Part II

Mythopoesis and Self-Narration

6 The Beat Phenomenon

Masculine Paths of Maturation

Among the thousands of books published in 1957, two works, Allen Ginsberg's long poem "Howl" and Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, captured public attention as definitive revelations of what seemed to many a new, unsettling form of youth rebellion. Neither work is profound, but the simple, straightforward language that Kerouac and Ginsberg used gave readers a conceptual framework for discussing the social position and obligations of young men in the 1950s. Part of *On the Road*'s power came from its providing a word, *beat*, to label this youth revolt. It was a term that anyone could use because it lacked definition. "Beat" conjured images, but particular features and emotional connotations each person supplied according to his or her prejudices. John Clellon Holmes, a friend of Kerouac's and Ginsberg's from their student days together at Columbia, had used the phrase "the beat generation" in his novel *Go*, published in 1952. Holmes's meaning was simple enough: the post–World War II generation, young men and women born in the 1920s, had grown up listening and dancing to jazz; they had a different sense of rhythm, movement, and language than the preceding postwar generation, the so-called "lost generation" of the 1920s, shaped in the dying days of a classical, genteel culture. Yet both postwar experiences were linked by "an ability to believe in anything . . . and the craving for excess which it inspired." In an essay published for the *New York Times*, Holmes wrote that

the word *beat* "implies the feeling of having been used, of being raw." It was the attitude of a man "pushed up against the wall of [himself]." Openness to experience, even curiosity, distinguished the new generation, not cynicism.[1]

Kerouac's sense of "beat" maintained the vital connection to jazz, but he invested the word with a diffuse web of connotations drawn from its glyphic extensions. It variously suggested beaten down, beatific, moving to the beat of the universe, moving to the beat of one's heart. One of the more sustained of Kerouac's definitions of "beat" in *On the Road* occurs when a group of women confront Dean Moriarty, the main character, over the shabby way he has treated his abandoned wife and children:

> Where once Dean would have talked his way out, he now fell silent himself but standing in front of everybody, ragged and broken and idiotic, right under the lightbulbs, his bony mad face covered with sweat and throbbing veins, saying, "Yes, yes, yes," as though tremendous revelations were pouring into him all the time now, and I am convinced they were, and the others suspected as much and were frightened. He was BEAT—the root, the soul of Beatific.

The women are awed and almost silenced by the spiritual power emanating from Moriarty. His primal knowledge underlies their sexual attraction to him, but they cannot possess and domesticate the natural force of maleness. The narrator intuitively understands his friend's response, but it is the physical, seemingly biological state of being young males, not any words they might have shared, that binds them: "What was he knowing? He tried in all his power to tell me what he was knowing, and they envied that about me, my position at his side, defending him and drinking him in as they once tried to do."[2] Moriarty's power, what makes him "beat," is his refusal to accept any male role outside phallic sexuality. He is a trickster offering ineffable pleasures but at the price of exposing the arbitrary character of deeply social conventions. His animal joy attracts women for its power to propel them momentarily out of daily worries into a state in which body and spirit are reunited.[3]

But he refuses all responsibility for the families that result, ultimately causing only misery for women drawn to him. Moriarty loves his three wives and four children, but he cannot provide for them without destroying his inner divinity.

Moriarty's charms endanger men as well. Moriarty's example seems to say that any form of ambition or commitment blocks a full open experience of the world. Choice is a form of self-limitation. To remain free, a man is always "on the go," ready to accept whatever new experience may come his way. The narrator of *On the Road* is a would-be novelist whose talents have been blocked by the interiorization of his relation to the world. Moriarty shakes the narrator out of himself by literally thrusting him into a fast-moving automobile ripping across the continent. Experience becomes a sequence of lightning-fast encounters, each with its own poignant lesson, but nothing can hold the attention for too long or it risks evolving into a commitment. The centrality of the automobile, of being "on the road," is the most direct and effective symbol in the novel of freedom as a state of pure potentiality.

Kerouac's use of the automobile occurred at a time when psychologists and psychoanalysts had developed a model for the stages of personal development that particularly identified the motor vehicle with male adolescence. Robert Lindner, in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1944), *Prescription for Rebellion* (1952), and *Must You Conform?* (1956), warned that the automobile augmented the power of young men to intrude into territories historically under the control of others. This would augment the natural rebelliousness of males in the period of their development when they first began to define their own powers but still remained subservient to the authority of the preceding generation. Lindner also warned, however, that aggressive youth rebellion would become a more pervasive problem in American society, for the means that young people had to express their disaffection had expanded to a greater extent than the ability of society to control or channel youthful passions.[4]

Erik Erikson also spoke of cars facilitating "intrusion into space by vigorous locomotion," which became a way of acting out a desire to explore the

unknown. Fixation on the automobile was part of a pattern of behavior in which young men in preparation to become autonomous adults separated psychologically from parental authority. Mobility, loud talking, loud music with a driving beat, public brawling and drinking, and acting out fantasies of unlimitable, therefore nonresponsible, sexual intrusion into female bodies were the distinguishing characteristics of an aggressive personality stage, Erikson argued. This was a preparatory stage in life in which men tested the limits of their interests and abilities prior to focusing on those relationships that gave them the most satisfaction.

Erikson's vision of psychosexual development was based on a model that assumed that the establishment of domestic relations was the fundamental and necessary conclusion. Erikson entertained not even the slightest doubt that the need to become mothers and therefore the need to choose a mate guided female intellectual and emotional development. Male development was likewise measured by an ideal of achieving a place in the world where a man could provide for a family. At a certain time in life, role experimentation was essential to developing a sense of self-certainty and autonomy, the confidence that one's path emerged from voluntary and informed decisions. To prolong the experimental phase, as Moriarty had, past adolescence into adulthood prevented the formation of a mature identity and locked men into futile, aggressive relations with the world in a personality style that lacked intimacy, defined as the ability to form companionate marriages; generativity, defined as the ability to reproduce society through work others value; and integrity, defined as the ability to maintain a core set of values and goals in a fluctuating world.[5]

In outlining the pathological aspects of a prolonged phallic relationship to the world, Erikson specifically criticized the beat poets as a movement that perversely refused the growth associated with career or long-term emotional ties.[6] The reality was more complicated, as most artists and poets associated with the beats were committed to their professions and many led relatively normal married lives. The beats played a symbolic role in public discussions

in the 1950s that was not entirely consonant with the actualities of their lives. Nor was *On the Road* a celebration of irresponsibility. The novel ends with the narrator choosing career over youthful experimentation. Moriarty acted as guide during a stage when the narrator's blocked identity formation prevented him from realizing his ambitions as a novelist. Intensifying every moment with alcohol, drugs, sex, and sheer physical terror as he accompanies Moriarty on his cross-country escapades allows the narrator to establish a sense of presence in the world. As a novelist, his task is to fix experience, not to live perpetually in a flow of immediacy. He must in the end turn away from his unreformable friend and return to the literary world with a good yarn to tell or fail in his own quest for personal excellence. The concluding image of the novel is a sad vision of Moriarty isolated and freezing on a wintry New York street as the narrator speeds away in a Cadillac limousine to attend a concert with old friends who, like himself, have found a place for themselves in the world.[7]

To the degree that *On the Road* described a general social condition that went beyond the specific situation of Kerouac and his small group of friends, the novel addressed a crisis of maturation facing young men in post–World War II America. The choice that many men made when entering college on the GI Bill to give priority to personal enrichment rather than career development involved a partial postponement of assuming a responsible position within society. As we recounted in chapter 3, many men felt that military service had derailed their lives. A period of experimentation made up for time lost, while allowing men to assert an absolute right to make their own decisions against a society that had subjected them to involuntary servitude. The high percentage of marriages and the large number of children born while GI Bill students were still in college suggests that they did not intend to remain in a prolonged adolescence.[8] The aftermath of military service and the general disruption of world war upon the lives of both men and women led to a superimposition of life stages. Men began making long-term commitments while they were still experimenting with their life goals. The desire to catch

up collided with the desire not to lose any more time, with each stage in the process of maturation being intensified and problematized simultaneously. Anxiety stemmed from the possibility that pursuing personal preferences might indeed prove foolish, and men would have to accommodate to a structured, hierarchical world without having achieved either adequate skills or a sense of personal autonomy.

One of the ways in which Kerouac's novel spoke to these crises of reintegration into society was to reimagine masculinity through an inversion of gender role associations. In Kerouac, male physicality contrasts with a female-defined social order. The irrational connotations of nature, normally associated with female being, are transferred to the male side, but only to the degree that a man has not succumbed to responsibilities. The spiritual salvation of the young man lies in his ability to salvage as much as he dare of his raw natural force and postpone the process of maturation until it can be achieved on the basis of personal experience, that is, a broad if superficial knowledge of the world.

Ginsberg's "Howl" also projected a sense of maleness as an essentially sexualized interaction with the world. Neal Cassady, the mutual friend of Kerouac and Ginsberg who provided the inspiration for Dean Moriarty, also appears in "Howl" as a man

> who copulated ecstatic and insatiate with a bottle of beer a sweetheart a
> package of cigarettes a candle and fell off the bed, and continued along
> the floor and down the hall and ended fainting on the wall with a vision
> of ultimate cunt and come eluding the last gyzym of consciousness,
> who sweetened the snatches of a million girls trembling in the sunset, and
> were red eyed in the morning but prepared to sweeten the snatch of the
> sunrise, flashing buttocks under barns and naked in the lake,
> who went out whoring through Colorado in myriad stolen night-cars,
> N.C., secret hero of these poems, cocksman and Adonis of Denver.

As in *On the Road,* cars become vehicles for conflating phallic and spiritual states when Ginsberg describes Cassady as one

> who drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out if I had a vision or
> you had a vision or he had a vision to find out Eternity[9]

In Ginsberg's case, the incorporation of femininity into male identity was part of his growing self-assertion as a gay man. "Howl" was, he claimed, his coming out of the closet. Even though his friends knew he was gay, the poem was "a public statement of feelings and emotions and attitudes that I would not have wanted my father or my family to see." By struggling against his hesitation to release the poem to the public, he gained the strength to reject normative descriptions of his sexual desires as perverse and proclaimed them instead as a gift from heaven.[10] The reason for the beat generation having come into existence, Ginsberg wrote in 1964, was to create a "social place for the soul to exist manifested in *this* world." The soul was not merely "mental consciousness," or ideas, but "feeling bodily consciousness," emotions and physical experiences. Art was the expression of the soul, the unity of body and emotions in intercourse with the world. Secretions, semen and words, were holy because they created an orgasmic community linking spiritualized bodies. The avant-garde was "the only social-public manifestation" forcing into the public "tender shoots of private sensibility, private understanding, rapport, giggles, delicacies."[11] As we shall see, the psychological reunification of body and soul into a single conscious entity was a central theme in the work of this generation and became an important factor in its interaction with the rest of society. The end of dualism was the battleground upon which "eros" contested against "repression."

Arrested for marijuana possession and car theft in 1948, Ginsberg escaped criminal proceedings by agreeing to undergo therapy at Columbia-Presbyterian Psychiatric Institute in Manhattan. It was a particularly painful

punishment because his mother had been committed to a state psychiatric hospital ten years earlier for delusional fantasies. Only months before his arrest Ginsberg had signed papers authorizing doctors to perform a lobotomy on his mother. Ginsberg spent eight months there, biding his time until he could return to his studies at Columbia University. During his stay, he met and became close friends with Carl Solomon, the other hero of "Howl." Solomon, like Ginsberg, came from a left-wing Jewish family. Like Ginsberg, he merged literary with political radicalism, but he had led a more active, adventurous life and was better read in French aesthetic theory. The two spent their free time together talking about literature, the bohemian tradition, Marxism, and the role of Jews in American culture.[12] Unlike Ginsberg, Solomon had entered the hospital without direct coercion and asked that doctors give him a frontal lobotomy, which he thought would be a painless form of suicide. Ginsberg first met Solomon as he awoke from an insulin-induced coma. The brutal shock therapy Solomon received as part of his "cure" provided key images for "Howl." The poem unfolds around Ginsberg's horror that "the best minds" of his generation were "destroyed by madness" because their physical and emotional natures conflicted with social demands. Through their suffering and eventual redemption by accepting the wisdom of their bodies, gay men emerge in Ginsberg's poem as universal subjects representing all poets—indeed, all who sought liberation from externally generated values. To achieve sanity, Ginsberg had to confront the social construction of sexuality with a self that had a biologically revealed destiny.

In the second section of the poem, Ginsberg associated American society with Moloch, the false god whose worship required the sacrifice by fire of the children of its believers. Social conformity was idolatry, and adherence to inner desires, however superficially anarchic, expressed a devotion to the truly divine, which communicated most directly through its demands upon the body. Sexual relationship was the most fundamental component of being-in-the-world. The phallic became the truest representation of nature, and the relationship of men with each other the most perfect and beautiful manifesta-

tion of community. Intrusion upon the world could also be a form of liberation, not only for the intruders, but for those whose lives were disrupted.

As is well known, Kerouac and Ginsberg emerged from a small circle of young men with literary aspirations, most of whom were students at Columbia University in the mid- to late 1940s. Neal Cassady was an outsider to the group. Born in Denver, Cassady had no college education, but was a veteran of reformatories, prison, and itinerant jobs on the railroad. He fatefully appeared in New York in 1946 with his seventeen-year-old wife and asked Kerouac to teach him how to be a novelist. He came east to learn writing, but he lacked discipline to accomplish this goal. Instead he carried Kerouac and Ginsberg west to Colorado and then to California, in journeys that helped them define their poetic voices.

In a story that both Kerouac and Ginsberg told about him, the two New Yorkers paid a visit to Cassady's room shortly after first meeting him. Cassady answered the door completely naked, having been in bed making love to his wife. The image overwhelmed them. Kerouac told his other friends that he had found for the first time in his life a true "Nietzschean hero." Cassady was absolutely comfortable with his body; he seemed unaware of the duality between spirit and flesh that plagued Western civilization. Yet his craving for friendship and the chance to talk was more important than satisfying his sexual needs. At this moment both Kerouac and Ginsberg believed that Cassady existed on a plane of enlightenment denied most men.[13]

While Cassady could not derive meaning from his flow of experience without falling out of his state of natural being, the two writers could. Life in immediacy could be imitated in books through a flood of images tumbling one after another, with no space for readers to rest and reconsider. Since the writer guided and selected this flood, the structure still involved interpretation, but the goal was to re-create an experience of forward motion, unsettling in its lack of established perspectives, but liberating in its projection of a subjectivity that lived independently and perhaps even unaware of a priori interpretative frameworks.

Ginsberg and Kerouac failed to report how Cassady's young wife felt about this interruption. The misogyny everpresent in their writings and lives shaped discussion of the beats in the mass media.[14] In a parody of Freud's famous question about women, Paul O'Neil asked in a *Life* magazine report on the beat poets, "What is it that beats want?" The form of the question indicates how the beats, whose ethos O'Neil inaccurately presented as an exclusively male phenomenon, assumed in their public face stereotypical values associated with femininity: the beats were irrational and emotional, they refused to follow the "logic" of situations, they were concerned about their appearance, they smelled, they compensated for prolonged immaturity by substituting group for individual identity. Their apparent disdain for work and lack of concern for material success appeared to be a rejection of the traditional male role of provider. O'Neil's portrait aligned the beats with the purportedly seductive, dangerously libidinal pole of femininity that challenged the stability of domestic relations.[15]

The negative stereotype presented in the media reinforced normative masculine behavior in American society by creating an Other, a feminine male self, against which the true male could be defined by his ability to overcome rebellious desires and accept the necessity of responsibility. The effects of wartime disruption on the lives of young people might have subsided and faded as a generation of veterans settled into adult positions. The cold war and the perpetuation of a large standing army based on the draft made military duty a typical feature of young male life for over two decades. In 1957 the editors of *Look* magazine observed that the fact that three-fourths of men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-seven served in the military forces might have adverse consequences for civilian life. Military duty seemed, in the eyes of the writers, to encourage either excessive conformity or excessive rebelliousness. The repercussions of arrogant inflexibility and irresponsibility boded ill for the long-term stability of American institutions. The writers suggested that women alone had the power to counter this negative development, for female distribution of sexual favors shaped how most men behaved.

The magazine's solution seemed to favor men who finished their military duty determined never again to be vulnerable to external authority. The writers urged women to give preference in selecting their mates to men that had unconventional and daring attitudes because in the long run they would be more exciting partners *and* better providers.[16]

One could escape service altogether, as both Kerouac and Ginsberg did during World War II, by claiming psychological disability. A more common alternative to service during the cold war was to prolong education and take a student deferment. The creation of a permanent standing army itself increased pressure upon politicians to expand educational opportunities. Some men volunteered for military service in order to qualify for GI benefits and the possibility of subsidy for training, while others decided only after completing their duty that they should go to college. Veterans groups made access to education one of their top political priorities. Between 1947 and 1962 the percentage of the population between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two enrolled in college increased from 28.7 to 44 percent, with higher figures in California, which had the most extensive community college system in the nation. Sixty-two percent of graduating high school students entered college in 1962, while a public opinion poll found that 69 percent of parents in 1959 planned on their children going to college. Such expectations led to rapid expansion of college facilities, largely paid for by state and federal funds. Student enrollment increased from 2.4 million in 1949 to 3.6 million in 1960, and then nearly doubled in the next decade as enrollment rose to 7.1 million in 1969.[17]

The extension and spread of college life was another factor leading young men and women to defer full independence to a later stage in life. By simultaneously expanding college education and military service, American society made subjection to external discipline and deferral of autonomy the most commonly experienced preconditions for eventual participation in the benefits of the "American century." At the same time, the average age for first marriages dropped throughout the 1950s. Young people may have

sought in domesticity an autonomous realm where they could create their own lives independent of the often arbitrary institutions engulfing their youth.

Public images about the beats vicariously satisfied needs for rebellion, while reinforcing the correctness of responsible behavior. Evidence that psychological need for release and reinforcement was sizable may exist in the range of deviant behaviors occupying the mass media in the 1950s. In addition to the beats, the media virtually exploded with images focusing on rebellion. Movies such as Richard Brooks's *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) and Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) popularized the themes of juvenile delinquency and motorcycle gangs. In 1955 rhythm and blues erupted from a narrow segment of the music market to become the most popular type of music, as Elvis Presley, Little Richard, and Chuck Berry gained a mass audience by flouting parental authority and sexual conventions.[18] The growing attention given to the beats was part of a wider fascination with youth transgression. The focus on youth's discontents went beyond questions of subordinate rebellion against social constrictions, a perennial aspect of popular culture, to suggest that a period-specific crisis of maturation had become a new organizing theme for cultural expression, both high and low.

Douglas MacAgy had not dreamed that artists would become objects of mass consumption, but in 1943 he had predicted the growing importance of elite art for postwar America. As summarized in chapter 3, MacAgy argued that the arts provided an arena for subjective autonomy within a society increasingly organized around the needs of rational, efficient planning. The public would spontaneously turn to the arts to claim for itself the only realm where imagination ruled unhindered by laws of necessity, be they scientific or theological. MacAgy expounded the positive functions of irrationality, but he had forgotten that irrationality was associated with both juvenile and feminine being.[19] The public would not absorb the benefits he described without trepidation, for who could say with certainty where the boundaries lay between the positive and negative aspects of freedom—that is to say, between

adolescence and adulthood, between male and female? The benefits of personal freedom were counterbalanced by potential disintegration of the categories that traditionally defined identity and the appropriate roles for given stages of life.

The polarization between "beats" and "straights" that occurred in public discussion ritually enacted interior conflicts over the limits of freedom. The public debate was artificial as it exteriorized complex personal choices into Manichaean imagery that negated essential questions of context. The combination of discipline with experimentation typical of avant-garde practice demonstrated that it was indeed possible to make freedom and structure, pleasure and responsibility, ambition and ideals, experience and traditions compatible. Possibility, however, never guaranteed certainty. The argument that took shape around the images of the beats favored apocalyptic fantasies: the beats' vision of an inner utopia that resolved all conflicts into grist for personal growth (maturation as a self-determined process) versus a nightmare vision of unrooted individuals succumbing to libertinism (engulfment in perpetual immaturity). This spurious opposition promoted the use of reductive symbols by both sides to generate a polemic endlessly oscillating between enthusiast and moralist faces.

The artificiality of the polemic, even in its own time, is suggested by a national study of attitudes toward conformity conducted in 1953. Nearly 80 percent of those surveyed for this inquiry described themselves as "conventional" in behavior and attitude, but those respondents nonetheless claimed to value unconventionality and difference as important for the future of the country. Study participants ranked academics, writers, and artists higher than business leaders or politicians for social prestige because of the assumed propensity of intellectuals to question things most people took for granted. The sample presumed that leaders of society, be they political, economic, or cultural, were risk-takers and were motivated by a strongly felt desire to demonstrate personal superiority. The subjects of this study valued traditional relationships, but their respect for innovation may be evidence that they wanted

to experience those relationships as voluntary rather than as obligatory. They wanted to retain known boundaries between established social categories such as male and female, but augment the content of each so they might be less one-dimensional.[20]

If this study's results were a valid indicator of general attitudes at the time, the mass relationship to new phenomena like the avant-garde appears not to have been a question of totalistic absorption or rejection. Added to the "marketplace of ideas" was a "marketplace of behaviors" from which the public picked and chose according to individual interests and situations. The drama of the beatnik presented in magazines, motion pictures, and on television brought attention to a new repertory of life-styles, with varying promises of release from unwanted responsibilities. The polemic was an imitation of a debate because the public did not need to make fundamental choices. The appeal that the beats made to reduce mind-body dualism might mean only that one could learn from experience and ought to trust one's desires. The message of "free love" might convey simply that affection rather than obedience should be the basis of marriages, or that a trial period of living together—an aspect of "beat" life inevitably reported in the mass media—might be a reasonable test of compatibility before making a permanent commitment. The beats helped negotiate conflicting demands of subjective experience and institutional rationality by projecting these conflicts onto an imaginary vision of themselves. This exemplary role developed as artists and poets struggled with their personal and professional problems. "Howl" and *On the Road* were two exercises, among many, in the reconstruction of male identity into a form that allowed the poet to have a constructive sense of self in pursuit of excellence while undergoing prolonged apprenticeship, a condition increasingly typical of men's experiences in the postwar period, but particularly exaggerated for those in the creative arts.

To the degree that poets and artists achieved attention, they became generalized symbols in which fragments came to stand for larger phenomena.

"Howl" and *On the Road* defined the beat vision, which even limited to the small group of friends associated with Kerouac and Ginsberg, was more complex and ambiguous (and often far less optimistic, as in the case of William Burroughs's paranoid fantasy *Naked Lunch*) than the movement's two best-known products. The beats, marked by extreme misogyny and a heavy-handed didacticism, overshadowed but did not eliminate the many competing visions within their generation of artists and poets. Most curiously, a generation of young artists symbolized the appeal and the dangers of autonomous identity for their fellow citizens. The relation of the postwar avant-garde to American society is one of intersecting layers of surfaces and depths, in which symbolic functions often obscure a more complex and varied set of experiences. We will need to bracket and suspend stereotypes from those years to look more closely at the manifestations of the avant-garde. Yet for the purposes of our analysis, the meanings captured in stereotypic thought remain a touchstone, for they return to the roles of the avant-garde in the social imagination of the time. Our goal ultimately will be to gain understanding of the peculiar relationship between elite, vanguard art and the rest of society that developed in the 1950s. First we must address the relationship of the beats to other voices within the avant-garde by examining the ways in which Ginsberg's peers experienced "Howl."

The response that sculptor Manuel Neri (b. 1930) had to "Howl" demonstrates the complexity of the interaction between symbolic forms and individual lives. Neri first heard the poem in 1955 when he visited a friend's apartment in Oakland and Ginsberg, who also happened to be visiting, read a draft of the poem. Neri recalled that evening as one of the most moving experiences of his life. The poem seemed to capture nuances of his own life. Ginsberg's famous opening line, "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked," struck Neri as an accurate description of

the anguish artists felt. As important was the *forgiveness* accompanying anger. "Howl" promised that poets could trap "the archangel of the soul between 2 visual images" and

> recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose
> . . . rejected yet confessing out of the soul to conform to the rhythm of thought

and that this wisdom would blow

> the suffering of America's naked mind for love into an eli eli lamma lamma sabacthani saxophone cry that shivered the cities down to the last radio
> with the absolute heart of the poem of life butchered out of their own bodies good to eat a thousand years.[21]

It was a heady image that continued martial and millenarian imagery: dedication to the impractical was part of a necessary crusade to restore goodness. Artists attending to their own interests served a transcendent public good, a theme that Ginsberg continued to strike through his career.[22]

Neri was a member of the Six Gallery, an artist cooperative in San Francisco run by students from the California School of Fine Arts. He opened the gallery space for a public reading of "Howl" so that Ginsberg could find an audience outside the living rooms and kitchens of his friends. On October 13, 1955, Kenneth Rexroth presided over Ginsberg's presentation and a reading by five other poets: Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Philip Lamantia, Michael McClure, Gary Snyder, and Philip Whalen. All of the poets who read gained national reputations as leaders of the San Francisco "poetry renaissance," which had actually begun a decade earlier but achieved attention far beyond poetry circles in the late 1950s because of its association with the beat phenomenon.

Neri's conviction that "Howl" accurately described his life and his hopes is an historical fact with significance for future developments. Yet Neri was not gay or bisexual. He was not a conscientious objector, and indeed served

creditably when drafted for the Korean War. As an artist, he was more concerned to develop a formal, aesthetic vision than to project a program of social criticism. Nor was Neri an outcast, suffering artist. Even as a student, he was well received and on his way to becoming one of the most prominent artists in California. His development was a remarkable success story, one made possible in part by the rapidly expanding market for contemporary American art.

Neri was born in California's Central Valley into a family of immigrants from Mexico who spent the year traveling up and down the state as agricultural laborers. Neri worked in the fields with his parents and siblings until he was fourteen years old. When his father and older brother died in an accident, Neri's mother abandoned farm labor and moved her family to Oakland, where she went to work in the canneries. For the first time in his life, Neri was able to attend school on a regular basis. He proved to be an exceptional student with strong grades in all subjects. His counselors and teachers encouraged him to go to college, and he enrolled at Berkeley in 1949 with a practical goal of pursuing a degree in electrical engineering.

An elective course in ceramics changed his aspirations. Hearing about the experiments at the California School of Fine Arts, he went across the bay and audited classes. Overwhelmed by Clyfford Still's work and "his idea of what an artist should be," Neri determined to become a painter instead of an engineer, though he tried to placate his mother's concerns by taking a double set of courses.[23]

In 1952 the army drafted him. He spent the next two years in Korea behind the lines deciphering aerial reconnaissance photographs. Discharged, with a young pregnant wife, he decided, as so many veterans before and after him, not to compromise his ambitions any further. He used his GI Bill to attend art school rather than return to the university. He enrolled first at the California College of Arts and Crafts, but transferred to the California School of Fine Arts after Gurdon Woods replaced Ernest Mundt as director.

His commitment to art led to the breakup of his first marriage in 1955,

shortly before he met Ginsberg. He and his wife had not argued about money, he said, as he later reconsidered the fluctuations of his life. His wife wanted financial security, but she had expected several lean years while he finished his education. The primary problem he thought was one of time and his inability to give both art and his family adequate attention. His wife was not an artist, and their interests were so far apart that he felt his most intense moments in the studio and while carousing with his fellow students.

Liking what he saw of his friend Jay DeFeo's work in plaster, Neri switched from painting to sculpture in 1955, using a medium that was "unimportant, cheap, and malleable." This decision was the critical breakthrough of his career. His plaster figures seemed to peers and teachers alike to be the first true application they had seen of action-painting techniques to sculptural form. Neri worked with the plaster while it was still wet, and he had to form his shapes quickly before the plaster dried. The medium demanded immediate improvisation but could also be reworked easily by lopping off and adding on. A piece was finished, he observed, only when somebody took it away. After the sculptures dried, Neri slopped cheap but bright house paint over the work in broad brushstrokes that treated the plaster as a form of canvas.[24]

His teachers, Elmer Bischoff and Robert Howard, brought his plaster sculptures to the attention of museum curators, and he began to exhibit in both San Francisco and Los Angeles. In 1960 the George W. Staempfli Gallery in New York offered him representation, and Neri had the first of many one-artist exhibitions in Manhattan. In 1964 the art department at the University of California, Davis, recruited him to its faculty, and he gained economic stability. Neri found in the art profession critical acclaim and a dazzlingly rapid escape from the poverty of his youth. Neri's reaction to "Howl" cannot be explained by the facts of his life course, so we must consider that the symbolic importance of the poem referred to nontangible, imaginative aspects of social reality.

The events of the reading of "Howl" at the Six Gallery have been retold many times because it seemed a moment that allowed those present to see that

a new force had arisen in American culture.[25] The response that the poem released was complex, most of it only peripherally related to the poem's force as a jeremiad. For listeners, the content that the language carried was less important than the ritualistic, collective emotions released by scatalogical and sexually explicit language as the poem was read in public. But it would be wrong to separate content and form. The language fit the content perfectly because it underscored the poet's anger and drew upon the everyday use of vulgarity in emotionally intense moments. Still, at the time, such direct, simple expression was unusual for a poem with serious aims. A letter written right after the event reported on the effect of the language and, incidentally, on Kerouac's role in pushing the audience to let go of its inhibitions and accept the spirit with which Ginsberg had written "Howl":

> This Carrowac [sic] person sat on the floor downstage right, slugging a gallon of Burgundy and repeating lines after Ginsberg, and singing snatches of scat in between the lines; he kept a kind of chanted, revival-meeting rhythm going. Ginsberg's main number was a long descriptive roster of our group, pessimistic dionysian young bohemians and their peculiar and horrible feats, leading up to a thrilling jeremiad at the end, that seemed to pick up the ponderous main body of the poem and float it along stately overhead as if it were a kite. There was a lot of sex, sailors and language of the cocksuckingmotherfucker variety in it; the people gasped and laughed and swayed, they were psychologically had, it was an orgiastic occasion.[26]

In *The Dharma Bums,* Kerouac's novel written in 1957 about his friendship with Gary Snyder, Kerouac gave his own account of "the night of the birth of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance" (thereby launching the myth that the type of performance that evening was something never heard of before):

> It was a mad night. And I was the one who got things jumping by going around collecting dimes and quarters from the rather stiff audience standing around in the gallery and coming back with three huge gallon jugs of

California Burgundy and getting them all piffed so that by eleven o'clock when Alvah Goldbrook [Allen Ginsberg] was reading his, wailing his poem "Wail" drunk with arms outspread everybody was yelling, "Go! Go! Go!" (like a jam session) and old Rheinhold Cacoethes [Kenneth Rexroth] the father of the Frisco poetry scene was wiping his tears in gladness.[27]

Both accounts stress that the poet's performance aimed to incite audience participation. The words Ginsberg read were his, the emotions belonged to everyone in the room. Instead of listening quietly and attempting to follow the complex lines of poetry, the audience joined in as if they were members of a jazz ensemble. They were not oblivious of the content, but their response was an immediate visceral reaction to a performance, which had its own collective truth independent of the words. "A reading is a kind of communion," Gary Snyder observed. "The poet articulates the semiknown for the tribe."[28] As the letter written immediately after the event strongly suggested, part of the response stemmed directly from the use of street language. The comment on the "ponderous" quality of the poem should remind us that neither the ideas nor the images were new. The poem expressed relatively commonplace gripes of young bohemians. The vulgar language as such was familiar as well. As Deputy District Attorney Bruce McIntosh stated during the trial in 1957 against Lawrence Ferlinghetti for violating obscenity laws by publishing "Howl," any man on the street understood the surface scatalogical images even if the poem's purported philosophical content seemed obscure.[29] As a communicative act, "Howl" presented nothing new to its audience; as an interactive event, the poem was a radical experience, even for this audience, because it allowed the audience collectively to thrust into public discourse what had been everyday ideas and language of private feeling. Public use of obscene language for serious purposes broke down inhibitions that haunted everyone in the room with conventional ideas about what was appropriate and inappropriate for "art." As an event, the reading of "Howl" demonstrated that

there was no aspect of internal experience, no inclination, no emotion, that was to be despised a priori.

A New York theater critic reported a similar experience in 1967 when he observed that Michael McClure's play *The Beard* was unlike anything he had ever experienced previously. There was no drama on the stage, but tremendous pressure built up and released in the audience as they watched the actors impersonating Billy the Kid and Jean Harlow insulting each other with repetitious obscenities until joining in what appeared to be actual sexual union at the play's conclusion. "Curiously enough," he found, "by the end of the play, one has completely ceased to be shocked." As the mutual seduction consummated, "There seemed to be a kind of relief round the audience at this point: the ultimate had taken place, all the taboos were down, and it wasn't really so awful, was it? Which, to my mind, not only cleared the air but absolved the play of any possible charge of pornography."[30]

Participating in breaking down barriers through public ritualization of well-known, daily private acts helped to release guilt about private feelings, and not only those related to sexuality. The most basic desires and fears were no longer *publicly* repressed and therefore no longer experienced as shameful, weak, or conversely as a hidden source of masculine strength. Sexual need (and aggression) could openly define the male relationship to the world, even in areas unrelated to genital sexuality. Ginsberg extended to his audience, but not necessarily to his readers, the dispensation from mind-body duality that he had received from Neal Cassady.

The release from guilt helped justify faith that choosing personal enrichment over immediate material benefit was neither foolish nor immoral, neither essentially irresponsible nor libertine. Certainly Neri would have been more practical, if less self-fulfilled, to stick to electrical engineering. That he succeeded as well as he did as an artist was simply, he himself had observed, luck. The ambition expressed in Ginsberg's "Howl" that words and images, if true to personal vision, could liberate America helped assuage anxiety at

moments of crisis such as divorce, for example, when past decisions might seem mere foolish personal whimsy. There was another, more altruistic psychological reality at play: the very real sense of self-liberation that many felt upon daring to choose their own path regardless of risk seemed germane to others. The avant-garde presented itself with a conception of the individual in the world that said, it is all right to take risks, the pursuit of individual excellence will tap creative energies chained by antiquated customs. The poem promised that to be an artist, or to be gay—that is to say, to be any kind of "deviant"—would be beneficial for the world and would help spread the sense of grace discovered when the boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate language collapsed.

The poem's overarching jeremiad provided a capstone, but not the point of origin. Nothing in the poem's program is remotely political in the sense of programmatically addressing specific social needs. The poem's release was not the sharpening of political antagonism but a diffuse sense of promise. Against America's blind mistrust of "difference," poets and artists claimed to produce a healing balm that would reconcile the divisive elements in America and make the country "holy" again, as the coda to "Howl" predicted. The healing of America involved martyrs like Carl Solomon, but those who were true poets would embrace the conflict the poem described. The language of the poem stressed human values over profit, and this gave "Howl" a superficial anticommercial, antimilitarist tone borrowed from the rhetoric of the left. Yet the power of the poem's rhetoric had little to do with reorganization of political priorities. "Can any good society be founded," Ginsberg asked in 1961, contemplating the Cuban revolution, "on the basis of old-style human consciousness?" The mass media in all countries, capitalist or socialist, functioned as subliminal manipulation that alienated its citizens from facing their own inner reality. Revolutionizing social arrangements were less important than affirmation of the authority of personal need.[31]

A focus on consciousness-raising did not mean that beat-generation criticisms of American foreign policy, the development of a permanent standing

army, or the rape of the environment lacked genuine feeling or intellectual substance. Ginsberg's poem "America," written in 1955, developed an alternative vision of patriotism, based on the merger of political, aesthetic, and sexual radicalism. Still, the most important social effects of "Howl" involved the reconstruction of personal identity on a level at which the ideas were epiphenomenal. The social values poetry expressed had their place, but they were structured by the sense of rupture and rebirth that those participating wanted to feel reaffirmed.

More important than the ideas was an embodiment of a new ideal self that became present in group interactions. Joanna McClure remembered that at the first poetry reading she attended in San Francisco, she "looked around at the women there and thought, I like the way these women look. I like their faces. I am right where I belong."[32] Her reaction was similar to the revelation that Kerouac and Ginsberg felt when encountering Cassady. An ideal self emerged in encountering members of the same sex whose state of being one wanted to appropriate for oneself.

Because Ginsberg and Kerouac provided their generation of artists and poets with a new sense of masculine subjectivity, they came to represent that age group, even though most of its members led lives and pursued aesthetic visions that could not be reduced to the single model the beats provided. In confronting images of a reformed, justified self in a ritualistic context, young men could literally shake off old self-images and throw themselves back in the world to pursue their projects with greater bravado. Kerouac and Ginsberg also helped develop a language of communal loyalties among young men, a language at least as important as notions of freedom for a group not yet differentiated and still engaged in parallel projects.

The simplicity of their ideas and language, ideal for the ritualistic reembodiment of bohemian masculinity, was particularly suitable for relay to a mass audience. Translated into the media as ciphers in a public morality drama,

their work spawned overly simple-minded and insulting presentations. Artists and poets faced the public reduced to a parody of themselves. "Woe, woe unto those who think that the Beat Generation means crime, delinquency, immorality, amorality," Kerouac complained in *Playboy* magazine in 1959, angry at the trivialization of his ideas which reduced him to one book that he did not consider representative of his other work. He warned prophetically, "Woe unto those who spit on the Beat Generation, the wind'll blow it back."[33]

Meanwhile, tourist buses brought in visitors to explore San Francisco's North Beach, Manhattan's Greenwich Village, Chicago's North Shore, and Los Angeles's Venice district with their coffeehouses, bookstores, art galleries, and jazz clubs. Quiet neighborhoods where artists and poets had congregated changed as music and comedy clubs catering to a general public opened. Rebellion was marketable as entertainment, allowing those who preferred their conventional lives to experience a simulacrum of the off-beat.

Painter Wally Hedrick (b. 1935) remembered that one bar in San Francisco's North Beach district hired an action painter to work while a jazz combo performed: "That was his job. He made these paintings and while he would paint the musicians would play along with him. He would go like this and they would go doodoo doop. It was very popular in North Beach. The guy would make four or five paintings in an evening." There was a mystique to being beat, Hedrick admitted, but he was never comfortable with the whole concept. Like most, he was never sure what the word meant, but "I had the costume; I had my beard and I wore my sandals." He briefly held a job sitting in the window of a coffeeshop and drawing abstract pictures while tourists passed by. It was stereotypic identity, but nonetheless brought recognition and a sense that personal peculiarities might be meaningful to others.[34]

Bruce Conner (b. 1933), on the other hand, hated both the term and the hype. He thought "beat" was a derogatory term, accompanied by a kind of publicity that "exploited, degenerated, and decayed" artists into "providers for art boutiques." In 1959 he and Michael McClure proposed that artists and poets repudiate the term beat and call themselves "rat bastards" instead, and

they announced the formation of the Rat Bastard Protective Society, the name intended as a playful allusion to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Membership of the Rat Bastards included Joan Brown, Jay DeFeo, DeFeo's husband Wally Hedrick, and Wallace Berman from Los Angeles. Since the society had no business to conduct, not even seriously trying to convince other artists and poets to substitute "rat bastard" for "beat," its meetings were simply excuses to have a party. McClure doubted that a beat *movement* ever existed on the West Coast. It was an East Coast idea that poets could form a movement, he claimed. California poets were more "individualistic, more private, more self-centered."[35]

Robert Duncan preferred to continue using the older term "bohemian" to describe the California arts environment because it placed the avant-garde firmly in the context of a one-hundred-year-old tradition. Bohemian meant translating aesthetic achievement into life-style, that is, living with the arts as a natural and necessary adjunct to daily existence:

> In a Bohemian household you have immediacy to all the arts so that you are going to have some aspect of music, poetry, painting, and also the decoration of things at the same level. The minute they're picked up, it is part of the thing you do. Much of what you have around is either painted, composed, etc., either by you or your friends. That's part of the flow. The first thing you have regarding the Bohemian thing is that you don't have someone else do your decor. . . . The Bohemian way is also a constant flow of people in and out, lots of entertainment. You're not surprised that so-and-so is married, or not married, to so-and-so. That's part of what we see—this network of people, this constant interchange. The other half of the Bohemia concept is the Bohemia of North Beach, and that is its cafes, cafe life.

Beat was something developed to make money, to give a suitable advertising label so that customers could look for the correct product.

> That's the death of Bohemia. It isn't so much that you couldn't have money. . . . Your art has to be posed with no guarantee and actually look like a very remote unreal activity to be in. Something that nobody values, and you couldn't explain why you're doing it—in order for it to be Bohemia. . . . Modern painting constantly tries to occupy an area that would be doubtful enough to be Bohemian, but it has become so much of a commodity that it's very hard to keep the Bohemian sense. It sells overnight. But it's still Bohemian because the fact that it sells does *not* give it solidity. So, the painters live in a good deal of doubt. . . . Bohemian poetry means risk. But it means something more than risk. It means poetry that no one is sure what it is.[36]

However aggravating or confusing the beat phenomenon might be, the attention it generated brought rewards in terms of shows, gallery contracts from New York, and publications. The possibility of success and actually influencing the country and becoming leaders beckoned, even if the trappings were often offensive. New Directions and City Lights Books, small presses specializing in noncommercial literature, found themselves in the unusual situation of going through multiple editions of volumes by living poets who were not yet assigned in college English classes. Major galleries in New York sought West Coast painters, and several galleries opened in San Francisco and Los Angeles to represent experimental work.

Response to worldly interest was frequently ambiguous. The responsibilities of developing a career in a world apparently interested in what one had to say seemed to interfere uncomfortably with the sense of personal autonomy needed to function as a creative person. The unresolved dialectic between ambition and autonomy remained embedded in many recollections from this generation in a double form of self-representation and a corresponding split in the language they used to recall their careers.

We will examine this tension in the careers of two women painters, Joan Brown (1937–1990) and Jay DeFeo (1929–1989). Their response as women

will reinforce the importance of gender distinctions in this period, but it will also suggest that the reactions of creative people, men as well as women, were more complex than the programmatic fantasies that Kerouac and Ginsberg developed for men alone might suggest. Brown's and DeFeo's experiences juggling career, marriage (and in Brown's case, motherhood), ambition, and spiritual values, while blending sexuality with a desire for stable relationships, point to a commonality between young artists and society at large that an exclusively male focus obscures. At the same time, their experiences had some differences. Unlike most women their age, Brown and DeFeo were involved in two-career marriages with men who were also creative people. Brown was better known than her first and third husbands, William H. Brown and Gordon Cook, while she and her second husband, Manuel Neri, had relatively equal reputations. The early work of Brown and Neri was strikingly similar, but both developed their styles before meeting or falling in love. Indeed, they later felt that one of their marriage's deepest problems had been that their attraction to each other had grown primarily from a shared aesthetics. They assumed that because their work was so similar that they were soul mates. Jay DeFeo and her husband Wally Hedrick were distinct personalities, each notorious in their own way, with very different approaches to art. DeFeo was as private as Hedrick was extroverted, but DeFeo briefly achieved a national reputation as one of the significant artists of her generation.

Notes

Abbreviations

AAA	Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
BL	Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
CLP	Kenneth Rexroth. *The Collected Longer Poems of Kenneth Rexroth.* New York: New Directions, 1968.
CSP	Kenneth Rexroth. *The Collected Shorter Poems of Kenneth Rexroth.* New York: New Directions, 1966.
DSC	Department of Special Collections, University Library, University of California, Los Angeles.
OHP/UCLA	Oral History Program, University of California, Los Angeles.
PAS	Public Affairs Services, University Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.
PT	Kenneth Rexroth. *The Phoenix and the Tortoise.* Norfolk: New Directions, 1944.
ROHO	Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
SFAA	San Francisco Art Association Archives, Library, San Francisco Art Institute.
WOW	Kenneth Rexroth. *World Outside the Window: The Selected Essays of Kenneth Rexroth.* New York: New Directions, 1987.

Chapter 6

1. John Clellon Holmes, *Go* (New York: Scribner's, 1952), 5; Holmes, "This Is the Beat Generation," *New York Times*, 16 November 1952, reprinted in Holmes, *Nothing More To Declare* (New York: Dutton, 1967), 109–115. In this essay Holmes credited Kerouac as the originator of the phrase.

2. Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Viking Press, 1957), 161.

3. Carolyn Cassady on her husband Neal Cassady, the original for Dean Moriarty: "Where again would I ever find such intensity of being we . . . shared. And the fantastic communication Neal and I had . . . the complete lack of *self*-consciousness I could achieve with him, merging objectively into whatever we were discussing together . . . no personalities involved; perfect understanding" (Carolyn Cassady, "Coming Down," in *The Beat Book*, special issue of *Unspeakable Visions of the Individual* 4 [1974]: 19).

4. Robert Lindner, *Rebel Without a Cause: The Hypnoanalysis of a Criminal Psychopath* (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1944), *Prescription for Rebellion* (New York: Rinehart, 1952), and *Must You Conform?* (New York: Rinehart, 1956). Lindner advocated loosening social restrictions to decrease generational tensions. By opening the possibilities for legitimate exploration, young people could explore their interests without feeling in conflict with their society.

5. Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton,

1968), observations on male adolescence, 116, 128–135; observations on female goals, 265–266, 282–283, 291.

6. Ibid., 253–255.

7. In *Visions of Cody* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), Kerouac completed a fifth and final draft of *On the Road.* This version retold the story of his relationship to Cassady from the viewpoint of the westerner. Instead of ending with a break based on Kerouac's imagined reintegration into Manhattan literary life, the story follows more closely the actual developments of Kerouac's life. The narrator moves west and lives with Cassady and his wife while working as a railroad conductor. Kerouac derived much of this novel from audiotape recordings he made during his travels with Cassady. Despite his publisher's desire for additional material after the success of *On the Road,* Viking decided *Visions of Cody* was unprintable, in part because of its obscenity; but its lack of a plot and mythification of Cassady's anarchism were also unpalatable to a mainstream readership. For background on composition and publishing history, see Allen Ginsberg's introduction to the 1974 edition and Tim Hunt, *Kerouac's Crooked Road* (Hamden: Shoe String Press, 1981).

8. See John Modell, *Into One's Own: From Youth to Adulthood in the United States, 1920–1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 177, 193, 201, 203, 206, 209, 211, 250.

9. Allen Ginsberg, "Howl," in *The Postmoderns: The New American Poetry Revised,* ed. Donald Allen and George F. Butterick (New York: Grove Press, 1982), 177. Cassady also appeared in Holmes's novel *Go* as the character Hart Kennedy.

10. Allen Young, *Gay Sunshine Interview: Allen Ginsberg with Allen Young* (Bolinas: Grey Fox Press, 1974), 12.

11. Allen Ginsberg, "Back to the Wall," *Times Literary Supplement,* London *Times,* 6 August 1964, 333.

12. See Barry Miles, *Ginsberg: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 79ff., and Michael Shumacher, *Dharma Lion: A Critical Biography of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 115–117, for a discussion of Ginsberg's relationship with Solomon. Solomon has given his own version of these events in *Emergency Messages: An Autobiographical Miscellany* (New York: Paragon House, 1989).

13. Kerouac included the episode in *On the Road,* 6, although in that version he had Moriarty throw on boxer shorts to answer the door. See also Anne Charters, *Jack Kerouac: A Biography* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1973), 71; Gerald Nicosia, *Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac* (New York: Grove Press, 1983), 175–176; William Plummer, *The Holy Goof: A Biography of Neal Cassady* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1981). See chapter 3 of Barry Miles, *Ginsberg: A*

Biography, for an account of Ginsberg's love affair and ongoing friendship with Cassady.

14. Ginsberg has since tried to confront the fear and dislike of women he felt in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1974 he argued that misogyny was the product of "distrust, hatred, paranoia, and competition" between men. He hoped as the gay movement allowed men to accept innate homoerotic attitudes, more men would be able to enter into emotionally satisfying relationships with women (see Allen Young, *Gay Sunshine Interview,* 14). LuAnne Henderson, Cassady's seventeen-year-old wife at the time of the 1946 trip to New York, recalled that Kerouac was the only man in the group who assumed that she too had intellectual and artistic interests, but she was disappointed that he ignored her sexual interest in him (Nicosia, *Memory Babe,* 176). Anne Charters reported that Kerouac was uncomfortable with women and envied Cassady's ease at developing sexual relationships (Charters, *Jack Kerouac,* 76). Carolyn Cassady told an interviewer that her husband was a sexual sadist (Gina Berriault, "Heart Beats: Carolyn Cassady," *Rolling Stone,* 12 October 1972).

15. Paul O'Neil, "The Only Rebellion Around," *Life* 47 (30 November 1959): 114–130. See also J. D. Adams, "On Writers of Beat Generation," *New York Times Book Review,* 18 May 1957, VII, 2; John Ciardi, "Epitaph for the Dead Beats," *Saturday Review* 43 (6 February 1960): 11–13, 42; Irving Feldman, "Stuffed 'Dharma,'" *Commentary* 26 (December 1958): 6; J. Fischer, "Editor's Easy Chair: Old Original Beatnik," *Harper's Magazine* 218 (April 1959): 14–16; Herbert Gold, "The Beat Mystique," *Playboy* 6 (February 1958): 20, 84–87; Irving Howe, "Mass Society and Post-Modern Fiction," *Partisan Review* 36 (Summer 1959): 420–436; G. B. Leonard, Jr., "The Bored, the Bearded, and the Beat," *Look* 22 (19 August 1958): 64–68; John Leonard, "Epitaph for the Beat Generation," *National Review* 7 (12 September 1959): 331; Norman Podhoretz, "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," *Partisan Review* 25 (Spring 1958): 305–318; Diana Trilling, "The Other Night at Columbia," *Partisan Review* 26 (Spring 1959): 214–230; Ernest van den Haag, "Conspicuous Consumption of Self," *National Review* 6 (11 April 1959): 656–658; "Squaresville U.S.A. vs. Beatsville," *Life* 47 (21 September 1959): 31–37; "Every Man a Beatnik?" *Newsweek* 53 (29 June 1959): 83; "Daddy-O," *New Yorker* 34 (3 May 1958): 29–30; "Beatniks just sick, sick, sick," *Science Digest* 46 (July 1959): 25–26; "Cool, Cool Bards," *Time* 70 (2 December 1957): 71; "Blazing and the Beat," *Time* 71 (24 February 1958): 104; "Fried Shoes; Beatniks," *Time* 73 (9 February 1959): 16; "Beat Friar," *Time* 73 (25 May 1959): 58; "Bang bong bing," *Time* 74 (7 September 1959): 74; "Bam; roll along with bam," *Time* 74 (14 September 1959): 28; "Zen-Hur," *Time* 74 (14 December 1959): 66.

16. "The Importance of Not Being Square," *Look* 21 (23 July 1957): 35.

17. United States Office of Education, *How the Office of Education Assists College Students and Colleges* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1968); Elmo Roper, *The Public Pulse* 6 (September 1959): 1; United States Congress, Joint Economic Committee, *The Economics and Financing of Higher Education in the United States: A Compendium of Papers* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1969).

18. W. T. Lhamon, Jr., recounts the emergence of rhythm and blues in chapter 3 of *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990).

19. MacAgy, "Clay Spohn's War Machines," 39–42.

20. Richard Centers, "Social Class, Occupation, and Imputed Belief," *American Journal of Sociology* 58 (1953): 543–555.

21. Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1957), 9.

22. Neri's recollections are drawn from an untitled, undated interview at the Archives of California Art, Oakland Museum, and Neri's account in Thomas Albright, "Out of the Time Warp," *Currânt* no. 1 (1975–76): 9–13. See also Margarita Nieto, "Manuel Neri," *Latin American Art* 1 (Fall 1989): 52–56. Joan Brown's oral history interviews conducted by the AAA also contain her reflections on Neri's personal development.

23. Albright, "Out of the Time Warp," 11.

24. Ibid., 11, 16. George Segal began working in plaster sculpture at the same time in New York, but his work was unknown on the West Coast. Neri was not aware of Segal's tableaux until his first trip to New York in 1960.

25. Michael Davidson referred to the Six Gallery reading as an "enabling fiction" of the San Francisco poetry scene. See Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 2–4. Accounts of the reading are collected in Allen Ginsberg, *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile, Transcript, and Variant Versions*, ed. Barry Miles (New York: Harper and Row, 1986).

26. Jack Goodman to John Allen Ryan, November 1955, quoted in Rebecca Solnit, *Secret Exhibition: Six California Artists of the Cold War Era* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990), 48.

27. Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (New York: New American Library, 1959), 13.

28. Gary Snyder, *The Real Work: Interviews and Talks, 1964–1979* (New York: New Directions, 1980), 5.

29. *Howl of the Censor*, ed. J. W. Ehrlich (San Carlos: Nourse Publishing Co., 1961), 95–96.

30. Richard Roud, "The Beard," *Guardian*, 9 November 1967, 7.

31. Allen Ginsberg, "Contribution Towards the Cuban Revolution" (Detroit: Artists Workshop Press, 1966; first printed 1962 in *Pa'alante*).

32. Quoted in Barbara Gravelle, "Six North Beach Women," *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, 21 October 1979, *California Living Magazine*, 33.

33. Jack Kerouac, "The Origins of the Beat Generation," *Playboy* 6 (June 1959): 79.

34. Wally Hedrick, "Wally Hedrick Interview #1," AAA, 30–31, 27.

35. Bruce Conner, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Bruce Conner," interviewed 1974 by Paul Karlstrom, AAA, 32; Bruce Conner, "Interview of Bruce Conner," interviewed 1973 by Paul Cummings, AAA, 16; Michael McClure, "Interview with Michael McClure," interviewed 1969 by Richard A. Ogar, BL, 32, 38.

36. Robert Duncan, "Conversations with Robert Duncan during the month of December 1978 relating to Poetry in the Bay Region," interviewed by Eloyde Tovey, BL, 149, 154. However, in pre–World War II San Francisco, the term "bohemian" had connotations of a refined, free-thinking, upper-middle-class life. The Bohemian Club, founded in 1895, had brought together business and intellectual leaders to discuss matters of common interest. In *Bohemian San Francisco* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Company, 1914), Clarence C. Edwords declared, "To [San Franciscans] Bohemianism means the naturalism of refined people. . . . Bohemianism is the protest of naturalism against the too rigid, and, oft-times, absurd restrictions established by Society. The Bohemian requires no prescribed rules, for his or her innate gentility prevents those things Society guards against" (p. 6).

7 A Woman's Path to Maturation

Joan Brown, Jay DeFeo, and the Rat Bastards

From 1957 to 1964 Joan Brown was one of San Francisco's best-known painters. At midcareer she reflected upon the ambitions that nourished her artistic practice, claiming that

> [painting]'s the only thing that I have been involved in, or could think of being involved in, where there's no responsibility to anybody else. And this gets into maybe some of my feelings about galleries and the public. Whatever you do is strictly for yourself. And I want the freedom. Anytime I feel the pressure from anybody, from anything outside, I'll retreat from that and push it away and push it aside. Because it's the only thing I've ever done where there's absolute freedom. . . . At any given moment I can make a total ass of myself and I'm responsible. You know, there's just me involved in it and nobody gets hurt, nobody. . . . You can't do that when you're teaching, you can't do that with your family, you can't do that with your child or wife or boyfriend/girlfriend.[1]

We might note immediately that for men art was a way of finding a masculine self, but for Brown art was a way of stepping back from gendered relations. At the time of this statement in 1975, Brown was one of many obscure but talented painters who earned their livings by teaching. Yet at the start of her career she seemed, even more than Neri, on the verge of stardom. She began her artistic career in 1955, at the age of seventeen, with an impulsive decision

to register at the California School of Fine Arts rather than go to a liberal arts college. She had shown no previous artistic inclinations. Two years later, she had her first commercial exhibition in New York. In 1958 *Holiday* magazine, playing on the national interest in San Francisco's bohemia that developed after the publication of Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, featured her in a series on "North Beach Poet-Makers." *Look* magazine ran a profile on her in an article highlighting the most prominent women artists in the United States. In 1959 Staempfli Gallery in New York began paying her a monthly stipend of $300 for exclusive right to represent her work and presented annual one-artist shows of her work. In 1960 she became the youngest person to exhibit at the Whitney Museum of American Art. *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour* prepared feature articles on her as a young woman making it in a mostly male profession. In 1962 *Mademoiselle* honored her with its annual Outstanding Single Achievement in Art Award.[2]

"Everybody's Darling," art critic Philip Leider called her. Brown's work, Leider noted, heralded the national success of the aesthetic and pedagogic approach developed at the California School of Fine Arts. Paintings such as *Lolita* (fig. 13) epitomized the San Francisco school of painting, with its philosophical preference for ugliness, a coarse four-to-five-inch-thick surface, and cheap materials. Since she came into the art world at a very young age, immature and intellectually undeveloped, Leider argued that Brown focused the ideas of her teachers and peers, without her own ambitions—other than seeking praise—intervening to dilute their expression. Leider sexualized her achievement by describing her as a passive, if talented and energetic, receptacle of "attitudes." Her work "embodied" the "germinating" ideas of Clyfford Still as assimilated by Brown's teachers Elmer Bischoff and Frank Lobdell. Like Bischoff, Brown reduced her figures to the barest amount of information to identify their gender and relative age, while her use of sludgey impasto to create textured three-dimensional shapes echoed Lobdell, although she preferred bright colors to his grimly limited palette.[3]

She recalled the early acclaim she received as "bothersome and difficult."

13. Joan Brown, *Lolita,* oil on canvas, 1962. Courtesy of Frumkin/Adams Gallery, New York. Photo: eeva-inkeri.

Success limited her sense of freedom. "Some of the pressure was coming from the outside, but some was internal too; 'Is this one as good as the last?' The concerns were going outward where they had been inward. Not 'Do I think this is better than the one I just did?' but worrying about what outside reaction would be. I found that very stifling."[4] This conflict between ambition and inner ideals came to a head in 1964, when she and her dealer, George W. Staempfli, clashed over new directions in her work. After her marriage to Manuel Neri in 1961 and the birth of their son Noel the following year, Brown started painting domestic scenes drawn from her son's baby book. The subject of her painting had moved from creative expression itself to the daily experiences of her life: Noel eating his first ice cream cone or taking a pony ride at the zoo. Her stylistic devices adopted to her new concerns. She recalled:

> I was feeling restless and felt there was more than what I knew about. So in January of 1965 I decided to take a new step forward. I put away all my palette knives and trowels, and decided to do some small still lifes in subtle color. I wanted more conscious control of my work at this point. Staempfli couldn't understand why I would want to change since my paintings were selling well, I was showing steadily in New York and L.A., and people were taking notice of my work. I tried to explain that I didn't want to show for a while, that I wanted to pursue this new direction. He didn't agree, so then I realized that we must part ways. I never regretted it, either.[5]

Brown's break with Staempfli and her decision to suspend public exhibition of her work coincided with her divorce from Neri. She confronted a crisis hitting all facets of her life by deciding to spend a year remastering her craft. She asked herself what she would need to learn to become a painter if she had never gone to art school. She began, as if a novice, systematically to work through charcoal, crayon, and water color exercises. Discipline and self-control replaced expression and impulse as the key concepts of her working methods. She purposely limited her palette, restricting herself in order to

force discovery of what she did not know. She worked with small formats because everybody in San Francisco painted very large canvases. If she was to regain a sense of initiative, her art was no longer to speak of presumed painterly absolutes, but only for herself.[6]

The process broke the patterns she had developed while a student at the California School of Fine Arts. When she returned to public exhibition, her work was radically, and for most critics, shockingly different (pl. 7). The precision of her new style was accentuated by a shift from oil on canvas to enamel on masonite board, which made the surfaces flatter and more brittle. Drafting became vitally important, as she created bright representational images, mostly drawn from dream imagery. She forced the viewer's attention away from the language of painting onto the literal content of the images, the details of which were influenced by her studies of hermetic and gnostic philosophy. The cat in ancient Egyptian religion, for example, was one of the four primal emanations of Ptah, the fundamental life force. The image, painted on the occasion of Brown's third marriage to painter Gordon Cook, merged autobiography with mythology.

This work was consciously out of fashion. She knew that her quotations of Rousseau, van Gogh, and Japanese Ukiyo-e prints appeared naive and quaint in a period dominated by postpainterly abstraction. She assumed, contrary to the prevailing wisdom, that the images could be more important than the form of presentation. Representation meant that she was not afraid of what she felt, even at the risk of sentimentality. She would take a stand in the world by making interpretations. She had progressed from being a brilliant exponent of what was virtually a brand-name style to a more masterful but individual approach that did not at the time relate to the formal preoccupations of any other group of painters. This insistence on the primacy of her own vision over any concept of art orthodoxy problematized her relation to the professional art world and contributed to her decline into the secondary rung of artists.[7]

She had no one-artist shows until a 1971 exhibition at the San Francisco

Museum of Modern Art. For ten years she went without a show in New York, and she never again had a commercial gallery as an exclusive representative, although several houses in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York exhibited her work. No longer a bright young star or even likely to become famous, she still considered her career to be successful, carefully underscoring that she did not, indeed dare not, use monetary criteria. For her, success meant the ability to create a body of work faithful to her interior vision. She did not conceal her contempt for the purely commercial aspects of the art business. She told *Artweek* magazine in 1971 that she painted only for herself, but she felt a need "every once in a while" to exhibit her work to see how other people reacted to it.[8]

The objectively foolish, but subjectively necessary decision to drop Staempfli left Brown in a difficult financial situation that would endure for a decade. Since 1960 she had taught at the night school program at the California School of Fine Arts, but the work was sporadic and part-time. Her salary was insufficient to support herself and her son. She received money from Neri and her parents, but she needed to feel that she could rely on her own efforts to provide the basis for her standard of living. She supplemented her income by teaching in hospitals, private schools, and by leading art therapy classes for the physically and mentally disabled. "It was tough at that time," she observed later, but felt that the experience of working with so many different types of people outside the art world gave her a better sense of what art could mean in everyday life. Raising a child convinced her that "being an artist is a by-product of being a human being. . . . I'm not any one thing; I'm not just a teacher, I'm not just a mother, I'm not just a painter. I'm all these things plus, and the more areas I can tap the richer each one of the others will be."[9]

Only in 1974 did she gain financial stability when she joined the faculty of the art department at the University of California, Berkeley. The goal of personal, creative freedom was so necessary for her self-esteem that she willingly accepted ten years of personal hardship without ever publicly regretting the

choice she had made. The decision had been hers, she insisted. She refused to blame Staempfli in any way for her difficulties in producing satisfactory product for him. He operated as he did because developing saleable artists was essential to the survival of his business. Brown could not become autonomous working with Staempfli because he himself had no autonomy whatsoever, but led his professional life entirely in reaction to the mechanisms of the market.[10]

Brown's decision was neither unprofessional nor antiprofessional, since her career turned toward an alternative professional model for being an artist, one grounded in the nonprofit, academic aspects of the art world. Her most important shows appeared at museums and university galleries. Her approach to art, shared with many in her generation, included a component irreducibly noncommercial because the institutional framework most important to her advancement took place in the publicly funded sector. She had experienced rebirth in school, and leaving the academy to join the wider world proved difficult and painful. After a plunge into entrepreneurial activity, she discovered that Douglas MacAgy's conception of art as a form of scholarship provided a more secure and independence-giving basis for building a career. She did not reject the value of sales, but she would not make them critical markers of success in her own self-evaluations. The sacralization of creativity in fact helped to support the art market system, because it enhanced the general idea of art as a special autonomous realm. Yet if the public and private sectors were not inherently in conflict, they were not identical, and a potential for conflict underlay the distinction between these two ways of being an artist in America.

The turn from worldly ambition was motivated by a desire to protect personal autonomy and to prevent herself from being reduced to a stereotype. She had discovered that a life based on creativity and work allowed her to live simply and in direct contact with her interior reality. "I trust the unconscious very, very strongly. And I don't trust my conscious, my mind is a mess. It just looks like this painting table. It's just fitted with nonsense, sidetracking,

garbage, and crap." Her conscious mind came from the exterior world, from the repetitious dictates of social pressures. Her unconscious tapped into a deeper level of reality, one independent of society. Her dreams were orderly, clean, clear, very bright in color: "They look just like my paintings as a matter of fact."[11]

Three factors in Brown's account of her life help explain the particular contours of her life-course decisions: her parents' status anxiety; an experience of psychological rebirth that the art student peer group gave her; the linkage of sexual stereotypes to commerce. The first factor was her parents' obsessive anxiety over class status. Brown was born in San Francisco in a lower-middle-class Catholic family, the only child of an alcoholic father who worked as a bank clerk and a devoutly religious mother who suffered from epilepsy. Brown began her life story by stressing the disjunction between her parents' psychological disorders and their desire to maintain the façade of a respectable and affluent *professional* family.

Her father's income was modest compared to the image he wished to project. The family lived in an upper-middle-class section of the city, but in a tiny, uncomfortable three-room apartment. Brown was forced to sleep in the dining room with her grandmother, instead of having a room of her own, as she was certain she could have had if they had lived in a neighborhood more appropriate to the family's income level. Brown particularly recalled that she herself was a public emblem of her parents' aspirations. The family often ate poorly, but she wore expensive clothes and attended the most exclusive Catholic schools. The bank clerk concerned about how his peers viewed him arranged his life to conform to the most clichéd images of respectable life, even to using his daughter, without thought to her needs, to allay status anxiety.[12]

She hated the environment her parents provided for her. Life was insular and deprived, rotating between church, school, and the uncomfortable apartment where each member of the family retreated into a personal shell. "It was dark," she recalled. "I mean dark in the psychological way, and it was crazy."

She could never bring friends over because the family's private life did not live up to its public façade. The street became the only place where she could escape her parents' obsessive fantasies. "As a child, I never spent one moment alone in that apartment. If my parents weren't home when I came home I would wait in the lobby downstairs. I'd wait out in the street. . . . It was black, dark, scary, like a Dracula house to me."[13]

When she graduated high school in 1955, her parents enrolled her in Lone Mountain College, the city's Catholic women's school, but Brown, only seventeen, impulsively switched to the California School of Fine Arts after seeing an advertisement a few days before classes were to start. As soon as she walked into the school's courtyard, she recalled that the school "was a whole new world for me, and I was just ready for it." The students were "sophisticated" and "worldly" veterans—this time from the Korean War. No one seemed afraid to formulate an opinion about art and society. She felt she learned that the world was hers to interpret, that there were experiences "outside of the damn Catholic San Francisco environment" of her childhood. The continuing appeal of the values and perspectives of World War II veterans-turned-bohemians and the processes by which their interests spread to a younger generation of artists are a striking feature of painter Joan Brown's recollections of her career. She repeated almost verbatim motifs we discussed in chapter 3, but her female perspective is a reminder that the male veteran was as much a shared imagination of youthful independence as a sociological reality.

The second critical factor in Brown's transition was the liberating effect of generational confraternity. Instead of competition and infighting, "We'd all meet and be just one big bunch of energies all coming together. . . . We gave each other a great deal at that time. Everybody was excited. It was kind of like a big burst of energy, a rebirth in a sense."[14] Wally Hedrick, a close friend and fellow student, also stressed the importance of a generation developing new lives together: "In this little community we didn't have to have art teachers. It sounds egotistical, but we were our own teachers and we taught each other.

We were so close to one another it was as if I could have called them my surrogate parents."[15] Psychological realignment with one's peers helped one separate from unwanted traditions and values, but it was also a way of emphasizing personal accomplishment. Professional identifications provided sociability, but also the group in which one competed to demonstrate personal excellence. By choosing to be orphans, for whom peers were more important than parents or teachers, postwar artists imagined that each person started on an equal footing and achieved what he or she could, according to the strength of talent and vision.

Languages of independence and ambition were closely linked, and thus we must be careful not to assume that youth rebellion was necessarily or inevitably a revolt against patriarchal authority. Fraternity placed the generation in an ambivalent position vis-à-vis fathers and teachers, as we saw in chapter 1 when younger artists negated the history of which they were heirs in order to magnify their own accomplishments. The myth of inheriting a cultural desert was a formula for asserting on a social level the powerful feelings of rebirth that students such as Joan Brown felt upon entering the art world. The promise of novelty stimulated ambitions and the possibility of rapid advancement within the chosen profession. Confraternity appeared in the guise of rebellion, but it did not overthrow the patriarchy except in the imagination. Indeed, as careers differentiated and competition intensified for prestige and place, the confraternity dissolved into a memory, idealized and romanticized because it represented hope in a timeless state. As long, however, as ambition conflicted with portions of subjective ideals, the individual remained suspended between accommodation to a mature position within a rejuvenated cultural institution and a position of rebellion defending more egalitarian aims.[16]

Evidence of the psychological realignment Brown underwent in school remains in the formulas in her account that shift her career choice into a purely mythic level. She presented the critical decision of her life as an element of chance, as if the hand of fate had directed her to the new environment for

which she, as yet uninitiated into the mysteries of creativity, was totally unprepared.

> I can't really say it was an accident that I ended in art school. I don't believe in accidents, but it certainly wasn't planned. . . . When I went to art school, I had never heard of Picasso. I had heard the name Rembrandt, but never had seen any of the paintings. I had never been to any museums outside San Francisco. All I had looked at was a sarcophagus and a mummy at the de Young Museum.[17]

So foreign was the life she had chosen that she was deeply embarrassed to discover she had to draw life studies from nude models. The first Richard Diebenkorn picture she saw infuriated her because it seemed so pointless. Within a year she wanted to duplicate for others the shock she first felt at seeing an abstract painting.[18]

This motif of chance guiding her continued to appear in her account as she described falling virtually by accident into a teaching career and getting her first shows. The certainty of success that the motif of chance suggested was countered by a second mythic element that introduced factors of suspense *and* personal merit. She loved art school, but she recalled that when she began taking courses, she showed no talent whatsoever and teachers advised her to drop out. To stay in school she had to work extraordinarily hard, fighting lack of aptitude and technique.

> I thought, "I don't have any talent, I have no business here," and I was going to go to work when [William H. Brown] talked me into taking one more class . . . "Landscape Painting." Elmer Bischoff taught the course. . . . [and told her] "You don't have to do things right, just paint from your insides, let it go, I'll help you as we go along." He really started teaching me how to see, rather than to be technically proficient.[19]

Brown blossomed under the influence of the "Bischoff attitude": don't worry about the rules, do what feels right, protect your privacy, never forget that it

will always be hard work to do something good, and be your own strongest critic, never satisfied until you have achieved something new. She acknowledged that having no "natural" talent, she never mastered the basics of drawing, but her technical inadequacies forced her to explore "internal process" and develop a visual language for her philosophical meditations rather than reproduce surface phenomena.[20]

After her breakthrough in Bischoff's class, she never again considered pursuing a career other than painting, because all alternatives meant returning to her parents' world. Thus her life journey took a path of rebellion only so she might discover the otherwise hidden traditional values of community, apprenticeship, and hard work. She continued as a student until 1961, when she completed a master's of fine arts degree. She escaped forever her parents' "damn Catholic San Francisco environment" that she believed was based on appearances only. She had rebelled, but fundamentally she was not a rebel. "You can't keep working if you're just rebelling," she argued. The media, she thought, imposed an image of the rebel and outcast upon artists and poets, but generalizing from her own experiences to those of her friends, she described the motivations of her generation as positive, as the pursuit of interior truth and moral renewal.[21]

The linked languages of ambition and autonomy are represented by two highly distinctive voices alternating in her accounts. One voice used humorous hyperbole to accentuate the surreality of her parents' life or, on occasion, her own foibles and those of her peers. This inflection drew a veil across the more painful elements of her life by rendering them into sharp, quick images designed to shock and get a laugh. The other voice used a more expansive language of wonder and excitement to express the adventure of a young woman on a journey of initiation that would allow her to overcome her fears and enter into enriching relations with others. Part of this journey included following a very traditional pattern for women: marriage at the age of nineteen to a fellow student, William H. Brown, another "refugee" from a Catholic family, with whom she formed a union based on mutual intellectual inter-

est. For two years he was her teacher and guide: "Bill gave me a bunch of books on painting, on the impressionists, Rembrandt, Goya, and Velásquez. . . . I went through all this stuff, and I was just knocked out. I'd never seen any of this stuff, and I felt this tremendous surge of energy."[22] Her marriage conformed to generational patterns, but it also ensured her independence from her parents. In the context of her progression, an apparently traditional act involved consolidating the rebellion begun when she enrolled in art school. The leading trend was toward assuming personal control over one's life, and thus the 1950s was also a period when one in three marriages ended in divorce. Brown's four marriages follow this trend, but also suggest her determination not to make the mistakes of her parents and continue a relationship that no longer provided growth.

This brings us to the third factor in Brown's subjective progress: the linking of commerce with sexual stereotypes. Entering the realm of aesthetics allowed her to escape the contradictions of her parents' aspirations, in which surface devoured substance. Yet the world she entered linked success and gender so closely that she could not achieve success without betraying the ideal personal freedom that she had discovered in art. She found herself repeating the role that her parents had assigned her, but for a larger audience and with greater rewards. Nell Sinton recalled that the young Brown was a "sparkplug." Sinton meant this as a personal rather than sexual attribute, though in the mid-twentieth century the sexual and personal were seldom distant.[23] Brown's magnetic personality attracted both men and women to her; excitement, verve, and energy could assume distinctly sexual overtones in a male-defined environment, as they often did in reviews of her work.

Brown's response to the sexualization of her art both embraced and rejected the importance of femininity.[24] She did not want to deny her personal charms, yet neither did she want to acknowledge that sexuality, rather than the quality of her ideas, might have been a factor in her success. She confronted contradictions in the art world through a double form of self-representation parallel to the double voice discussed above. She used sexual-

14. Joan Brown, *Fur Rat,* mixed media, 1962. University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley.

ized imagery to portray her interaction with the absurd world of career building. The language and narrative devices that allow this gendered self to speak were closely connected to those used to discuss her relationship with her parents. Early in her life account, she portrayed herself as a liar who learned to use dress and appearance to protect herself; at the same time, she satisfied her parents' desires for middle-class status by impersonating the role of society princess. This mendacious, opportunistic character reappears in her account as the person who participates to excess in parties, drinks too much, and lets herself be carried to unspecified extremes by the energy levels of "a whole bunch of people . . . constantly butting up against each other on an almost twenty-four-hour-a-day basis."[25]

This figure became an element in her work as well, where it appeared most spectacularly in *Fur Rat* as a decaying animal wrapped in mangy fur (fig. 14).

Underneath the fur, Brown had inserted the sharp ends of carpet tacks. The needle points were completely invisible, but if one stroked the work—and only the most privileged patrons of the art world were able actually to touch a work—one's fingers could be lacerated. This object derived from a dream she had in 1961, just as her national career achieved momentum. In later years she recalled that she recognized in the dream her troubled response to the pressures of making a career. The fur rat appeared ironically in *The Bride*, collared and leashed, tamed as a sometimes necessary attribute of dealing with the practical world.[26]

Ironic use of seductive imagery in her art and in her narrative reflected her ambiguous position as a woman in the arts. Like it or not, a woman made her way in the absurd world of practical ambition with "all the dimensions that happen with the absurd—happiness, humor, gentleness, violence."[27] And yet a passion for distinction transformed into ambition for worldly success had led her into a trap. Success under those conditions meant accepting a constricted self-identity, one that gloried in appearances and the ability to use "feminine wiles" to advance herself. To be a successful woman artist was possible, but that life seemed only a reconstruction of her parents' world on another plane.

Opposed to a gendered, sexualized conception of self, another voice called, evoking a vision of an initiate who survived spiritually through recurrent journeys into the freedom of painting. This degendered voice gave her the strength to stand her ground and sever profitable ties with George Staempfli. It also required her to reject the nascent feminist art movement when, in the early 1970s, several feminist critics pointed to Brown's concern with recording personal experience as an example of a specifically female perspective in art.[28] Brown vocally opposed this conclusion and refused to participate in feminist-oriented exhibitions. She accepted feminism when applied to general economic and political questions, but she thought explicitly feminist art was "rotten and contrived" because it elevated one aspect of human experience to universal importance and, perhaps as important, restricted

meaning to a priori conclusions. The central act in recovering subjective will was asserting the freedom to establish the meaning of one's experiences. Feminist ideology, when applied to art, struck her as being as narrow and arbitrary as the commercial art world. Powerful images came from a level of thinking, she believed, that preexisted society and all its distinctions. If she were to use her paintings to reflect her experience, she could accept no political ideology as a filter.[29]

A degendered definition of art allowed her to construct a mature identity, but the price was negation of public value and transfer of personal vision onto an ideal, aesthetic level. This surrender did not mean passivity. Retreat was the only way she could continue to function within society as an active, contributing member without being consumed by the contradictions of her position. By embracing those aspects of her experience that were emancipatory but ignoring those that were confining, she could pursue a career as image maker without actively pursuing a commercial career and exposing herself to the demands of the "fur rat" lurking within her. Instead, she reached for a universal subject that could function simultaneously as artist, teacher, mother, wife. The spiritualized reimagination of mature female self appeared in her work as a "mysterious figure" whose spirit is totally distinct from the dreamlike environment in which it finds itself. Speaking of the series of paintings that included *The Bride,* Brown observed that her figures are "involved in a rather placid kind of setting and then something else is going on. . . . You don't know whether the figure is actually thinking about these things or that's just going on and she's thinking about something else or what. I don't know! I don't have the answers. If I did I wouldn't do it."[30] The separation from the environment she invoked suggests the tenuous character of individual empowerment, constantly impinged upon by practical ties. Brown hoped her art connected her to eternity, while daily life was a constant iteration of need. In art, she said, "people are absolutely timeless." In art, one moved from the trivial world of appearances into a "otherworldly" realm where she could function without betraying her own needs.[31]

Brown's course provides a model of life-turnings that appears with variations and nuances in the choices that many of her associates, male and female, made. The institutional shift away from the school and museum toward the primacy of the commercial gallery generated a subjective shift that dismayed her, because it privileged negative aspects present in her personality from her upbringing. She reacted to assert a form of idealized self, hence of institutional position and ultimately of aesthetic form, distinct from the developing market system of "fine art."

This maneuver had a very worldly foundation: the expansion of higher education provided alternative ways of being in the art world, but this factor was not causative. Brown did not achieve a tenured teaching position until 1974, ten years after she made her break with Staempfli. Withdrawal was a procedure for contributing to the world, being within it, without being overwhelmed by the tremendous pressures one could feel to conform to behavior dictated by the necessities of career building. Refusal to submit to the dictates of a commercial career was her way of affirming her personal freedom to make meaning of the world she lived in, a freedom essential to twentieth-century definitions of successful art. Thus withdrawal was closely tied to ambition, to that pursuit of personal excellence propounded so strongly at the time. In part her decision was a reaction to inability to reconcile hopes and realities, but retreat also allowed her to maintain self-control as an artist and thus to preserve the integrity of her own ambition rather than submit to the demands of those who controlled aesthetic institutions. Withdrawal was a way of remaining active and effective *within* a specific imaginary and then seeking out an institutional environment where that imaginary was most comfortable. By constructing a sense of self separated from social reality, she preserved a sense of subjective independence.

This operation did not negate the possibility of worldly success. Withdrawal set limits as to how far a person would go to cooperate, but within those boundaries freed the creative person to acknowledge the empowering aspects of ambition. Because withdrawal was connected to a transcendent

view of self, it shaded into forms of hubris, an intent to create a body of work that would overwhelm the social forces with which one normally had to negotiate. To influence without being influenced in return was a heady ambition that projected art and poetry, and therefore the aesthetic creators themselves, as completely "free" elements *within* society, the only elements (many of them believed) capable of disrupting it because they could imagine themselves uncompromised.

Maturation as Differentiation

Because college and university training expanded rapidly in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, Brown had the option of pursuing an academic career in opposition to working within a commercial structure. Her friend and one-time housemate Jay DeFeo lacked the possibility of that kind of security because in 1954 DeFeo was convicted of shoplifting two cans of paint from a hardware store. This misdemeanor on her record barred her for most of her professional life from working in state-run schools, and most private schools also had policies against hiring individuals with criminal records.

Like Brown, DeFeo came from a troubled family, discovered in art an environment that provided a new productive identity, and achieved early recognition of her talent. A pervasive feature in DeFeo's recollections is the use of antinomies to present herself and her parents. Almost at the very beginning of one interview, she joked about being a schizophrenic. Then to prove the point she recounted the story of her father's life. A doctor committed to ideals of social justice, he worked during the depression in rural northern California treating the poor. DeFeo spent the first eight years of her life moving from community to community, until her father suddenly announced he was in love with another woman and abandoned his family. "He was living two kinds of existence simultaneously," she concluded, and "it all ended in a complete split." Thus as a child there was the "country Jay," the young child who

had lived in the woods and the "city Jay," the adolescent who lived in San Jose, where her mother supported herself and her daughter entirely on her own by working nights as a nurse.[32]

She discovered in art a way to reconcile the splits within her by projecting them onto a more abstract plane. Lena Emery, her high school art teacher, recognized DeFeo's considerable talents and encouraged her to consider painting as a profession. Emery was "bohemian," DeFeo recalled, like her father, but her teacher demonstrated that personal freedom required rigorous self-discipline. Emery became a life-long friend, who provided an alternative to the chaos and loneliness of DeFeo's broken family through a vision of modern art as a way of realizing one's potential. For DeFeo, art became a means of physically bringing formal harmony out of chaos, but even here what appealed to her was the possibility of combining the two poles of the artistic tradition coming down to her.

> I think also later I was influenced by two kinds of painting which I'm interested in, or which I consciously or unconsciously tried to resolve in my own work. . . . A kind of classic style, if you wish, for lack of a better word. I don't want to think of it as a sophisticated style necessarily. But something that's classic in nature, influenced by the Renaissance. . . . But at the same time something that is essentially either funky or primitive. Putting it another way, a very close relationship to the use of materials and my relationship to the process of painting.[33]

DeFeo continued to define her artistic goal as sifting through the capricious elements of chance to locate a salvific underlying structure. She hoped to show through visual form the ways in which the chaos of individual existence was neither arbitrary nor empty. The rational and the irrational would present themselves no longer as contradictions, but as two faces of the same phenomenon.[34]

With financial assistance from Emery, DeFeo entered the art department at Berkeley in 1946. Her teachers there also were impressed by her talent, and

DeFeo's first public exhibitions occurred before graduating in 1951. That year she was the first woman to receive the prestigious Sigmund Heller Traveling Fellowship, which allowed her to spend eighteen months in Europe. While living and studying in Paris and Florence, she fell in love with Renaissance and classical art. She did not want to reproduce Renaissance vision, but her personal encounter with the European art heritage helped her preserve an independence from contemporary developments in American art. She remained unawed by the succession of successful artists that appeared every few years. Similarly, Joan Brown remembered her first trip to Europe in 1961 as the beginning of her psychological independence from the art business. She saw firsthand the centuries of work that she had known only from books. The power of it awakened within her suspicions that the achievements of American art since the end of World War II, however significant they were, would not be the last word. This understanding, she thought, gave her courage to change her style and to ignore her dealer's complaints. By placing themselves back in history, both Brown and DeFeo used tradition to distance themselves from the present and achieve a small measure of personal autonomy.[35]

DeFeo returned home and began working in the children's art department of the California College of Arts and Crafts. The certainty of a good academic career was shattered after her arrest. She turned to jewelry making to survive, while she continued to paint. By 1958 she had had several well-received exhibitions in California, had won jury prizes for her work, had seen her paintings published in commercial magazines, and had been selected for the Museum of Modern Art's 1959 *Sixteen Americans* exhibition. Gallery owner Irving Blum recalled that she had developed a reputation of "mythic proportions," not only in California, but in New York. On the basis of three years' work, he and others considered her likely to become one of the very greatest artists of her generation. Edward Kienholz remembered DeFeo as the "seminal force in San Francisco"; her influence extended to Los Angeles, where there was a keen interest in her work among collectors and young artists. Kienholz was impressed by her purist approach. She was one of only two

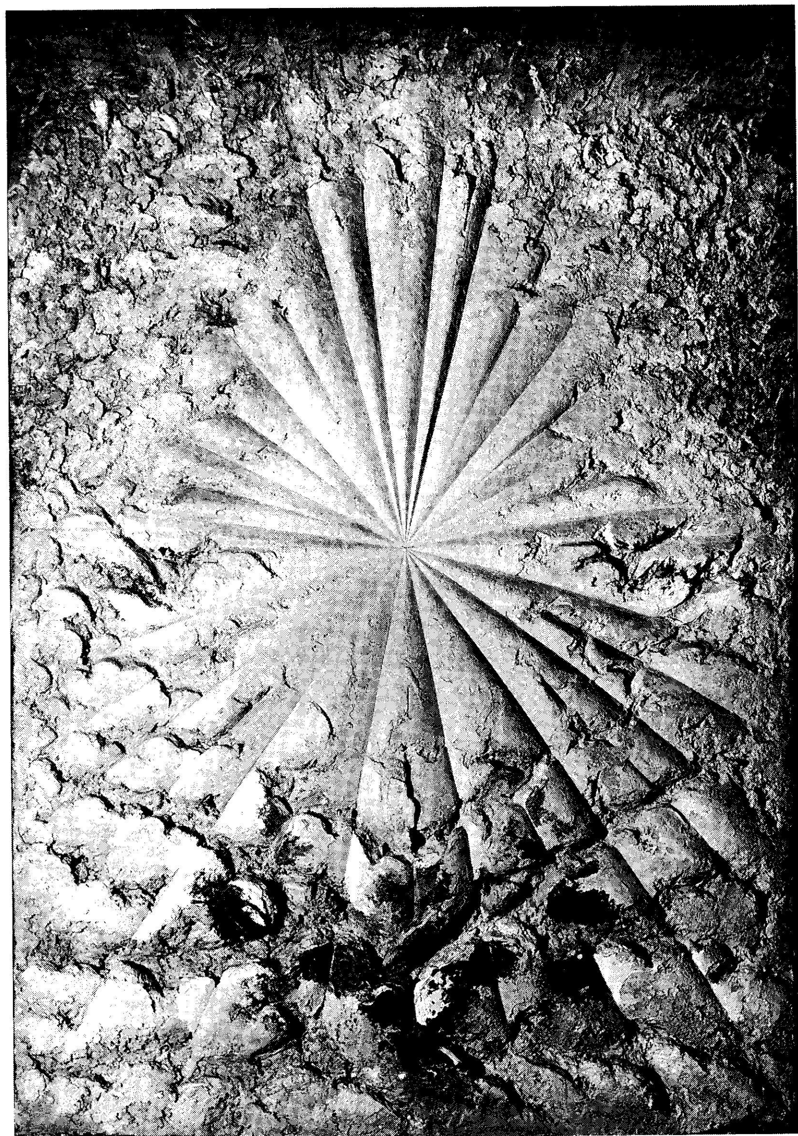
15. Jay DeFeo, *The Eyes*, graphite on paper, 1958.
Collection Lannan Foundation, Los Angeles.

artists he knew who bought pigments and ground her own paints so that she could achieve the exact shades she envisioned.[36]

She had a special affinity for poets, and much of her work derives from poems written by friends of hers. Her monumental pencil drawing *The Eyes* (fig. 15), eight feet wide and four feet tall, was a meditation on a few lines by Philip Lamantia, later published in Wallace Berman's underground journal *Semina:*

> Tell him that I have eyes only for Heaven
> as I look to you
>   Queen mirror
> of the heavenly court[37]

On the verge of establishing a national reputation, DeFeo withdrew from public view as she dedicated herself like a monk to completing one painting, *The Rose* (fig. 16). This work was a continuation of her interest with *The Eyes* to capture the mystic underpinnings to human relationships. She had already painted a series of works, including *The Jewel* and *The Cross,* the visual structures of which emanated from a partially submerged central point, but she



16. Jay DeFeo, *The Rose,* oil and mixed media on canvas, 1958–1965.
Courtesy of the Estate of Jay DeFeo. Photo: Frank Thomas.

was not satisfied that she had demonstrated the necessity of working from a center.

Her obsession with *The Rose* stretched across six years.[38] She felt that in resolving the formal problems posed in this painting she would uncover and systematize the merger of classicist rigor with improvisation. DeFeo's struggle took on titanic proportions. All other activity stopped until she mastered the solution.

Unlike Brown, DeFeo's problem came not from a sense of opposition between "fine art" and commerce, though the critical reputation she developed may have stimulated a pride that matched her natural reticence and modesty. The theme of her art was the compatibility of merely human intentions. Does the interaction of myriad personal ambitions lead to a structured order or to a jumble? Because of the contradictions she felt within her background, she could see plumbing her own depths as a test case. The work was to be a redemption of ambiguity, through a romantic eclecticism that defined the self through the combination of what appeared to be opposites. "I wanted to create a work that was so precariously balanced between going this way or that way that it maintained itself," she said of the painting.[39]

The gamble was to strip away the fearful, dangerous aspects of rapid, personal change by uncovering a hidden underpinning of a timeless, cosmic reality. Growth and personal choice did not need to be the same thing as irresponsibility, and yet the nature of the problem as posed evaded the tragic dimension of human relationships. One might forgive the father of irresponsibility, but his abandonment still caused pain. Personal differentiation, which we might call growth, could easily mean that the needs of people who have been linked changed at different rates and often in opposing directions. Part of this she experienced in her own marriage to Wally Hedrick. DeFeo was professionally reclusive, while her husband was one of the most active, vocal figures in the local arts community. He was director of the Six Gallery from its opening in 1954 until 1957; he was administrator of the night school pro-

gram at the California School of Fine Arts after 1957; and he became the leader of the Studio 13 Jazz Band, while continuing to paint and promote his ideas of art as social criticism. In 1959 he mounted what may very well be the first art show protesting American involvement in Vietnam.[40] Antiwar activity would increasingly occupy his time as the pace of American intervention increased. Knute Stiles, commenting on the differences between DeFeo and Hedrick, compared DeFeo working on *The Rose* to Penelope, weaving and unweaving while she waited for her Ulysses to return, struggling through her efforts to keep the ideal of the hearth alive—an ideal that referred both to her marriage and the spiritual necessity of community.[41]

The form of *The Rose* originated in DeFeo's love of hiking in the mountains, where she felt the awesome power of God was most strongly expressed in terms that humans could endure. As she explored the serrated visual structure of valleys, peaks, and canyons, she believed she explored her own spiritual relationship to the earth. Working through the painting's various versions, she found she did not know how to represent female subjectivity. The first version, published in the catalog for *Sixteen Americans,* was called *The Death Rose,* but she decided that this approach was too melodramatic. It overemphasized the existentialist viewpoint that each person must live with her death if she is to find freedom. Because of childbirth, which constantly replenished humanity, she thought women existed at the crossroads of life and death, weaving the two together into an inseparable pattern. She then changed the title to *The White Rose* and recrafted the work to make it more crystalline and airy. This version was significantly larger as she built a new canvas stretching across the bay window of her apartment and glued the old canvas onto the new framework. DeFeo added an armature of wooden beams to *The White Rose,* which gave rigidity to the rays.

Still unsatisfied, she felt that the painting had become too architectural. Her image needed a more organic and biological feeling. She added wire, beads, and pearls, materials she used in her jewelry business, onto the sur-

face; these she used to superimpose a layer of organic shapes on top of the geometric patterns. The overlaying of effects made the painting flamboyant and "super-baroque." Instead of removing the objects she had added to the painting, she painted over them until they disappeared from sight.[42] Their presence, however, was felt in the textures they gave to the surfaces above them. The rational structure that she believed underlay all creation had disappeared under an accretion of emotional reactions. She had to pull back the painting to make it more classic in character. She felt an "absolute necessity to maintain the spirit and freshness of the abstract expressionist ideal—the spontaneity, let's say, and the growth of the image from one layer to the rest. But also I demand from myself and the images, too, a sense of refinement and exactitude."[43] To accomplish this, the painting she remembered "actually had to be carved and hacked." It had become a work of sculpture as well as painting. "It was done with a combination of building up and tearing back during every stage of the game." When she completed the painting, finally feeling that she had embodied a "unity of the opposite ideals," *The Rose* was nearly eleven feet high, nine feet wide, eight inches thick at points, and weighed an incredible 2,300 pounds.[44]

During the nearly seven years she worked and reworked this one image, DeFeo retreated from all exhibition. She turned down inquiries from a New York gallery following her exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. When her former classmate at Berkeley, Fred Martin, then chair of the exhibitions committee for the San Francisco Art Association, invited her to mount a one-person show, she declined as well, apologizing profusely and hoping he would not misunderstand, but she avowed, "I personally can't do it until I have completed a certain cycle of work. . . . I feel I must be able to understand my work . . . before I hang it up and hope the other people may see it as I do. In this sense, I perhaps place too much importance on the show. . . . As for the actual 'prestige-value' of the show goes—I can very easily give this up as it means little to me. So nothing is lost." Concerned that Martin might be

offended by her refusal, she wrote him another letter that confessed that the idea of the show put her "in some kind of fear of being judged by certain prevalent standards that have nothing to do with my paintings . . . our paintings have not been as much visual experiences as perhaps they are 'ideas' on canvas. . . . Somehow abandoning the show also abandoned my ego fears. I was not ashamed of being egocentric but being in a confused state, I wondered if I was losing respect for the 'me' element—which appeared a tremendous threat to my whole motive to paint. . . . I have constant doubts that I will ever be able to satisfy myself in both aspects—that of the personal and the visual . . . at least I can blunder along—as now, at last, no one cares again."

The intersection of private vision and public value was a torturous contradiction for DeFeo. In a third letter to Martin, she observed that "I used to think that *first of all* art was personal and *secondly* it possibly could extend to greatness if the individual were great, which I'm sure I'm not." Then half-retracting her modesty, she added, "I used to think so, oddly enough." Commenting on the ambitions of her friends, DeFeo expressed amazement at how strongly convinced they were that their paintings were important. "They really feel they are struggling to add to the art history of this century and the personal glory plays a part—but it isn't so shallow as *that,* I don't think, I can't dream that it could be that small, I'm sure it isn't." Success seemed to freeze ideas as artists repeated formulas that had achieved a positive response; therefore success barred the path to transcendence. The artist should remained secluded until she had created the best she hoped she could do. DeFeo returned to her concern for "the personal thing," which, although unique to her, she still felt "potentially extends beyond my personal ego."[45]

DeFeo's isolation was sustained by a select group of friends convinced that she was indeed creating something extraordinary. Dorothy Miller, curator at the Museum of Modern Art, followed the progress of the work and promised to purchase it for the museum's permanent collection as soon as DeFeo completed it. Wally Hedrick encouraged her to stop making jewelry and live off

his salary. Her former high school art teacher, Lena Emery, and a collector, J. Patrick Lannan, provided her money for supplies. Fred Martin helped her out financially—and he hoped psychologically—by arranging for her to teach an occasional class at the California School of Fine Arts. Walter Hopps from the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles sold her earlier work and sparked magazine interest in writing about her. The work in progress was published in *Holiday* magazine in 1961, and in 1962 President Kennedy (or his staff), in an article for *Look* magazine, "The Artist in America," selected DeFeo and *The Rose* to illustrate what was best in contemporary American art.[46] In 1964, after becoming curator of the Pasadena Art Museum, Hopps began planning two major shows: the first retrospective of the career of dada pioneer Marcel Duchamp and a one-artist exhibit for DeFeo to feature her finally completed *The Rose.*

When the painting was moved in 1965 for exhibition at the Pasadena Art Museum, the movers had to cut out a section of the front wall to her apartment and bring in a crane to lift and lower the work into the moving van. DeFeo laughingly referred to *The Rose* as the "ultimate abstract expressionist auto-da-fé."[47] Bruce Conner, who made a wistful, sweetly sad film on the moving of the painting (*The White Rose,* 1965), described DeFeo's quest as the most heroic of their generation; she had completely subsumed her personality into a single creative act so that the painting reproduced but harmonized the contradictions that moved within her. By this he hastened to add that DeFeo had achieved something few artists had: the painting was physically alive; it was like confronting a living, breathing being.

Except for a thin crust on the surface, the paint had not hardened. This was a common feature to San Francisco painting, but the monumental size of *The Rose* carried a wet surface to another level. The work quivered as people approached it. Viewers could read in the changes on the image's surface a reaction to their own physical, and by extension emotional, effects upon the world. *The Rose* was a physical being, responding to the world around it. The painting recapitulated the action painting aesthetic of projecting the

painter's self onto the canvas, but in a baroque elaboration which made the visual image secondary to the visceral reaction evoked within the viewer. DeFeo had manufactured a being that confronted the world, demanding a response, but it was as unstable as a real life.[48]

The painting grew as an effort to bridge a series of interlinked conflicts within DeFeo's life: the tensions of her family background, with pleasure and duty pitted as opposites, and DeFeo's own inability to choose between the models her parents left her, seeing in both father and mother appealing elements. She entered the art profession partly because her teachers presented the aesthetic process as a way of harmonizing the conflicts she felt through a combination of individual freedom and craft discipline. Her aesthetic then was to present the interlocking of chaos and order, so that one need not choose. DeFeo recognized she existed in a competitive social environment, but she refused to participate on that level. The confraternity had started as a utopian community. In her heart, she still lived in the undifferentiated paths of youth. Her heroic effort rallied her friends around her and allowed a sense of community to cohere. The inner center that her work tried symbolically to materialize preserved a community that had to disintegrate as its members aged. While DeFeo's struggle was not against commerce, her attempt to create a material basis to the utopian dream allows us to understand more clearly the nature of Brown's reaction to Staempfli: commerce was the face of antiutopia, introducing through the assignment of rewards and distinctions differentiation and hierarchy among the brethren. Commerce meant the acceptance of external authority, a center that came from without and therefore could only be experienced as arbitrary and dictatorial.

The Rose was predicated on the idea that everything proceeded from a single, interior point from which emanated an undeniable, because subjective, mystic sense of order and value. Just as the painting was fragile, DeFeo was unable to find the center that resolved contradiction into perpetual harmony. Her ideal could not be achieved in the mystic form she sought. The watching eyes remained only one's own, with all one's inner crises still operative.

DeFeo stopped painting for six years after completing *The Rose.* She was deeply depressed and disillusioned, her marriage broke up, and she suffered severe lead poisoning from the quantities of lead white paint she had used. Her teeth fell out, and DeFeo was subject to frequent infections and extreme exhaustion well into the 1970s. Yet she also recalled this period away from painting as a second adolescence that gave her a greater sense of humor in facing the disappointments of her life. By 1968 the canvas and wooden frame support for *The Rose* showed signs of buckling under its ton of weight, and she thought her effort might disintegrate. Bruce Conner organized a campaign in 1972 to save the painting, which conservators decided to sheathe in liquid plastic, linen, and paper and then encase in a plaster truss. The painting with its protective covering weighed two and a half tons and lost the shimmering responsiveness that had made it seem alive. The San Francisco Art Institute provided a home for *The Rose* and stored it in the wall of the school's conference room.

Immature enthusiasm bred ambition for worldly success, but the steps taken to achieve that success generated a crisis of conscience. In Brown's case, the immediate cause was external, the attempt of her dealer to dictate the nature of her work. In DeFeo's case, the cause was internal, a questioning whether her work could possibly live up to the expectations that she and her friends had set. She was proud of the work she had done as a painter. She could speak with confidence as a visual thinker, but her work had failed to hold together the imaginary community brought into being by the arts. The cases of both DeFeo and Brown manifest subjective fissure. Brown and DeFeo experienced ambition and ideals as contradictory, instead of resolving into a structured mature, professional life. This led to withdrawal from the "art world," which did not necessarily mean cessation of production. Withdrawal allowed for the construction of a sense of self that could function within self-determined goals. A return to the art world thus followed the crisis, as the artist created work that reflected more closely the ideals and ambitions that had brought her into the art world in the first place. The artist

turned from forms that established the initial reputation and constructed mental categories valuing myth over society, the timeless over the "time-full," freedom over constraint. This resolution was achieved by transferring hopes from worldly to otherworldly success, which allowed the individual to proceed with energy and force since ambition had not been negated but sublated.

I have used two women painters to illustrate a pattern, yet I could as easily have taken male artists and poets as examples, so widespread is this life course in mid-century California. "I want to be anonymous," Bob Kaufman told scholars seeking him out for information on the beat movement. This African-American poet who came to San Francisco in 1957 after discharge from the army was the first person to use the word *beatnik* in print, in his *Abomunist Manifesto,* published by Lawrence Ferlinghetti in 1958. Sales of his first three chapbooks surpassed even Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems,* and Kaufman was for a short five years San Francisco's best-known beat poet, a popular figure who held court with his wife, poet Eileen Kaufman, and their toddler at the Coexistence Bagel Shop. He was invited to teach at Harvard in 1963 and New Directions offered him a contract for two collections of his poetry. Then President Kennedy died. Three days later, Kaufman took a ten-year vow of silence, a self-mortification in which he assumed personal responsibility for the tragedy he saw falling on the nation. For a decade he neither spoke in public nor wrote, maintaining his vow until February 1973, when at a gathering commemorating the withdrawal of the last American soldiers from Vietnam he improvised several poems as part of the celebration.[49]

Jay DeFeo's husband Wally Hedrick refused to exhibit his paintings in museums and commercial galleries during the course of the war. He withdrew from full-time teaching and opened a fix-it shop in the suburban community of San Geronimo, while designing costumes and sets for the politically radical San Francisco Mime Troupe. Hedrick continued to paint, but turned down most requests for exhibits even after the war ended. Museum shows, he thought, focused attention on work that was in his past. Curators

did not know how to set up a confrontation between artist and audience that would help the artist discover how to solve his current problems. All a show could do, he declared, "was get me in the magazines, and maybe I'd make more money. Then I would just have too much to drink. . . . I know what happens when I get a little money. So I don't need that stuff."[50]

Assemblagist and filmmaker Bruce Conner came to feel imprisoned by the art he produced:

> The object gets my name on them. And it gets to a point where it exists as a personality. If it becomes historical it exists as a weapon to me as a person, as an artist. It can be used against me. It can be used to destroy me as an artist, a living artist.[51]

Conner rebelled against the fetishized art commodity by bringing his dealer in New York, Charles Alan, boxes of found objects simply thrown together without any particular order:

> I remember I went into the Alan Gallery in 1963. I had a cardboard box which had eight or nine objects in it. I said, "This is a new work." He said, "What do you do with it?" I said, "That's it. It's that box." "You mean you exhibit the box?" I said, "You can if you want to. Or you can take them all out and put them all over the room, or put them in your pocket and walk home, or go to a movie, or put them on a shelf. But you have to remember that they all go together." Charles Alan couldn't deal with that.[52]

Conner's box of objects was as much personal insult against Charles Alan as philosophical reflection on the nature of what made some objects "art." We might recall Joan Brown responding to her success by crafting *Fur Rat* with its hidden nails ready to lacerate the owner's fingers. Wally Hedrick created a sensation in 1958 when one of his mechanical assemblages "attacked" a woman at the San Francisco Museum of Art's annual Christmas party. Three years before, Hedrick had started making sculptures from broken radio and

television sets, refrigerators, and washing machines he found in junkyards. He painted over the surfaces with thick layers of impasto and gesso which incorporated the work into the aesthetic of action painting. He was particularly pleased when he could fix an abandoned appliance sufficiently that at least some piece of it would work and he could turn his assemblages into moving sculptures. His *Xmas Tree,* built out of "two radios, two phonographs, flashing lights, electric fans, saw motor—all controlled by timers, hooked so [they] would cycle all these things," was featured at the 1958 San Francisco Museum of Art annual holiday show. One of the record players played "I Hate to See Christmas Come Around." At the opening, which Hedrick refused to attend, he set a timer so that the piece "suddenly began flashing its lights, honking its horns, and playing its records." One woman who was standing next to the piece when it suddenly turned on found her fur coat tangled into it and then received an electrical shock.

> It caused quite a sensation not because of its artistic merit, but because it attacked this lady, which I thought was very nice. . . . I wasn't making it as an art thing. I was more interested in making a "thing," and if it attacked people—well, I guess I knew it was going to attack. . . . I knew it would probably attack because I laid the trap. So it entertained me; I thought the evening was a success.[53]

Critics concluded that the group of young artists were neodada, and some like Hedrick, for whom Marcel Duchamp was a hero, enjoyed the idea that they were continuing in an accepted and honored art tradition of rebellion. But were the insults that Brown, Conner, and Hedrick crafted assaulting art as a system of meaning, or where they directed against the personalities with which artists had to engage if they wanted to exhibit and sell? Their actions were declarations of personal independence, statements saying that their participation in the professional art world was no longer giving satisfaction, that they would leave to pursue other activities, equally creative, but outside the professional boundaries encasing the "visual arts" in the 1960s. Their insults

did not intend to explode those boundaries, and indeed accepted them as facts of life that an individual working within the system was unable to change. Action was aimed at personal empowerment, creating a distance between the artist and an environment that was only partially escapable, while protesting the loss of community, the family of the young, swallowed up in its march into maturity.

In 1965 Conner "dropped out" of the art world. For several years he developed the light show concept at the Avalon Ballroom, utilizing film clips, slides, and reflectors to create a visual accompaniment to the rock music. It was a performance art that could be repeated but never reproduced, and therefore unlike gallery art or the music he was accompanying, immune to the basilisk eye of commerce. He then worked with Dennis Hopper developing motion pictures. He influenced the decor and editing style of Hopper's 1969 film *Easy Rider.*[54] In 1974 Conner felt that he did not have an aggressive enough personality for Hollywood and returned to exhibition in galleries. His reputation remained strong among those who remembered his work from the early 1960s, but withdrawal had reduced him to a figure of historical interest. He preferred to be a marginalized figure, "operating with concerns outside those of most other artists of his day."[55] When asked for photographs of himself for catalogs or magazine articles, he sent in pictures of other people. He enjoyed submitting multiple biographies to reference works:

> I used to have two totally different biographies—one in *Who's Who in American Art* and one in *Who's Who.* In *Who's Who in American Art,* I was born in India and went to exotic schools. Then I got tired of getting letters in the mail that asked me to update my biography. So I sent them back saying "deceased." *Who's Who in American Art* absolutely believed that and never put me back again. And then they sent me a form for information for *Who Was Who.* I updated all the information way beyond the time I died and sent it to *Who Was Who* and they listed me. Then about

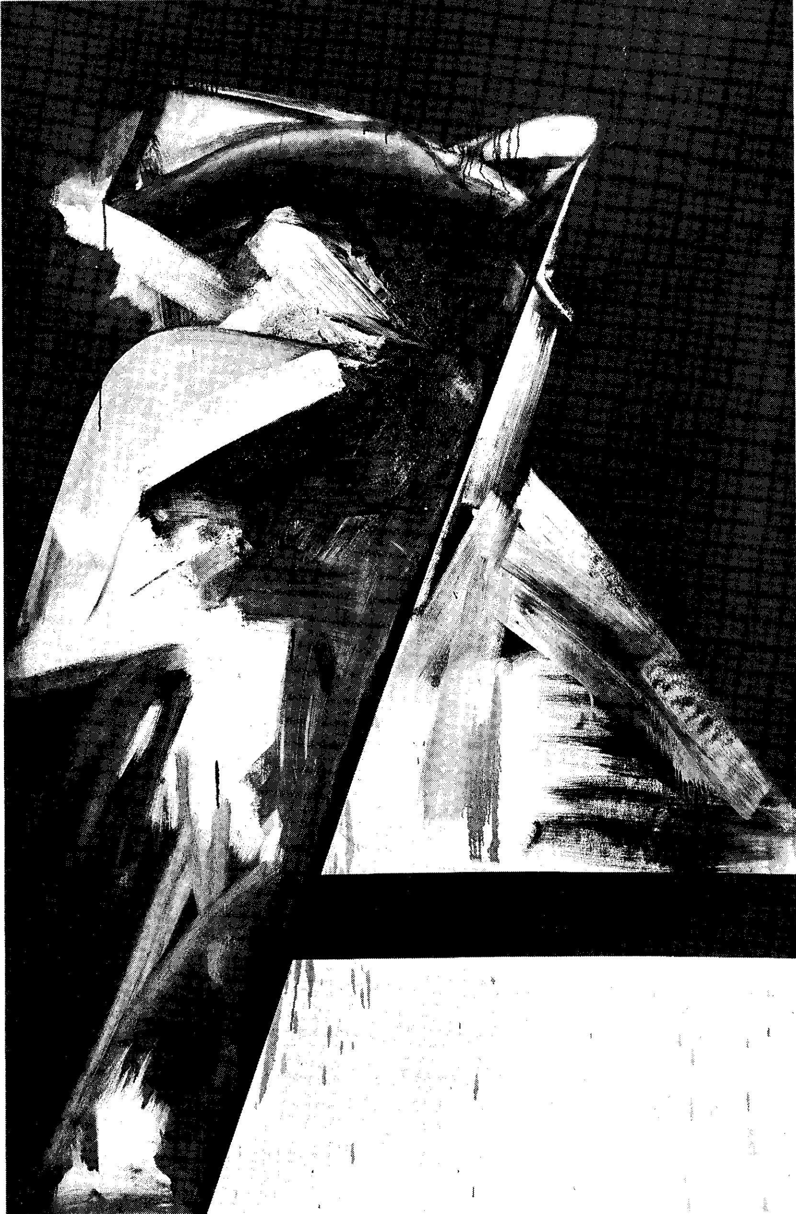
ten years ago I got another letter that they wanted to include me in *Who's Who*—I'd been recommended. Now I am in *Who Was Who* as a dead artist and *Who's Who* as a living film maker.[56]

Folly and Utopia

Insults are just as easily a sign of immature frustration at the inability to resolve the contradictions of social relations. Similarly the neurotic attachment to one painting. The argument that withdrawal was a path to maturity seems to hold only for Brown, who successfully negotiated a transition from commerce to the university. Yet the challenge each of these artists faced was how to remain productive, and their responses were directed to that goal. Each continued producing, creating new and more unusual work after their crises. DeFeo had the most profound physical and emotional breakdown, but in 1970 she resumed painting. Under doctor's orders, she could no longer work in oil paint, so she began using acrylics on paper. *The Rose* had only replicated, not resolved, the conflict between order and chaos. Her post-1970 paintings, each one readable and precise, powerfully succeeded in fusing her interests in classicism and spontaneity (fig. 17).

In 1971 David Meltzer complained to a long-time friend about the trivialization of avant-garde ideas that seemed to accompany success:

> [Life] zips by so fast, if you fart, it's gone. It was and is and will be always beyond words, which is why we write and excite them into being, which is why we throw our eyes all over canvas and paper and piss rainbows into anywhere knowing it is all perfect. . . . The ones who worship at art's poor used car lots are lost in a world they never made; they sniff at it and think by owning art they are free of its meanings and responsibilities and joys. We were always right to keep those messages around us at all times because



17. Jay DeFeo, *Summer Image (for My Mother),* oil and acrylic on paper, 1983. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Harry W. Anderson. Photo: Lee Fatheree.

> those images and works are our amulets, our deepest magics, coming from all kinds of souls in all kinds of knowing and illumination as well as pain and black-hole-in-space density. . . . Our houses are temples, shuls of the most divine reiteration; we can not auction our lives, our magics, our truth.[57]

Long after their activities had generated attention and a market, many in the generation of the 1950s looked back upon its formation and saw a total separation from the arts as commercial ventures. In MacAgy and Still, we saw opposition to art serving an instrumental function subsidiary to other aspects of society. Meltzer's anger hardened into what appeared to be an absolute contradiction between creativity and the market. In another letter, Meltzer returned to the theme as he blamed his colleagues for having surrendered to ambition for worldly success by turning themselves into stereotypes:

> I am so fed up, I mean I am fat to vomiting, with precious sacred cowardness & myth-making. I am sick of men that are poets but pee crookedly. . . . I am sick of shamans, hacks & art pushers. . . . Who loves the static man, the man stopped, years ago, copping a safe hole & rotting there?[58]

Meltzer lamented that somehow the original project that artists and poets had embarked upon in the 1950s had gone awry. They had ceased to sing "true songs," coming from the heart in one-on-one communication with reader and viewer so that their work would begin a process of conversion, saying to themselves, "Oh, I never thought of it that way. I never saw it quite like that. Yes, now I see." This art was to create a revolution, to replace the babble of destructive, contentious voices with harmony and productivity.[59] Their generation had the chance to do this, he thought, because creative people had separated from commerce and formed a community. Their ideal of artistic communication was dialogue, the exchange of viewpoints with the goal of achieving some form of higher truth. Jack Hirschman's lines, written to Dean

Stockwell in 1971 to thank the actor for hospitality while the San Francisco-based poet was in Los Angeles for a reading, evoked the transcendent goals that creative people shared:

> like the chorus we've always
> made of each other's dialogues,
> multiplying through the long
> distant intimacy of this town
> on the hill of a high,
>   the intonations on a phone,
> the steady help toward
> some quiet dignity quite close
> to the way nature itself works[60]

By the 1970s competition for shows, jobs, and publishers had taken them in many directions. Choices were made, and those who lived through them might view the sundering as a reduction. They could look back upon the ambition and ideals of their youth and see the hope that young artists and poets could create an audience by offering truthful statements about living in America and a way of resolving the contradictions of modern, urban life. "It was a 'we,'" Joan Brown emphasized. The members of the artistic community in the 1950s saw themselves collectively. "It's been an 'I' ever since. But anybody who's really being straight or honest about it *from that time* really should say 'we'" (my emphasis).[61]

As we have seen, this group of artists' memories of their careers revealed crisis and inner conflict. Participants clung to images of youthful rebellion in preference to those of integration and assumption of power.[62] Reactions against the type of maturity that seemed available short-circuited their rise to authority. Their confusions, however, generated an alternative model for maturation, one based on autonomy and transfer of ambitions to "other-worldly" concerns. They redefined personal excellence to give priority to moral ends, which inevitably in a world of permanent war seemed like a

dream state. In his 1965 poem "Kral Majales," written after he had been expelled from Czechoslovakia, Allen Ginsberg defined the poet's ambition in terms that portrayed the poet as the "wise youth" whose pursuit of personal excellence was a socially essential task:

> And I am the King of May, which is the power of sexual youth,
> and I am the King of May, which is industry in eloquence and action in amour,
> and I am the King of May, which is long hair of Adam and the Beard of my own body
> and I am the King of May, which is Kral Majales in the Czechoslovakian tongue,
> and I am the King of May, which is old Human poesy, and 100,000 people chose my name
> . . . .
> And I am the King of May, that I may be expelled from my Kingdom with Honor, as of old,
> To shew the difference between Caesar's Kingdom and the Kingdom of the May of Man—
> and I am the King of May, the paranoid, for the Kingdom of May is too beautiful to last for more than a month[63]

Dare to be as much as you can, Ginsberg told his readers, and the enthusiasm of his language drew upon him the wrath of censors on both sides of the iron curtain. As always, he sang of his own small group of friends, but his ode affirmed the morality of student sit-ins to end segregation and racial discrimination. It affirmed resistance to the Vietnam War and three years later to the Soviet tanks occupying Prague. In the struggle against "conformity," poets helped reinscribe sharp we-they boundaries in a society that many, according to David Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd,* had come to see as a seamless, though articulated, organism in which orders had to be obeyed because they seemed to come from everywhere.[64]

The new inscription evaded social forms of organization to project symbolic imagery of death and rebirth as contending social realities. The sense of anticipation experienced in the community of youth peers combined with a feeling of liberation from the compromised lives of one's parents to give rebirth an active, psychophysical immediacy, the tangibility of which could not be denied by those who experienced it. Art, however, compromised by the expanding webs of commerce, could not sustain the dream. The ideals lived on in the ambitions of political and social resurrection that had accompanied personal choice as an ancillary justification. Youth, considered as an image of lost community, became identified with living in a particularly moral state. This maneuver denied the morality of other forces in society, ultimately making it impossible to confront them politically, since they were associated with the absurdity of parents. Opposing forces stood for death, an imagery that was confirmed by the reliance of the national government upon military solutions.[65]

Poets and artists also redefined the boundaries between public and private spheres by insisting upon public expression of experiences that had before been entirely personal. Their efforts brought resistance from the more conservative sectors of American society. In 1957 the United States Customs Office impounded a British printing of Ginsberg's "Howl" when it arrived at the harbor. Lawrence Ferlinghetti then used an American press to publish his edition. The San Francisco police department arrested him and his manager, Shigeyoshi Murao, for violating antiobscenity laws. The judge directed acquittal, but the case confirmed for those, like Manuel Neri, who did not venture to the scatological or erotic extremes of expression, a sense of danger and risk to the artistic project.

It is in this context of a broad-based, apolitical movement to mobilize the agonal spirit and the beginnings of resistance by cultural conservatives that public fascination with the beats arose in 1958. Artists and poets had symbolic importance in the developing contention because they so easily represented both the positive and the dangerous sides of individualism. It was this

contention that imposed stereotypes upon discussion of the avant-garde, even in their own self-presentations.

The contradiction of private freedom and public expression generated a variety of career crises that resulted often in even more powerful art, but also, inevitably, in a sharp curtailment of who saw the work. If we give these artists their due as people who chose their destinies, the impact that many California artists might have made upon the national understanding of contemporary art was limited by their concept of art as spiritual journey that called into being a self independent of the mundane world. The ability to work was the only utopia they could realize. Productivity suspended momentarily the conflict between ambition and autonomy that permeated their relationships with the world. A sense of community decayed as the postwar generation matured and differentiated. Even success could be a mixed blessing because it established conditions within which the work proceeded. As Conner's games with biographical dictionaries allegorized, the happy few were dead to the world and alive to their own creativity.

What was left then was to operate as a dream substratum within American society, influencing without being recognized, exploring the possibility of otherness, occupying the spaces disdained by those who sought overt power and influence. The utopian and the foolish intermingle so closely that it was, and remains, easy to dismiss their activities as irrelevant. But the foolish, an aspect of rejecting the practicality confronting a person, might be the basis for winning out to an alternative standard of practicality. *Might.* Nothing is certain in the never-attained struggle to achieve the utopian. The rejection of the world as it exists flings one into an otherworldly limbo between heaven and hell. By choosing retreat, the avant-garde transformed themselves into a reservoir of pure tendentiousness that would become increasingly attractive and relevant as the mechanisms for extracting consensus in American society collapsed. Like *The Rose,* the avant-garde of the beat era was less a definable image than a response waiting to be activated.

Notes

Abbreviations

AAA	Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
BL	Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
CLP	Kenneth Rexroth. *The Collected Longer Poems of Kenneth Rexroth.* New York: New Directions, 1968.
CSP	Kenneth Rexroth. *The Collected Shorter Poems of Kenneth Rexroth.* New York: New Directions, 1966.
DSC	Department of Special Collections, University Library, University of California, Los Angeles.
OHP/UCLA	Oral History Program, University of California, Los Angeles.
PAS	Public Affairs Services, University Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.
PT	Kenneth Rexroth. *The Phoenix and the Tortoise.* Norfolk: New Directions, 1944.
ROHO	Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
SFAA	San Francisco Art Association Archives, Library, San Francisco Art Institute.
WOW	Kenneth Rexroth. *World Outside the Window: The Selected Essays of Kenneth Rexroth.* New York: New Directions, 1987.

Chapter 7

1. Joan Brown, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Joan Brown, Session #3," interviewed 1975 by Paul Karlstrom, AAA, 25.

2. "North Beach Poet-Makers," *Holiday* (June 1958): 55–62; Charlotte Willard, "Women of American Art," *Look* 24 (27 September 1960): 70 (the article placed Brown next to Georgia O'Keeffe, Louise Nevelson, and Claire Falkenstein); "Joan Brown," *Cosmopolitan* (November 1961); "Joan Brown," *Glamour* 30 (March 1962); "*Mademoiselle*'s Annual Merit Awards," *Mademoiselle* 55 (January 1963): 30–35. Dorothy Walker in the *San Francisco News* predicted a stunning career for Joan Brown in 1957, observing that besides having abundant talent, Brown had flair for

self-publicity. See Dorothy Walker, "Painters Shy? These Youngsters Invited Critics To Joint Exhibit," *San Francisco News,* 26 January 1957, in Joan Brown artist file, SFAA.

3. Philip Leider, "Joan Brown: Her Work Illustrates the Progress of a San Francisco Mood," *Artforum* 1 (June 1963): 28–31. In a dissenting view on Brown, but one based on similar assumptions, John Coplans argued Brown's paintings were parodies of Clyfford Still and Mark Rothko. See "Westcoast Art: Three Images," *Artforum* 1 (June 1963): 25.

4. "Joan Brown: Interview by Lynn Gumpert," in *Lynda Benglis, Joan Brown, Luis Jimenez, Gary Stephan, Lawrence Weiner: Early Work* (New York: The New Museum, 1982), 17.

5. Quoted in Brenda Richardson, *Joan Brown* (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1975), 24. Noel Neri's baby books, as well as the family photos and sketches that Brown used for her paintings of him, are preserved in the Joan Brown papers, AAA.

6. Brown, "Interview with Lynn Gumpert," 20.

7. For discussions of the status of representational art in the late 1960s and early 1970s, see Lawrence Alloway, "Notes on Realism," *Arts Magazine* 44 (April 1970): 26–27; Linda Nochlin, "The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law," *Art in America* 61 (September-October 1973): 54–61, and 61 (November-December 1973): 97–103; Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria," in *Other Criteria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 55–91; Sidney Tillim, "The Reception of Figurative Art: Notes on a General Misunderstanding," *Artforum* 7 (February 1969), 30–33. Positive critiques of Brown's later work appeared in 1978, when Marcia Tucker described her as a precursor of the New Image school then developing in New York in opposition to the hegemony of formalist thinking (see Introduction, *"Bad" Painting* [New York: New Museum, 1978]; see also Ronny H. Cohen, "Reviews: New York—Joan Brown," *Artforum* 20 [February 1982]: 89). Brown, however, suffered from being too closely identified with a regionalist school. In an article written after her death, Brooks Adams observed that Brown's Bay Area roots had made her seem peripheral and obscured the "international implications of her art" (Brook Adams, "Alternative Lives," *Art in America* 80 [January 1992]: 88).

8. CNM, "Joan Brown's Neo-Naives," *Artweek* 2 (10 July 1971): 3.

9. Andrée Marechal-Workman, "An Interview with Joan Brown," *Expo-See* (March-April 1985); Brown, "Interview with Lynn Gumpert," 19.

10. Ibid., 17.

11. Brown, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Joan Brown, Session #3," AAA, 22–23.

12. Brown's account squared neatly with David Riesman's depiction of the new "other-directed" service-providing middle class in *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), especially 19–25, 45–49.

13. Joan Brown, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Joan Brown," interviewed 1975 by Paul Karlstrom, AAA, 8, 16. Brown also felt that the antipathy she felt for the apartment was based on a premonition of her mother's suicide there in 1965. Interviews with artists and poets of Brown's generation tend to portray their childhoods in dark colors and troubled relationships with their parents. Yet the self-images as orphans are belied in occasional details that indicate ongoing relationships with the parents. The question of the nature of the relationships requires biographical investigation to determine what the case was in individual circumstances. The presence of a subjective motif in accounts by a relatively broad spectrum of individuals suggests that they augmented biography with a narrative theme that helped emphasize the idea of a generation embarked on a fundamental break with the past. Despite the rather negative picture Brown presented of her parents, they must have been somewhat open-minded, for they readily agreed to pay her tuition to the art school on what must have been very short notice. She transferred to the California School of Fine Arts days before she was to register for her classes at Lone Mountain College. Her mementos of Noel's childhood preserved in the AAA show that her son was christened, attended Sunday school, and was confirmed in the Catholic church.

14. Joan Brown, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Joan Brown, Session #2," interviewed 1975 by Paul Karlstrom, AAA, 17.

15. Hedrick, "Wally Hedrick Interview #1," AAA, 22–23. The structure of Kerouac's novel *On the Road* links loosely around Dean Moriarty's search for his missing father. That search is unsuccessful, but in the process Moriarty forges a brotherhood with the novel's narrator, Sal Valentine. See Erik Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*, 135–136, 167–169, where Erikson argued that maturation required separation from paternal authority. Generational confraternity offered a reasonable transition from dependency to autonomy. This contemporary view, presented as a general observation on the process of psychological maturation, suggests that relations between generations was a particular problem in the postwar period. Erikson, however, warned that the attempt to idealize school ties blocked further development to individual integrity and "generativity," that is, the ability to reproduce society through work that others value.

16. See Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*, 155–159, for discussion of age-group identifications and the development of competition. The central importance of peers in forming the "other-directed" personality was also a critical element in David Ries-

man's description of American middle-class culture. See Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd,* 69–77.

17. Brown, "Interview by Lynn Gumpert," 16, 19.

18. Brown, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Joan Brown," AAA, 37. See also Joan Brown, "In Conversation with Jan Butterfield," *Visual Dialog* 1 (December 1975, January-February 1976): 15; untranscribed audiotape of "Funk Art Symposium," 22 September 1967, University Art Museum, Berkeley, tape at AAA.

19. Brown, "Interview by Lynn Gumpert," 16.

20. Brown, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Joan Brown," AAA, 19–21, 34–40, 42, 48–49, 65–66.

21. Brown, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Joan Brown, Session #2," AAA, 35.

22. Brown, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Joan Brown," AAA, 40.

23. "Tape-Recorded Interview with Neil Sinton," 15 August 1974, AAA, untranscribed.

24. For a viewpoint that unequivocally embraced the idea of an "essentially feminine attitude" toward art, see Anaïs Nin, "Cornelia Runyon," *Artforum* 2 (August 1963): 54. Runyon, Nin argued, "began with a respect for what the sea or earth had already begun to form in the stone [Runyon used for her sculpture]. She contemplated and meditated over them, permitting them to reveal the inherent patterns they suggested. She never imposed her own will over the image tentatively begun by nature. She discovered and completed the image so that it became visible and clear. She assisted the birth of chaotic masses into recognizable forms. . . . In this way, her way, what came through was not some abstraction torn from its basic roots, its textures, its organic growth, but something her tender maternal intuitive hands allowed to grow organically without losing its connection with the earth or sea. . . . Her work, I believe, is the opposite of an act of will."

25. Brown, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Joan Brown, Session #2," AAA, 22. At the same time, Brown angrily defended herself against accusations that promiscuity had advanced her career. She was certain other women artists, jealous of her success, were the source of these rumors.

26. Quoted in Brenda Richardson, *Joan Brown,* 28. *Fur Rat* also reflects Brown's association with the Rat Bastard Protective Association, so one can read the piece as a portrait of the bohemian artist in opposition to the media stereotype of the beats.

27. Brown, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Joan Brown," AAA, 33–34.

28. See Nancy Azara, "Artists in Their Own Image," *Ms.* 1 (January 1973): 56–60; Lucy Lippard, "Household Images in Art," *Ms.* 1 (March 1973): 22–25.

29. Brown, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Joan Brown, Session #2," AAA, 49,

51–52, 54–56. She also complained that the feminist art movement denied the achievements of women who had made careers for themselves prior to 1970. She noted that Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago claimed that the art movements of the 1950s were entirely male and that the Ferus, Six, and Dilexi galleries had never shown women artists. Brown then recalled offhand a dozen women, including herself, Jay DeFeo, Nell Sinton, Deborah Remington, and Cameron, who had had several successful shows at each of these galleries. Brown ignored those aspects of feminist arguments that focused on the marginalization of feminine experience and arts developed by women, such as quilts (see Miriam Schapiro, *Art: A Woman's Sensibility* [Valencia: California Institute of the Arts, 1975]). Brown's position on feminism is a critical marker of the timing of her entrance into the art profession. She began her career at a time when its features were still undifferentiated on the West Coast and a woman could construct a degendered imaginary of art as spiritual journey to find personal autonomy. Women entering art after 1965 encountered a more structured profession, and consideration of their experiences as women offered a more open, autonomous path for the creation of meaning outside of established sets of discourse. See interviews with Miriam Schapiro, Rachel Rosenthal, and Josine Ianco-Starrels, AAA, for examples of how women entering the profession in the 1960s gravitated to feminism as a system explaining their position *within* the art world, rather than looking to an ideology of aesthetics as a liberation from their position in the world at large.

30. Brown, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Joan Brown, Session #3," AAA, 11.

31. Ibid., 24, 25.

32. Jay DeFeo, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Jay DeFeo (1) at the Artist's Home, Larkspur, California," interviewed 1975 by Paul J. Karlstrom, AAA, 2–6. She extended the interior division she used to characterize herself to her mixed ethnic background. Her father was Italian, her mother Austrian, and she felt her moods oscillated between the Germanic and the Latin. DeFeo also recalled spending much of her time alone as a child and adolescent.

33. Ibid., 3.

34. Jay DeFeo, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Jay DeFeo (2) at the Artist's Home," interviewed 1975 by Paul J. Karlstrom, AAA, 5.

35. Brown, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Joan Brown," AAA, 60, 65.

36. Irving Blum, "At the Ferus Gallery," interviewed 1976 by Joann Phillips, 1978 and 1979 by Lawrence Weschler, OHP/UCLA, 161–162; Edward Kienholz, "Los Angeles Art Community," OHP/UCLA, 118–119.

37. Philip Lamantia, untitled, *Semina* 4 (1959).

38. Kienholz said that for years he thought that the painting's title was "Death

Throes." He identified her trouble with the work as the convulsions of a dying ideal to which she clung to desperately (Kienholz, "Los Angeles Art Community," OHP/ UCLA, 119).

39. DeFeo, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Jay DeFeo (1)," AAA, 19.

40. See Six Gallery files, Ackerman Library, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, for exhibition announcements.

41. "A Discussion Between Sir Avid Penultimate and Knute Stiles about Wally Hedrick," in *Rolling Rock Renaissance: San Francisco Underground Art, 1945–1968* (San Francisco: Intersection/Glide Urban Center, 1968). Reflecting on her marriage to Hedrick, DeFeo complained that they had lived entirely within the insular community of artists and poets. "Wally never took me anywhere in the whole time we were married where there wasn't some kind of a thing where he could perform. Not even once out to dinner in ten years, and that's pretty tough" (DeFeo, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Jay DeFeo (2)," AAA, 24). Stiles's image of Penelope creating the stories of her family and community by weaving echoes one of the major themes of Joanne Kyger's first book of poetry, *The Tapestry and the Web* (San Francisco: Four Seasons, 1965).

42. At the time, William Waldren's paintings created by pouring buckets of paint over chicken wire–reinforced canvases were much praised on the West Coast. See *Artforum* 1 (June 1962): 8–9, for a typical review.

43. Jay DeFeo, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Jay DeFeo (3) at the Artist's Home, Larkspur, California," interviewed 1976 by Paul J. Karlstrom, AAA, 25.

44. Ibid., 6–13. See also "Notes on *The Rose*," prepared by J. Kelemen for Merrill Greene, *Art as a Muscular Principle: 10 Artists and San Francisco* (South Hadley, Massachusetts: Mount Holyoke College, 1975).

45. Jay DeFeo to Fred Martin, five undated letters, ca. 1959, in Fred Martin papers, AAA.

46. "Jay DeFeo, *The White Rose*," *Holiday* (May 1961): 34–35; John F. Kennedy, "The Artist in America," *Look* 26 (18 December 1962): 120. See also "New Talent U.S.A.: Painting," *Art in America* 49 (Spring 1961): 30–31.

47. DeFeo, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Jay DeFeo (3)," AAA, 26.

48. Conner, "Interview of Bruce Conner," AAA, 18. See also Douglas M. Davis, "Miss DeFeo's Awesome Painting Is Like Living Things Under Decay," *National Observer* 8 (14 July 1969): 12. As of 1993, new conservation efforts seek to restore *The Rose* to its original condition.

49. Raymond Foye, Editor's Note to Bob Kaufman, *The Ancient Rain: Poems 1956–1978* (New York: New Directions, 1981), ix; obituary notice for Bob Kaufman,

San Francisco Chronicle, 14 January 1986. Eileen Kaufman oversaw the production of the first of the planned New Directions books, *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness* (1965), as well as another chapbook of previously unpublished material for City Lights Press, *The Golden Sardine* (1967). Bob Kaufman refused to help promote either book or to provide new material for any publisher.

50. Hedrick, "Wally Hedrick Interview #1," AAA, 44–45.

51. Conner, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Bruce Conner," 8–9.

52. Ibid., 14.

53. Wally Hedrick, "Wally Hedrick Interview #2," interviewed 1974 by Paul Karlstrom, AAA, 7–10. See also *San Francisco Chronicle,* 12 December 1958, clipping in Hedrick papers, AAA.

54. Hopper recently reiterated his debts to Conner in his introduction to *Bruce Conner: Assemblages, Paintings, Drawings, Engraving Collages, 1960–1990* (Santa Monica: Michael Kohn Gallery, 1990). See also Stefania Pertoldi, *Il Mito del viaggio in Easy Rider e Zabriskie Point* (Udine: Campanotto Editore, 1987), 145–154.

55. See Frank Gettings, *Different Drummers* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 13.

56. "A Conversation with Bruce Conner and Robert Dean," in *Bruce Conner: Assemblages, Paintings, Drawings, Engraving Collages, 1960–1990.*

57. David Meltzer to Bob Alexander, undated, ca. early 1970s, Bob Alexander papers, AAA.

58. Meltzer to Alexander, undated, ca. 1977, Bob Alexander papers, AAA.

59. David Meltzer, "Golden Gate: Introduction," in *The San Francisco Poets,* 3–4.

60. Jack Hirschman, "The Crickets," holograph in Bob Alexander papers, AAA.

61. Brown, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Joan Brown, Session #2," AAA, 17. Compare Lawrence Lipton in *The Holy Barbarians* (New York: Julian Messner, 1959). "*We* is what this generation is all about, whether you call it beat or disaffiliated or anything else. *We* is what its books are about, the name of all those characters in those books and what those characters do and say. Everything that happens to them happens to *us*" (p. 48).

62. Generations that claim to initiate fresh starts, Lawrence Lipton thought, put supreme value upon the appearance of youthful behavior (*The Holy Barbarians,* 91).

63. Allen Ginsberg, "Kral Majales," in *The Postmoderns,* 190.

64. Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd,* 236–241.

65. See Kenneth Rexroth, "The Students Take Over," in WOW, for a discussion of the relationship of the new student movement to politics and an existential quest to

live in a moral state. However, the importance existentialist writers placed on the finitude of life circumscribed their impact upon a generation intent on extending the condition of youth indefinitely.