*, 110. The text of "Advent 1966" runs:

> Because in Vietnam the vision of a Burning Babe
> is multiplied, multiplied,
>   the flesh on fire
> not Christ's, as Southwell saw it, prefiguring
> the Passion upon the Eve of Christmas,
>
> but wholly human and repeated, repeated,
> infant after infant, their names forgotten,
> their sex unknown in the ashes,
> set alight, flaming but not vanishing,
> not vanishing as his vision but lingering,
>
> cinders upon the earth or living on
> moaning and stinking in hospitals three abed;
>
> because of this my strong sight,
> my clear caressive sight, my poet's sight I was given
> that it might stir me to song,
> is blurred.
>   There is a cataract filming over
> my inner eyes. Or else a monstrous insect
> has entered my head, and looks out
> from my sockets with multiple vision,

> seeing not the unique Holy Infant
> burning sublimely, an imagination of redemption,
> furnace in which souls are wrought into new life,
> but, as off a beltline, more, more senseless figures aflame.
>
> And this insect (who is not there—
> it is my own eyes do my seeing, the insect
> is not there, what I see is there)
> will not permit me to look elsewhere,
>
> or if I look, to see except dulled and unfocused
> the delicate, firm, whole flesh of the still unburned.
> (Levertov, *Poems 1968–1972* [New York: New Directions, 1987], 124)

32. Levertov, "An Interim," in *Poems 1968–1972,* 20, 26.

33. Levertov, "A Testament and a Postscript, 1959–1973," introduction to *The Poet in the World,* 5–6.

34. Levertov, "The Untaught Teacher," in *The Poet in the World,* 195–196.

35. See Levertov, *The Poet in the World,* 141, 195, on the voluntary nature of revolutionary struggle.

36. Duncan, "The Truth and Life of Myth," 19.

37. Duncan, "Dante Études: The Household," in *Ground Work: Before the War* (New York: New Directions, 1984), 110–111.

38. "Part of the aftereffect of both the German/Hitlerian thing and my own family preaching 'the will to power' to us when we were little made me feel whenever anyone mentioned power that I practically wanted to wind down so that you couldn't even run a tinker-toy with it. I was not interested in some center that would form, make a dynamo . . . I wanted no rhetoric but rather a launching out" (Duncan, "On Pound and Williams," 34).

39. Duncan, "Then Many a One Sang," in *Ground Work: Before the War,* 129.

40. Levertov, "Entr'acte," in *Poems 1968–1972,* 149.

41. Levertov, "Looking for the Devil Poems," in *Poems 1968–1972,* 165.

42. Levertov, "Glimpses of Vietnamese Life," in *The Poet in the World,* 145.

43. Levertov's Vietnam War poetry has been the subject of much critical debate. On the one hand, see William Aiken, "Denise Levertov, Robert Duncan, and Allen Ginsberg: Modes of the Self in Projective Poetry," *Modern Poetry Studies* 10 (1981): 200–245; Charles Altieri, *Enlarging the Temple: New Directions in American Poetry During the 1960s* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1979); Paul Breslin, *From Modern to Contemporary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); James F. Mersmann, *Out of the Vietnam Vortex: A Study of Poets and Poetry Against the War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1974); and Peter Middleton, *Revelation and*

Revolution in the Poetry of Denise Levertov (London: Binnacle Press, 1981). These critics have prepared particularly strong arguments that Levertov failed to bridge the gap between imagination and experience in her antiwar poetry, which became increasingly exhortatory as the war progressed. On the other hand, see Kerry Driscoll, "A Sense of Unremitting Emergency: Politics in the Early Work of Denise Levertov," *Centennial Review* 30 (1986): 292–303; Sandra M. Gilbert, "Revolutionary Love: Denise Levertov and the Poetics of Politics," *Parnassus: Poetry in Review* 12 (1985): 335–351; Paul A. Lacey, *The Inner War: Forms and Themes in Recent American Poetry* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972); and Lorrie Smith, "Songs of Experience: Denise Levertov's Political Poetry," *Contemporary Literature* 27 (1986): 213–232. These critics have made equally strong arguments that Levertov's antiwar poetry reflects an imagination focused on the problem of the war from the particular perspective of a woman. Excluded from the exercise of power or the processes of political deliberation, Levertov's poetic imagination took her into the hell of her own imagination to emerge from a sentimentalized "womanly love" to the necessity of power if the vision of love and joy peculiar to women is to find realization (Gilbert, p. 349).

44. Levertov wrote approvingly of Snyder's politics as a form of connection. See "Only Connect," in *Poems 1968–1972,* 209.

45. See Duncan, "The Multiversity," 72.

46. Duncan, "The Fire: *Passages* 13," in *Bending the Bow,* 42, 43.

47. Duncan, "Earth's Winter Song," in *Bending the Bow,* 93.

48. Ibid., 93, 94.

49. "At Easter, my sister, who was a year younger than I, and I were given a duckling and a little baby rabbit each. The ducklings we petted to death ourselves. There is a little lesson in the spirit of romance, isn't it? I mean, when I first started to have sexual affairs I think I petted a number of people to death (Virginia Wallace-Whitaker, "Robert Duncan on 'My Mother Would Be a Falconress,'" transcription of extemporaneous lecture Duncan delivered at the University of Maine in March 1983, *Sagetrieb* 4 [Fall and Winter 1985]: 199).

50. Duncan, "A Lammas Tiding," in *Bending the Bow,* 51.

51. "An Interview with Robert Duncan, Conducted by Jack R. Cohn and Thomas J. O'Donnell," 525.

52. Duncan to Jonathan Williams, 11 December 1971, correspondence files, Jonathan Williams papers, Poetry/Rare Books Collection, University Libraries, State University of New York, Buffalo.

53. The primary title signifies work in the ground of being, that is in the myths that emerge through the exploration of language. Ground work was the fundamental examination of the types of connections between people caught in the flux of human

desire and institutional mystiques. Duncan explained the second half of the title when he told one interviewer that those who have gained "the ability to respond" stand "before the war," the preposition having a spatial rather than temporal sense (Andrew Schelling, "Of Maps, Castelli, Warplanes, & Divers Other Things That Come 'Before the War,'" *Jimmy & Lucy's House of "K"* 3 [1985]: 44). The second volume, *Ground Work: Into the Dark,* appeared in 1988, literally days before Duncan's death.

54. Duncan, "Structure of Rime XXVII," in *Ground Work: Before the War,* 55.

55. Duncan, from "Santa Cruz Propositions," in *Ground Work: Before the War,* 36–37, 38.

56. Duncan, "In Truth Doth She Breathe Out Posionous Fumes," in *Ground Work: Before the War,* 128.

57. Duncan's use of gender in relation to Eros generally follows the lines he set in "The Household" (*Ground Work: Before the War,* 110):

> Let us call each voice, his or hers,
> "He" that leads in the rehearsal,
> and "She", the Matrix or Praxis
> the potentiality of Music

Eros in male form appears to have to do with design and innovation, while in female form with execution and tradition.

58. Duncan, "Then Many a One Sang," in *Ground Work: Before the War,* 129.

59. Duncan, "Santa Cruz Propositions," 39.

60. Duncan, "The Missionaries," in *Ground Work: Before the War,* 135.

61. Duncan, "Santa Cruz Propositions," 40–41.

62. Ibid., 45.

63. Levertov, "Life at War," in *Poems 1968–1972,* 122.

64. Duncan interviewed by James F. Mersmann, 9 May 1969, quoted in Mersmann, *Out of the Vietnam Vortex: A Study of Poets and Poetry Against the War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1974), 94.

65. Duncan, "Preface (1972)," *Caesar's Gate,* xiii.

66. Ibid., xxxii.

67. Levertov, "Looking for the Devil Poems," in *Poems 1968–1972,* 165.

68. Duncan, "Santa Cruz Propositions," 46.

69. Bernstein and Hatlen, "Interview with Robert Duncan," 131, 132–133, 134.

70. Levertov, "Report," in *Poems 1968–1972,* 188.

71. Levertov to Kenneth Rexroth, 29 May 1965, correspondence files, Rexroth papers, DSC.

72. Levertov, "Report," 190.

73. Eros was also the source of poetry. In his "A Poem Beginning with a Line by

Pindar," Duncan recounted the fable of Eros and Psyche as a mythic enchantment that redefined Eros as a desire to express the ineffable in words. By completing the labors imposed on her by Venus, Psyche finally was reunited with Eros, an allegory for the role of poetry in giving form to the diffuse components of the self. In Duncan, *The Opening of the Field* (New York: New Directions, 1960), 62–69.

74. Duncan, "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife," 112–113, 135–138.

75. Duncan, "The Truth and Life of Myth," 41–44.

76. Ibid., 32.

77. Duncan, "Bring It Up From the Dark," in *Ground Work: Before the War*, 53.

78. Duncan, "Dante Études," in *Ground Work: Before the War*, 94.

79. Duncan, "The Household," in *Ground Work: Before the War*, 110. At the same time, Duncan did not try to obscure that the choice of a partner and the responsibilities of establishing a household (or a profession) involved the repression of possibilities, which continued to express themselves through desires over which he had no control. "I have many, many rueful reflections upon domestication as repression, as loss of—denial of—" he confessed in one interview (Steve Abbot and Aaron Shurin, "Interview/Workshop with Robert Duncan," *Soup* no. 1 [1980]: 30). The household and the community coexist with the fantasies of other selves and the possibility of leaving despite the pain it might cause, for without the option of annihilating one's allegiances, the individual choice upon which Duncan's view of social relations rests disappears.

80. Duncan, "Circulations of the Song," in *Ground Work: Before the War*, 167.

81. See Ekbert Faas, *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet as Homosexual in Society* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1983), 31–44, for an account of Duncan's linked self-discovery as poet and as homosexual.

82. Duncan, "Circulations of the Song," 173.

83. Ibid., 171.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid., 172.

86. Ibid., 175.

87. Duncan, "The Truth and Life of Myth," 58.

88. See Duncan, "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife," 112–113; "Self and Postmodern Poetry," in *Fictive Certainties*.