

**Dynamics of Politicization in the Twentieth-Century U.S. Poetry Field**

**by**

**Barış Büyükokutan**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(Sociology)  
in The University of Michigan  
2010**

**Doctoral Committee:**

**Professor George P. Steinmetz, Chair**

**Professor Howard A. Kimeldorf**

**Professor Alan M. Wald**

**Professor Michael D. Kennedy, Brown University**

**Professor Gisèle Sapiro, Centre national de la recherche scientifique**

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*To my mother*

## Acknowledgements

Many people helped me directly and indirectly over my eight years at Michigan. George Steinmetz, my principal advisor, allowed me to pursue my interests wherever they went while not failing to make some very fateful interventions that decisively shaped my work for the better. Howard Kimeldorf was always there when I needed his advice, always supportive, and always the first to respond to my queries. Gisèle Sapiro gave valuable advice during the research stage. Alan Wald and Michael Kennedy, the remaining members of my dissertation committee, were helpful and available. Müge Göçek, my former advisor, trusted my instincts; Peggy Somers gave much-needed support during the coursework stage; and Nükhet Sirman constantly reminded me of other perspectives that I could easily have forgotten as a result of disciplinary isolation. Poets Neeli Cherkovski, Diane di Prima, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Joanne Kyger, Ron Loewinsohn, and Gary Snyder kindly spent time with me, answering my numerous questions.

I owe much to Ann Arbor friends: Shpresa and Besnik Pula, Lai Sze Tso, Heejin Jun, Sadia Saeed, Atef Said, Camilo Leslie, Kristen Hopewell, Mariana Craciun, Maria Farkas, Ethan Schoolman, David Dobbie, Claire Decoteau, Hiro Saito, Avi Astor, Cedric Deleon, Matt Desan, Eric Eide, Marco Garrido, Alex Gerber, Kim Greenwell, Claire Whitlinger, Elizabeth Young, Meagan Elliott, and Dan Hirschman. The “Young Turks” of Ann Arbor – Mücahit Bilici, Burçak Keskin, Aslı Gür, Aslı Iğsız, Deniz Erkmen,

Cihan Tuğal – deserve special mention. Kurtuluş Gemici, Zeynep Atalay, and Halim Kucur provided me with different views of scholarship at times I needed them, and their friendship was invaluable in surviving life after leaving the most beautiful campus on earth. Conversations with Mehmet Saner were always predictably inspiring. Donna Champine, Tom Morson and Haju Sunim taught me to see life’s goals in a different, less oppressive way, and in so small degree contributed to the formation of my ideas. Friends in Istanbul – Ali Oğuz Meriç, Neşe Uyanık, and Ece Özbaylı in particular – kept me grounded in my hometown, rushed to my help every time I asked, and gave me something to look forward to outside publish-or-perish.

Finally, my family. My father, Ünal Büyükokutan, was sometimes more interested in my research than I was, a rare phenomenon in academia. My grandparents, Östen and Halil İbrahim Yaşar, supported me in a way that only they could. Lastly, my mother, Melek Yaşar, is the single greatest influence on this dissertation. She supported me in innumerable ways, always believed in me, and eventually became my best reader. This dissertation would have been impossible without her; it is dedicated to her.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Introduction

How can dissenting intellectuals – writers, artists, and scientists who lack direct access to economic or political power and who disagree strongly with the policies formulated by actors with these kinds of power – gain social, cultural and political influence, as a group or individually? While “policy intellectuals” – intellectuals who have internalized the reason of the state as their own *raison d’être* – and market intellectuals – those whose brand of cultural production follows and reinforces prevailing tastes and the preconceptions embedded in them rather than challenging them – have no problem in being heard and taken seriously, the expertise that other intellectuals can credibly claim in the public sphere has little relevance to the immediate concerns of life. Should they decide to attempt crossing this divide, furthermore, the resources they accumulate in the course of their pursuit of aesthetic and scientific excellence – assuming that this is a genuine desire – are of little help. As a result, this kind of intellectual typically has to choose between being perceived as “a full-time Cassandra, who was not only righteously unpleasant but also unheard” and giving up his/her ideals and becoming “just a friendly technician” (Said 1994:69).

At first sight, this is a question that has little importance or urgency for scholars of U.S. history and society. Either the American intellectual is a feeble creature that has

only himself/herself to blame for his/her situation, some scholars tell us and the public seems to concur, or the term is an outright oxymoron. The American intellectual, in this view, has achieved little in the public realm by comparison to his/her illustrious continental cousins, who can boast of a long string of victories and honorable defeats from the Dreyfus affair in France to the postcommunist revolutions of Eastern Europe. They have succumbed, more than any other group of intellectuals, to professionalization, academization, and the commodification of culture, giving up the defense of truth for a safe but sterile comfort zone.

And yet, I will argue throughout this dissertation, dissenting U.S. poets in the twentieth century commanded considerable influence in the public sphere on numerous occasions while building an art that, many believe, is bound for extinction in the age of high (or post-) modernity. They managed to hold on to their space as Stalinism and the state threatened them from two sides in the 1930s; gained a toehold in universities in the 1930s and 40s; and used this toehold to enrich poetry institutions and to increase the status of poetry among the arts. This “infrastructure of influence” allowed other poets to challenge mainstream culture in the 1950s and 1960s and to make it harder for the U.S. government to wage war in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s.

## **1.2. On the Death and Life of the American Intellectual**

The “death of the American intellectual” seems a valid thesis at the outset. Focusing on the group of predominantly Jewish writers who gathered around journals like *Partisan Review*, *Dissent*, and *Commentary* in the 1930s, Jacoby (1987) argues convincingly that these “New York intellectuals” reneged from their social function after

World War II, unable to resist cooptation by universities. The bohemia, which could have shocked them back to life, also failed to play its part and allowed the commodifying impulse of the “sixties counterculture” to take over. Edward Said makes an elegant case that professionalization, the attitude to think of intellectual work as something one does from nine to five, produces a drift to power and authority (1994:73-88), and the U.S. is, in all likelihood, the place where professionalization is valued most.

Jacoby and Said’s accounts are finely crafted interventions with much truth behind them. But a review of scholarly work about scholars and artists reveals that the theme of the death of the American intellectual falsely particularizes the U.S. case. Mourning over the passing of the intellectual is a trope in its own right, one that appears frequently in other places as well: Peter Bürger’s magnum opus, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1985), makes a case that real political engagement among European artists disappeared after 1945; Kurzman and Owens (2002) date the birth of the sociology of intellectuals in France to Julien Benda’s *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (1927), a scathing attack on members of the educated class for betraying their true calling; in modern France, Pierre Bourdieu repeatedly attacked the media hype produced around the so-called “new philosophers” not just because he disagreed sharply with the views of this group but also because in them he saw the decline of the French intellectual tradition. If the “American intellectual” is dead or dying, he/she will not be alone in the afterlife.

The fact that the sociology of intellectuals can be said to have started not with a statement of self-confidence on the part of intellectuals but with an elegy for the species raises another red flag. As Robbins (1990:xvi) argues, the “death of the intellectual” theme belongs not with the category of the obituary but with that of the jeremiad—its

problem, then, is immodesty. It hides the real achievements of the group in question by comparing them with a set of impossible standards which have their origin in a defining moment in history – the Dreyfus affair in France – that, I will argue in this dissertation, can hardly be fully repeated anywhere. To use Bourdieusian lenses, the death theme provides scholars in any intellectual field with the weapons they can use, consciously or not, in their struggles with their contemporaries for symbolic benefits. It allows any writer to use yesterday’s – possibly inflated – glories to create a standard that one’s rivals cannot realistically hope to attain, a standard that the writer is exempted from by virtue of his/her authorial position outside the text. As such, the conviction about the death of the intellectual is produced by intellectuals themselves—the widespread public cynicism regarding intellectuals is at least as much the work of “engaged” writers and artists as of those who have indeed chosen to retreat to ivy towers of various sorts. In an ironic twist, in other words, if laypeople find it difficult to take intellectuals seriously as public figures, it is partially because some intellectuals have, *as public figures*, successfully made a case against intellectuals.

These impossible standards dominate the public image of the intellectual, constituting what Karabel (1996:205) calls the moralist tradition. In the moralist tradition, the intellectual is someone who selflessly “speaks truth to power” (Benda 1927; Said 1994) and who therefore must be forever in exile (Said 1994); someone who is in the “humble and courageous service of truth” (Silone 1960); someone who guards humanity’s common cultural achievement from corruption (Cosser 1965, Nettl 1969, Parsons 1969, Shils 1972); someone whose job is to be stranger everywhere (Pels 1995, 1999). Far from being its opposite, it is this view that makes possible the other

widespread view of the intellectual as ineffectual parasite: If actually-existing writers, artists, and scientists seem so impotent, so selfish, so out of touch with reality, it is at least partially because so much potency, selflessness, and awareness are expected of them and because past failures to live up to these standards are covered over.

In place of the moralist tradition, Karabel calls for a sociological realism, an approach that replaces the normative focus above with an analytical one (1996:205-206). The realist approach is based on a “forthright acknowledgment that the goals professed (and, in most cases sincerely held) by intellectuals may diverge from their concrete social practices” (p. 206). The reason why intellectuals sometimes side with the disadvantaged in politics, then, should be sought “less in any ethical mission or responsibility intellectuals may claim to have than in the social positions they occupy and the interests that they strive to defend” (p. 207).

This dissertation shares this sensibility. I accept Karabel’s first premise above, and do not take it for granted that intellectuals’ discourse on their social mission always matches their actual practices. I also accept, on principle, that this mismatch is due not so much to the dishonesty of intellectuals as to the nature of the social milieus they inhabit, and my findings – especially those in chapters 4 and 5 – support this view. The second proposition above, however, I find to be based on a false dichotomy between ideal factors (“ethical mission or responsibility”) and material ones (“social positions” and “interests”). I stay closer to Weber and Bourdieu’s views here, and examine the ways in which the ethical claims of U.S. poets and the social positions they occupy are co-constituted.

All this, however, assumes a tentative agreement on what the word “intellectual”

means. But defining the intellectual, as Bauman (1992:11) notes, is an exercise in self-definition, and insofar as different intellectuals have different views, interests, and self-appointed “missions,” these self-definitions diverge. Nevertheless, analytical definitions of the intellectual fall in three broad categories. The first and most common one sees intellectuals as the producers of culture, where culture refers to abstract ideas that cannot be put in the service of instrumental action. According to Collins (1989:19), for instance, intellectuals are producers of decontextualized knowledge; according to Benda (1927), they are people who, in one way or another, say “My kingdom is not of this world;” according to Parsons (1969), they are people who concern themselves with symbolic systems in general and not with their particular functioning. In their recent review, Kurzman and Owens (2002) call this the “classless” view, in that intellectuals are here understood, following Mannheim (1985), to be committed not to the welfare of particular social groups but to universal ideas and principles. The second view, now in a lull, defines intellectuals as a privileged technocratic class (Bell 1973, Gouldner 1979, Konrad & Szelenyi 1979, Szelenyi 1982)—what Kurzman and Owens call the “class-in-itself” approach. In the third view, associated mostly with Marxist scholars, intellectuals are people who give their social classes homogeneity and the awareness of their economic, social and political functions (Gramsci 1971:5). Scholars who focus on postcolonial and other third-world intellectuals sometimes replace social class with other forms of belonging, so unlike Kurzman and Owens, who call this approach “class-bound,” I prefer to call it “group-bound.”

I find much that is disagreeable with the class-in-itself and the group-bound views. Regarding the former, it is striking that the architects of the “new class” thesis

have themselves changed their minds about the classness of intellectuals. Furthermore, this definition leaves out many categories that other scholars take as central, such as writers and artists. The latter, on the other hand, seem to me to assume what they need to prove, that is, the tight relationship between intellectuals and certain social categories. But I do not mean to suggest that the fate of intellectuals is always decided separately from the fate of such categories either, so I will start with the definition that says least in this matter. Following Lipset (1963:333), I will refer by “intellectual” to “all those who produce, circulate and apply culture,” where by culture I understand the whole symbolic dimension of human practices. As such, intellectuals in this broad sense may or may not produce coherent ideas, be sufficiently aware of the dynamics of their activities to be able to give an abstract, theoretical account of them, be self-consciously or “objectively” oppositional, or care much for their independence. These other features variably define, for particular historical audiences, the social duty of the intellectual – e.g. the Anglo-American notion of the “public intellectual” – to which particular intellectuals in Lipset’s sense may or may not feel the need to conform.

These approaches above are objectivistic in the sense that they take the intellectual as a thing-like entity rather than as a contingent label that helps create the powers attributed to its holders. Recently, Bourdieu and his associates challenged such approaches, arguing that the label of the intellectual is more important as the object of struggles for appropriation than as the technical referent of a distinct social category. In this perspective, the boundaries of the group are always in question, therefore objectivist approaches conflate, in Bourdieu’s words, the things of logic and the logic of things. As such, the task of the sociology of intellectuals is not so much to figure out once and for

all the relationship between an ontologically prior group and its ontologically prior environment. Rather, it is empirically studying the fault lines among people who claim the label in specific historical contexts. To denote the objective dimension of intellectual life, Bourdieu uses the term “cultural producer,” which he uses broadly. The term “intellectual,” on the other hand, he reserves for a specific historical era that starts with the Dreyfus affair, for people who overcome the antinomy between the autonomy of cultural production and engagement with political issues by importing the logic of artistic and scientific fields to the political field.

Bourdieu’s approach is a useful corrective to reifying intellectuals’ social practices as a “function,” a flaw that Marxist scholarship, structural functionalism, and the moralist tradition share. Nevertheless, the Bourdieusian sensibility can be reconciled with Lipset’s approach. If, with Bourdieu and many others, culture is understood to be an arena of conflict rather than the rarefied and incontestable apex of human accomplishment as Lipset’s generation took it to be, Bourdieu’s definition of cultural producer and Lipset’s definition of intellectual converge. The distinction Bourdieu makes between cultural producers and intellectuals in the Dreyfusard sense, I believe, is best translated into English with the couplet intellectual/public intellectual. This is for two reasons: First, I find the term “cultural producer” unwieldy, especially in a book-length study that may be expected to repeat it several hundred times unless a simpler term is found. Second, in the Anglophone world the real equivalent of the French *intellectuel*, with all the moral and historical sense embedded in the word, is increasingly “public intellectual.” The term is a redundancy in French, because the *intellectuel* is a public

creature by definition<sup>1</sup>. In the U.S., on the other hand, it is the self-definition of choice of those cultural producers who position themselves on the side of critical reason against its various others.

The area that the sociology of intellectuals covers grows considerably with this view—the term now applies to sociologists, physicists, engineers and clergy as well as artists, philosophers, and “men of letters;” U.S. poets in the twentieth century are certainly part of this crowd. The question of intellectuals’ sphere of influence, then, is a large subset of the question of how to gain admission to an elite under unfavorable circumstances.

Combining Bourdieu’s insights with Lipset’s also helps solve a major logistical problem for this study. U.S. poets may qualify as intellectuals in the broad sense, and some of them may qualify as public intellectuals, but how does one know a poet from someone who is not? Without a firm criterion for this question, the phrase “the sphere of influence of poets” is meaningless. Lipset’s definition provides such a criterion, of course, but it does so in such a way that makes the mastery of the research object impossible—throughout the twentieth century, thousands of people have “created, distributed, and applied” verse in the U.S., and accounting for the cultural and political practices of all of them is unthinkable. With Bourdieu’s intervention, the size of the research universe becomes manageable as writing and publishing poetry are no longer sufficient by themselves; also necessary is an audience consisting of peers who may or may not recognize people who undertake these practices as poets.

If, as in the case of U.S. poetry, no central body regulates the give and take of this kind of recognition by creating a generally valid certificate of expertise and imposing it

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Johan Heilbron for alerting me to this point.

on all actors, the soundest research strategy is finding a few actors who were clearly inhabitants of the world of poetry, identifying the actors they recognized, and repeating this procedure until it yields no more new nodes in the network thus formed. To accommodate the financial restraints and to make the research timeline reasonable, I modified this procedure by distinguishing, like Karabel, between core and peripheral locations in the intellectual world—that is, between those who “produce” more and those who “apply or distribute” more.

The line dividing core and peripheral locations is fuzzy, as some actors produce about just as much as they apply and distribute culture. Nevertheless one can talk about core U.S. poets, that is, men and women whose reputations as creators of poetry overshadow their reputation as critics of other people’s poems and their reputation as champions of other people’s poetry in their roles as educators, historians, etc. Following Harrington (2002), I take the production of poetry to be more than the production of poems—as I will explain in detail in chapters 2 and 4, in modernity the defining features of poetry are increasingly open to debate, therefore what constitutes poetry is in actuality what constitutes poetry for the most influential actors in the poetry world. Because of this, Karabel’s distinction overlaps with the distinction between major and minor poets—between, on one hand, those who not only wrote poems but also defined the meaning of the word “poem,” and on the other, those who followed these formulas, implicitly or explicitly, in the poems they wrote.

I identified poets who occupied core locations by making an extensive study of the secondary literature on twentieth-century U.S. poetry, including literary history and criticism. I also consulted poetry anthologies that emerge from historical and critical

studies as pathbreaking and/or representative of dominant movements and networks. I then identified three archival locations – U.C. Berkeley’s Bancroft Library, Stanford University’s Special Collections Library, and U.C. Davis’s Special Collections Library – on the basis of their richness in terms of the number and variety of “core” poets whose personal collections they owned and their proximity to one another. My work in the archives included establishing the connections of these core poets to as many kinds of peripheral and semiperipheral poet as possible. When possible, I also consulted the collections of semiperipheral and peripheral poets’ collections in these three sites.

Because this research was restricted to one geographical location that was, as I will explain in chapter 2, associated with a particular avant-garde in midcentury, it could have led to a skewed understanding of poets’ practices. Fortunately, the letters, essays, and interviews of many twentieth-century U.S. poets, major and minor, is available in print. I conducted a parallel research in this sizeable “mobile archive” during and after the time I spent in Northern California.

### **1.3. The Case: U.S. Poets from 1910 to 1975**

The case of U.S. poets confirms that the “death of the American intellectual” is a premature call, because the cultural capital of the poetry field increased throughout the period under study in this dissertation without a proportional growth in dependence on sources of power. To show this, I will reevaluate two developments that scholars of the death theme have made much of: The university-poetry connection and the rise of the “sixties counterculture.” In addition, I will briefly discuss the role of U.S. poets in the Vietnam peace movement.

*The university connection.* The relationship between U.S. poetry and U.S. universities was not very strong before 1930. In English departments, research scholars successfully argued that the subjective nature of literary criticism made it unfit for the curriculum, which led to the exclusion of poets from the faculty (Graff 2007).

Between 1920 and 1930, poets associated with the journal *Fugitive* developed an ideological resource that effectively countered the power of research scholars: New Criticism. New Criticism outlined systematic methods for the evaluation of poetry, allowing poets and poetry critics to claim that their practices had the equivalent of scientific reliability. Between 1937 and 1941, armed with these methods, poets gained a toehold in English departments (Graff 2007:145-153).

The growth of universities over the following decades made this gain more and more meaningful for poets. From 1900 to 1940, the percentage of the eligible population attending college rose from 4 to 14 percent. Between 1940 and 1964—right after the victory of the New Critics over research scholars—this number skyrocketed to 40 percent (Graff 2007:155). The number of jobs universities offered to poets grew as a result, becoming the cornerstone of poets' survival strategies:

Poetry has to be endowed. Universities at the present time are the endowers; they pay for poetry readings, which is how most poets support themselves. I make a few thousand dollars a year on royalties, maybe \$5000 on a good year, but my standard of living doesn't allow me to live on that. I could if I had to, but I don't want to. I make my real money in poetry readings and teaching. I am very grateful to the university.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Diane Wakoski, quoted in Bellamy (1984:282-3). Original statement in 1977.

[F]or all our complaints it happens that the United States is probably the only country in the world where it's possible to live by one's poetry. This is mostly because the American university has decided to patronize the poets—by giving them teaching jobs, hiring them not for their academic credentials but for their poetry, and by sponsoring poetry readings.<sup>3</sup>

In line with the death theme, the New Critics are generally associated with a conservative, even reactionary, politics (e.g. Breslin 1983; Perloff 2002; Skerl 2004; Stein 1996). Their notorious reputation, however, may reflect not so much their actual program as the success of their rivals in labeling them. “While literary historians and scholars have told us a great deal about the mavericks and renegades” who overthrew the New Critics’ hold over U.S. poetry in the 1960s, writes one critic, “what little we know of [the] center we know through the eyes of its fiercest opponents” (Brunner 2001:ix).

A closer look at New Criticism reveals that the prevailing opinion about it is indeed problematic. The New Critics’ rivals have conveniently forgotten that their emphasis on irony and ambiguity had an anti-authoritarian kernel—their “insistence on the disinterested nature of poetic experience”, wrote Graff (2007:149), “was an implicit rejection of a utilitarian culture,” a rebuttal to the dehumanizing influence of industrialization and bureaucratization. It is true that some New Critics were conservative southerners who supported segregation in the 1930s. Most of these, however, publicly denounced their former position in the 1940s. Some, like Robert Penn Warren, went on to become active supporters of the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s. Furthermore, the small group that outlined the New Critical program in the U.S. south – the group who became the target of the attacks – was not the entire story of New Criticism. Richard Wilbur, who wrote the best examples of New Critical poetry in the 1950s, was sent to the

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<sup>3</sup> Kinnell (1978:73), original statement in 1975.

front during World War II because of his left-wing views; and Robert Lowell, arguably the best practitioner of New Criticism during the 1940s, was a pacifist who served prison time in 1943.

It is true that the poetic standards put in place by the New Critics did not benefit all poets in the same degree. The populist poets of the Midwest – poets like Vachel Lindsay and Carl Sandburg who used a simple language to describe the difficult life of the American poor during the depression – were pushed out in the 1940s as a direct result of the linguistic and cultural elitism of New Criticism. But the flipside of this development was U.S. poetry's rejection of Stalinism relatively early, before the Gulag discredited it in the 1950s. As a result, U.S. poets were, unlike some other intellectual groups, largely immune to the loss of direction and the tendency to self-destruct that the dirty secrets of Stalinism unleashed.

*The counterculture.* From 1950 to 1975, poets' sphere of influence gained a new dimension with the rise, among U.S. youth, of the "sixties counterculture" – practices like communal living, systematic drug use, and the exploration of Eastern and pagan religious ideas that horrified "mainstream society." Demographic changes and the postwar transformation of the U.S. economy – especially the college boom – provided the counterculture's raw material by producing a large cohort of young people partially liberated from necessity. But its conscious direction – the dodged pursuit of the-here-and-the-now – came from older intellectuals, and the role some poets played is particularly significant.

In the 1910s and 20s, high modernist poets had defined the problem of art as helping the individual survive the onslaught of the large, impersonal structures of modernity – a problem that also animated the sixties counterculture (Cavallo 1999; Farrell 1997; Gitlin 1993; Rossinow 1998; Smith 1995). Art could help by grounding the individual fully in the immediate beauty of the present moment as opposed to constantly looking to the future and delaying gratification. Modernist poets pursued this goal by developing a language that, they hoped, would preserve the freshness of “pure experience” in verse:

so much depends  
upon

a red wheel  
barrow

glazed with rain  
water

beside the white  
chickens.

(William Carlos Williams, “The Red Wheelbarrow”)

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.  
(Ezra Pound, “In A Station of the Metro”)

In the 1950s, the poets of *New American Poetry* made the modernist sensibility more explicit by writing openly about sexuality and drug use. In the context of the “tranquillized fifties,” their message took a political tone, and they came under attack in censorship trials and in the mass media. The little victories they won – Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Allen Ginsberg vs. San Francisco police in 1955-56; Allen Ginsberg and

Paul Carroll vs. the regents of the University of Chicago in 1959-1960; Lenore Kandel and Michael McClure vs. San Francisco police in 1966 – turned them to heroes of the burgeoning youth rebellion, and their audience among young people grew throughout the 1960s even though most of them kept publishing with small presses that did little advertising.

The “raw,” “anti-intellectual” style of these poets and their popularization of “flaky” practices like a hollowed-out version of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, however, have made them another convenient proof of the death of the American intellectual from the start. More recent scholarship has focused on their individualism and their emphasis on the private realm as the basis of their attacks on the cold-war state, finding them naïve and ineffective (Aronowitz 1984; Cavallo 1999; Smith 1995). Lastly, some historians have found that U.S. poets’ appropriations of Eastern religion were made possible by colonialism, and argued that the poets have not been sufficiently reflexive in this regard (Martinez 1998, 2003; Masatsugu 2004).

These criticisms, while warranted to some degree, are exaggerated. The much-maligned interest of midcentury U.S. poets in Eastern religions, recent studies show, was more serious than their opponents claimed (Quinn 2005; Rossinow 1998), and I present some evidence in this direction in chapters 2 and 5. What antagonistic scholars have called “Beat Buddhism” to underscore its lack of historical authenticity, I show, goes back to the nineteenth century; has its roots in the struggles for independence among American and European artists; and that some, though not all, of its proponents in U.S. poetry were quite learned in world religions. While the poetry/Buddhism nexus was certainly made possible by colonialism, I also show, this unpleasant origin did not

predetermine its content. Lastly, the criticism of their individualism assumes that the success intellectuals have in moving and shaking ordinary people has to do solely with what they write and that what they write is always understood perfectly—two assertions that cannot be taken for granted.

The charge of anti-intellectualism has some overall truth to it, but again the claims are exaggerated and not sufficiently appreciative of the cultural and political contexts of the time. First, poets' explicit denunciations of the over-intellectualism of the cultural life of the U.S. allowed a multiplicity of discourses to be used against the state during the Vietnam period—if nothing else, it gave the antiwar movement a B-plan in a fight with a much stronger adversary. Second, one can think of this as a small price to pay for getting in contact with masses in an opportune moment. Furthermore, I suspect that the reason why the poetry/counterculture nexus is so maligned has to do with the defeat of the counterculture in the 1970s, and here one should remember the dirty, extralegal tactics that the state used—tactics such as allowing countercultural scenes to be flooded with heroin and harassing the politically-leaning counterculturalists to the point of destroying their lives (Davis 1997).

*The Vietnam period.* Greater cultural influence allowed some poets to become relatively effective in challenging political authorities in matters that did not pertain directly to their artistic expertise. The best example of this is the Vietnam peace movement.

Concern about Vietnam War was widespread among poets following President Johnson's decision to commit combat troops there in 1965. But poets connected to universities had the first opportunity to take action because the president felt that he had

to have not only widespread support for his foreign policy but also the approval of the cultural elite. He called for a White House Festival of the Arts featuring the most accomplished representatives of the arts, which, as a “special consultant” to the president later admitted, was a “tool to quiet opposition to the war.”<sup>4</sup> One of the luminaries Johnson invited, the poet Robert Lowell, made the front page of *The New York Times* by turning the invitation down in an open letter. This incident gave Lowell a new “career” as a sought-after speaker in antiwar rallies, read-ins, and other protest events. His stature as an intellectual benefited from these activities significantly. In 1968, Yale University awarded him with an honorary doctorate for bringing “the keen moral vision of [his] Puritan ancestors to the understanding of our secular and violent age”—a reference to his political persona. In 1974, he won a second Pulitzer Prize for *The Dolphin*, where he chronicled his participation in the peace movement.

Soon after Lowell’s rebuff of the president, the younger cohort of poets who had built the counterculture/poetry nexus joined the fray. In late 1966, a group of Bay Area radicals came up with the idea of an event that would join the counterculture and the new left by turning countercultural activities to signs of active political dissent. This event would have to be simultaneously cultural and political, and to shore up its cultural aspect, they asked Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder, two poet leaders of the counterculture who identified with the left, for help<sup>5</sup>. They agreed, attended planning meetings<sup>6</sup>, and enlisted more poets. Ginsberg also secured the participation of Timothy Leary, the ex-Harvard professor who popularized LSD. The result was a “festival of life” in January 1967,

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<sup>4</sup> Cited in Hamilton (1982:320).

<sup>5</sup> Martine Bowen letter to Allen Ginsberg, November 12 1966. Allen Ginsberg papers, Stanford University Library.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication of the author with Gary Snyder, June 20, 2007.

attended by twenty thousand people, where Ginsberg and Snyder read their work and chanted Buddhist *dharanis*.

The two styles of poetic dissent came together later that year in another major protest event, the Pentagon March—Robert Lowell gave speeches to the crowd, and Ed Sanders led the tongue-in-cheek levitation of the Pentagon, a symbolic attempt to purge the evil spirits of the building. By 1968, the counterculture was thoroughly politicized. On March 24, 1968, in an article that explicitly mentioned Ginsberg, *The New York Times* suggested that political activism had become the new hippie “thing.”

None of this is meant to suggest that poets prevailed over political elites. The U.S. military stubbornly remained in Vietnam until 1973, and political elites presented the defeat – to some degree successfully – as an honorable withdrawal. This resolve drove the peace movement and some of its poets to a self-destructive nihilism and despair, causing them to lose much of the little credibility they had won in the 1960s. But the mere fact that poets’ voices were heard is significant. Their visibility made it more difficult for the Johnson and Nixon administrations to harness highbrow or middlebrow culture to the war effort. Consequently, they had to find ways of winning the war quickly, before mounting casualties would rob them of the one remaining source of legitimacy—the largely media-engineered support of the masses. When the Tet offensive dispelled these hopes in 1968, leaders of both major parties began looking for an opportunity to get out, a search that defined the next five years. Poets, then, helped shape the course of events even if the overall result was far from satisfying them.

#### **1.4. Reconstructing the Field Approach**

A number of questions arise at this point. First, what did the relative success of U.S. poets in extending their sphere of influence over the twentieth century have to do with the autonomy of poetry? In other words, can an autonomy-based explanation along Bourdieusian lines make sense of the big picture of U.S. poetry? Or are Bourdieu's anti-autonomy opponents right—that is, were U.S. poets successful in challenging cultural and political elites to the extent that they disowned their “bubble”? Second, what role did poetry's institutional setup play? Third, were some poets more successful than others in making “noise” in the public sphere with their cultural and political interventions, and if so, what explains this? How did class come into this picture? Fourth, what was the exact relationship between various kinds of influence—social, cultural and political? Was there a trade-off between cultural and political influence, as scholars of the Vietnam peace movement have claimed? Fifth, how were long term/collective success in extending the reach of the field and short term/individual success in cultural and political issues related? That is, was the relationship positive, negative, curvilinear, or nonexistent?

These, then, are the questions that I address in my dissertation. While each of these questions is distinct and separate from the others, together they lead to what I see as my main contribution: The idea that the Bourdieusian field approach and the study of U.S. intellectuals are a perfect match.

I mean two things with this statement. First, the fundamentals of the field approach are quite sufficient for making sense of U.S. cultural production and its relationship to its “outside.” This is important because there is a tendency among Americanists to think of the field approach as too “French”—that is, shaped too much in

its assumptions by the particularities of French history to be able to even ask the right questions to the U.S. context. This is the main objection of the foremost U.S. sociologist of literature to *Rules of Art*, Bourdieu's primary contribution to the sociological study of art (Griswold 1996). In a similar vein, Michele Lamont (1992) has claimed that the dynamics of distinction in the French field of power are not directly translatable to the U.S. case. In contrast, I argue in this dissertation that, while the specific hypotheses Bourdieu derived from his fundamental concepts with the help of some implicit auxiliary assumptions are often off the mark in the U.S., this is no reason to discard the conceptual framework in Bourdieu's oeuvre. By making Bourdieu's implicit assumptions explicit, I argue with Bourdieu against Bourdieu. I show that the concepts of field, capital, and habitus allow students of U.S. cultural production an analytical depth they may not be able to find elsewhere.

Second, the U.S. case provides scholars working with the field approach with an opportunity for identifying its problematic aspects and rectifying them—the comfortable distance that Bourdieu's concepts afford in the study of U.S. cultural production has its twin in the comfortable distance that the U.S. case provides for reflecting on these concepts. Specifically, I find that the U.S. case leads to a serious appraisal of the core concept of field autonomy by underscoring the processual nature of autonomy and the irreducibility of its multiple parameters to one another. This emphasis leads to the articulation of the field approach with social movements scholarship. If autonomy is a process to be managed rather than a status to be maximized or minimized, the question of how best to manage this process at the group and individual levels arises. Specifically, I ask: How much do material and symbolic resources matter, and what kinds of

institutional arrangements are best suited to raising them? To what extent should intellectuals be prepared to enter alliances with groups whose long-term agendas are incompatible with theirs? What is the role of cultural and political conjuncture, and is there any way to minimize the unpredictability that conjuncture brings to the table? How important is the language intellectuals use in addressing social issues?

U.S. social movements scholars have written quite a bit on these issues, and I enter a dialogue with them. I consider politically active U.S. poets as a social movement, with the same need social movements scholars found in others for balancing competing demands: Fundraising with independence, internal cohesion with external efficacy, and instrumental reason and planning with courage and selflessness.

### **1.5. Summary of Chapters**

In chapter 2, I review the literature on the fields of cultural production, tracing the development of the concept in Bourdieu's writings over his long career and the criticism of the concept and the methodological imperatives that come with it. I find that one weakness of the field approach so far is the underdevelopment of Bourdieu's original emphasis on the multiplicity of the sources of power. I then examine U.S. poetry throughout the twentieth century, finding that it displays most, if not all, the defining features of a field of cultural production, allowing me to test Bourdieu's ideas in the U.S. context in the following chapters. But I also find that the multiplicity and irreducibility of the sources of power creates some dynamics that do not quite fit Bourdieu's description of fields, and these differences, later chapters reveal, turn out to be consequential for poets' cultural and political practices.

Chapter 3 explores the relationship between autonomy and the efficacy of cultural and political intervention. The field approach is important, among other things, because it is an elegant defense of the possibilities autonomy offers in this regard to all kinds of intellectuals. It joins a long tradition of pro-autonomy scholarship and systematizes it. But the anti-autonomy position, the assertion that the autonomy of intellectual practice makes intellectuals socially, culturally and politically impotent, can also boast of a long list of illustrious defenders. I find, however, that these two traditions can be reconciled by taking seriously the multidimensionality of the process of autonomy, a corollary of the multiplicity of the sources of power.

Using archival and biographical evidence and secondary sources, in this chapter I find, first, that the cultural capital of U.S. poets had a variable relationship to universities and popular taste, two sources of heteronomy. Second, these sources of heteronomy did not align together, such that increasing autonomy from one does not necessarily translate into increasing autonomy from the other. Third, they were not equally important for poets throughout the century, so it was possible to give concessions to one in order to make more meaningful gains with regard to the other. These findings lead me to consider these sources of power as parameters of autonomy, not just sources of heteronomy. The concept “terrain of autonomy,” which emerges from this view, emphasizes that autonomy is not a status to be maximized or minimized but a process to be negotiated.

A comparison with Bourdieu’s France leads me to distinguish between two ideal-typical kinds of discursive formation I call “republican” and “federalist.” In republican discursive formations like France, the close relationship between the state and market always pits intellectuals against the same set of constraints, which must be challenged

simultaneously. In federalist formations like the U.S., on the other hand, the state and the market are constructed as antagonistic, so intellectuals can temporarily use these forces against one another. In the poetry field, actors were able to do this by reconfiguring their relationship with universities. The downside is that their gains will be more provisional.

In chapter 4, I ask how individual intellectuals can craft more effective political interventions given the findings of chapter 3. Specifically, I ask why Robert Lowell's political interventions were more successful in terms of criteria that I discuss at some length than Allen Ginsberg's in the 1970s, given that the two poets had similar success in the 1960s and displayed a similar level of engagement throughout the Vietnam period.

The contrast between Ginsberg and Sartre is significant in terms of Bourdieusian theory because the Ginsberg/Lowell couple is comparable to the Zola/Sartre one in Bourdieu's oeuvre. Therefore, the divergence in the careers of these two poets is something that, at first sight, cannot be explained within the field approach. The cases of Ginsberg and Lowell allow me to engage class-bound theories of intellectuals because they came from very different classes. They also speak to network theories because they belonged to different and antagonistic artistic networks with different connections to political, economic and cultural elites. Finally, I consider political process theory because the sixties and the seventies may have been different in terms of political opportunity.

Using archival and biographical evidence, I find that the interaction of Ginsberg and Lowell's field trajectories with political opportunity explains their diverging paths when a distinction is made between "frontstage" and "backstage" kinds of political activity. Frontstage activities are offensive and obviously political, address political elites and mass media, and have a short duration and immediate impact. Backstage actions are

defensive and less obviously political, address other intellectuals, and have longer duration and delayed impact. Frontstage activities, I find, need more backstage support in unfavorable conjunctures.

This chapter joins an emerging literature in showing that the field approach is compatible with eventful sociology, provided that the concept of field trajectory is emphasized. It takes the first steps to articulate the Bourdieusian sociology of intellectuals with social movements scholarship.

Chapter 5 focuses on the question of how intellectuals can do backstage activity better, given that chapter 4 shows it to be of crucial importance. Observing that Vietnam-era peace activists frequently deployed Eastern religious discourses and practices against the state and that U.S. poets were instrumental in converting these cultural resources to quasi-political ones, I ask how this process of conversion took place in the case of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism against the preferences of some powerful Buddhist clergy.

I engage with the following theories: Studies of orientalism from Said (1978) to Steinmetz (2007) since this is a rare incident of seemingly benign orientalism; theories of cultural opportunity structure because Vietnam has a Buddhist majority; framing/discourse theories because scholarship on the Vietnam-era antiwar movement has found American individualism to underlie the opposition to the war; class-bound theories of intellectuals because the poets who used Buddhism in protest were all from lower classes previously excluded from high modernist poetry; and resource mobilization approach to social movements because poets and gurus had different amounts and kinds of resources—economic, social, and spiritual capital.

Using archival and biographical evidence, I find that the combination of three disparate causal vectors explains the end result: the course of evolution of poetry's field *problematic*, Asian Buddhist clergy's cultural dispositions, and poets' stronger social capital stock vis-à-vis Buddhist clergy. Since the only factor that intellectuals in similar circumstances could consciously manipulate is the last one, this chapter calls for a reconsideration of some insights of resource mobilization theory in the context of intellectuals' political practices. Hence, it continues to build on the convergence of social movements scholarship with the Bourdieusian sociology of intellectuals that chapter 4 began. It completes' Bourdieu's picture on intellectuals' politics by a) showing the importance of social as opposed to symbolic capital, and b) underscoring the necessity of negotiating rather than maximizing autonomy, building on the insights of chapter 3.

Chapter 6 concludes this dissertation. Following Bourdieu's example, I take a normative approach in this last chapter and use it to outline a program for intellectuals who enter public debates. Summarizing the implications of my findings regarding the value for dissenting intellectuals of differentiation of interest, specialization in intellectual activity, specialization in political activity, specialization in capital accumulation, and ethical purity, I evaluate four views of the responsibility of the intellectual—Gramsci's organic intellectual, Sartre's total intellectual, Foucault's specific intellectual, and Bourdieu's collective intellectual. I then develop a fifth view, what I propose to call the pragmatic intellectual.

## 1.6. Findings and Implications

So, back to the main question. When/how do dissenting intellectuals acquire social, political, and cultural influence? Collectively, the answer is: when they have “diversely competitive” institutions—that is, institutions that offer something to everyone, compete against one another intensely for symbolic benefits, but stay in continuous contact. This answer is tentative, because a more decisive claim requires comparative evidence and the evidence in this dissertation does not fully qualify for this—I have found merely that the institutional setting of U.S. poetry fits this description more and more from 1910 to 1975, and their sphere of influence grows in tandem. With more certainty, I can claim that intellectuals can increase the reach of their collective sphere of influence by balancing the competing demands that make up their terrain of autonomy. Diverse competition is important because, my evidence leads me to believe, it helps here. It continuously alerts intellectuals to fateful political and cultural changes by creating multiple subgroups, each with its own program for autonomy, and pitting them against one another. The greater the number of such groups, the greater the likelihood that at least one of them will stumble into a program that will give the field a more advantageous position. In my case, such groups were always able to carry the day because they won younger actors over by displaying their competence in the arenas of struggle that were most relevant for the next generation. Had they been able to totally vanquish their opponents, however, such success would have undercut itself in the next round of the game. Fortunately for U.S. poets, no victory was so complete in my case.

All of this points toward a “liberalism of the pen”—these findings are in accord with a long tradition in Western thought that expects good things to come out of

respectful, friendly competition made possible by a sheer diversity no central power can control and regulated by institutions whose presence is ideally barely felt. When the focus shifts to individuals and small groups, however, the picture becomes more “agonistic.” Here, the answer to the same question is: when they are able to find out the ratio of energy and resources to be devoted to “backstage” versus “frontstage” kinds of activity. This is not something one can do by willpower and intellect alone, however. Past actions in the field, themselves shaped by one’s class background, lock actors progressively into patterns of activity that make them more or less able to “do the right thing.” Under adverse circumstances – those defined by the closing of the political opportunity structure – intellectuals need to support their frontstage activity with more backstage activity, that is, they must either decrease their frontstage activity or increase their backstage activity. The people whose action repertoires have such flexibility are those who enter the field with greater extra-intellectual resources. Since in places like the U.S. adverse political circumstances are part of the intellectual’s lifecycle, the structure of action as a whole discriminates against lower-class citizens of the republic of letters.

## CHAPTER 2

### U.S. POETRY FIELD IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: STRUCTURE AND HISTORY

#### 2.1. Introduction

The empirical chapters of this dissertation focus on various aspects of the politicization of intellectuals—chapter 3 on the relationship between intellectuals’ autonomy and their influence; chapter 4 on individual pathways to successful politicization; chapter 5 on the dynamics of the appropriation of cultural resources. In each chapter, I critically evaluate a claim that Bourdieu made about intellectual politicization – e.g. that influence presumes autonomy – or work on a crucial question he left unanswered – e.g. whether the “Zola path” and the “Sartre path” into the public spotlight are equivalents – by examining the case of twentieth-century U.S. poets. For these tests to be valid, however, it is first necessary to make sure that U.S. poetry is a comparable equivalent of the sites Bourdieu studied. This means demonstrating that U.S. poetry constitutes a social field, one whose properties are similar enough to the fields Bourdieu wrote about.

This is because the object of Bourdieu’s analyses was never an isolated intellectual or group of intellectuals but intellectual practice in its entirety; that is, the various fields of cultural production. It is not for nothing that Bourdieu refused to define the intellectual once and for all while providing multiple definitions of the field concept. The meaning of “intellectual” may vary from context to context, but in each context,

Bourdieu argued, it is a product of robust relationships of competition for recognition. It is this structure of competition and the cultural forms that it gives rise to that the notion of field aims to capture, and Bourdieu's propositions are about this level of analysis. When analysis focuses narrowly on a specific intellectual, Bourdieu argues, some of the most salient causal mechanisms – those that operate behind the façade of face-to-face interactions – become invisible. The situation is the same when analysis focuses solely on macro-level dynamics like class struggle and the politics of race and gender. According to Bourdieu, these dynamics do not have a direct impact on intellectuals' practices; they are “refracted” through the structure of intellectual action and this refraction introduces a fundamental uncertainty that macrosocial analysis can miss.

Therefore, the task of this chapter is to establish whether or not twentieth-century U.S. poetry features the dynamics Bourdieu associated with fields of cultural production. This is a twofold task. First, it is necessary to list the core characteristics of fields in Bourdieu's *oeuvre*, that is, the criteria by which to determine the degree to which a social practice is “field-like.” I find that these core features are a) a “game” with its own principles of evaluation that are not fully reducible to any one principle associated with other games, and b) a set of values that express and sustain these principles. Fields are salient to sociological analysis to the extent that they shape practice, and this happens when actors identify primarily with the field in question. In addition, Bourdieu's work on literary and scientific fields emphasizes that the hierarchies of these fields are in conflict with the market principle and with the reason of the state and that they are weakly, if at all, institutionalized.

Second, it is necessary to find which of these characteristics are present in U.S. poetry. Using archival and biographical evidence, I find that U.S. poetry had most, if not all, of these dynamics. It had, first of all, a distinct game with irreducible rules of evaluation and a set of values that expressed and gave life to these rules. Moreover, “poet” was the primary identity of many players of this game; this game was often, though not always, defined in contradistinction to the political and economic games.

I also find, however, that a number of formal and informal institutions were indispensable for the functioning of the field and that poets did not simply reject but rather strategically negotiate logics of the state and the market. As a result, even though twentieth century U.S. poetry can be said, for all practical purposes, to constitute a social field in Bourdieu’s sense, a number of its characteristics diverge from the ideal-typical description of fields. Therefore it is not certain at the outset which dynamics of intellectual politicization Bourdieu found are present in the case of U.S. poetry in particular and U.S. intellectual life in general; empirical investigation into them is necessary.

I then provide a brief history of this field from its founding in the early years of the twentieth century to the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. This section is meant as necessary historical background to the chapters that follow—it provides the basic information about U.S. poets and poetry movements; the struggles that defined the cutting edge of U.S. poetry; and the relationship of the poetry field with other fields. It provides the bare minimum for the reader to follow and make sense of the arguments I advance in the following chapters.

## **2.2. The Field Approach**

*The field concept.* A social field is “a veritable social universe where, in accordance with its particular laws there accumulates a particular form of capital and where relations of force of a particular type are exerted” (Bourdieu 1993b:163). Alternatively, fields are “structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and which can be analysed independently of the characteristics of their occupants” (Bourdieu 1993a:72).

The field concept underlies Bourdieu’s attempt to transcend the dichotomy between the hermeneutic tradition’s internal interpretation of cultural texts versus Marxist scholars’ external explication (Bourdieu 1985:16). It is simultaneously a force field and a field of struggle—the position an actor occupies in a field strongly shapes his/her dispositions toward other actors in the field, but it does not determine the outcome of the struggles among them. This is partly because the very definitions of the field’s boundaries and of what counts as a legitimate resource in struggles are themselves contested.

The concept has similarities with the work of a diverse group of scholars—Cassirer in the philosophy of science; Elias in sociology; Kurt Lewin in psychology; the literary criticism of the Russian formalists; and structuralist anthropology (Bourdieu 1985:16-17; also see Levi 2003). But if any decisive influence is to be identified, it is the Weberian sociology of religion (Bourdieu 1985, 1991a; Dianteill 2003; Rey 2004). In Weber’s theorization of the antagonism between prophets and priests Bourdieu found an important characteristic of artistic fields, his immediate scholarly concern because of modernist art’s challenge to the dominant principles of capitalist stratification: The

perennial confrontation between orthodoxy and heterodoxy that institutes revolution as the normal state of affairs.

Each field corresponds to a game with a set of rules that distinguish winners and losers. The benefits to be gained from winning are frequently symbolic, hence the need for what Bourdieu calls *illusio*—the conviction that the game is worth playing. Fields exist, then, to the extent that a specific type of capital and a specific game are discernible, and they are robust to the extent that they secure *illusio*.

How, then, does a field secure its *illusio*? Bourdieu does not theorize this point explicitly, but he writes of specific field values that not only express the “soul” of the game but also sustain it by converting it to moral principles:

The intellectual contrasts with those who, having bartered status (often of second rank) in the intellectual field for a position in the political field, then break more or less ostentatiously with the *values of their original universe* (...) Enclosed within his own order, with his back against *his own values of freedom, disinterestedness and justice*, precluded by them from abdicating his specific authority and responsibility in exchange for necessarily devalued profits or temporal powers, the intellectual asserts himself against the specific laws of politics (those of *Realpolitik* and the reasons of state) as defender of universal principles (1996:130, emphasis mine).

In contrast, the peripheral actors of a field are those who have not fully adopted its values:

The representatives of ‘bourgeois art’, who are for the most part writers for the theatre, are tightly and directly linked to the dominant class, as much by their origins as by their lifestyle and value system (1996:71).

Fields are important because they shape human practice decisively. This is for two reasons. First, the locations that actors can occupy in any field are objective and relational—their meanings precede the actors who occupy them and depend on the meanings of other positions in the field. This gives rise to the “field effect,” whereby texts can only be understood by reference to the structure and the history of the fields in which they are produced:

If there exists a history which is properly artistic, it means, among other things, that the artists and their products are objectively situated, if only because they belong to the artistic field, in relation to other artists and their products and that even the most properly esthetic breaks with artistic tradition always owe something to the relative position within the field of those who uphold it and those who try to break it (Bourdieu 1985: 22).

Second, even if human practices are not always sufficiently field-like, many of them nevertheless take place in fields. Capital and habitus, the two actor-level mechanisms of Bourdieusian theory, are tied first and foremost to the class structure, but particular class structures have unique features because they rise on the infrastructure provided by a topology of fields, which is different in each historical social formation.

If fields in general are so central for human practice, how do actors decide which particular fields command their immediate attention in the flow of everyday life? The answer has to do with the location a field occupies in the social space and with the degree of its autonomy from dominant principles of stratification. In any society, some fields exert greater pressure on actors than others—in tribal societies the field of kinship, in medieval Europe the religious field, today the economic field and the state field. These fields are simply impossible to ignore. For other fields to still be consequential, they must

increase their autonomy from the dominant ones. This means defining their games in contradistinction to the dominant ones, pushing away the half-hearted and increasing the solidarity of those who are willing to remain and identify primarily with the field in question. Here too the work of field values is crucial:

By an apparent paradox, it is only at the end of the [nineteenth] century, at a time when the literary field, the artistic field and the scientific field arrive at autonomy, that the most autonomous agents of these autonomous fields intervene in the political field as intellectuals – and not as cultural producers converted into politicians, like Guizot or Lamartine – that is, with an authority founded on the autonomy of the field and *all the values associated with it: ethical purity, specific expertise, etc.* (1996:342, emphasis mine).

Field autonomy is never absolute because kinds of capital preserve some convertibility regardless of how high the wall erected between fields is. For instance, modern literary fields come to their own by rejecting economic and political power as criteria of success—a great writer is one whose books do not sell very well and who does not accept political posts, elective or appointed (Bourdieu 1996). But the ability to devote oneself to the kind of writing that will achieve such literary success while foregoing economic gain presumes financial security, so quite a few canonical writers have been sons of wealthy families since the conquest of literary autonomy toward the end of nineteenth century.

The fundamental features of a field, then, are a) a distinct game with its own rules of evaluation and its own instituted rewards (i.e. symbolic or field-specific capital), and b) a set of values that express and sustain this game. From these fundamentals follow a number of “general laws of fields” (Bourdieu 1993a:72-74):

1. The existence of struggles between newcomers and the entrenched (orthodoxy vs. heterodoxy),
2. Irreducibility of the stakes and interests of a field to those of others (autonomy),
3. The tendency of dominant actors to take up conservation strategies and the tendency of the dominated to take up subversion strategies,
4. The existence of an objective complicity between actors that underlies all the antagonisms (*illusio*),
5. The existence of an “entry fee” to the game consisting of recognition of the value of the game.

Note that these properties, unlike the two fundamental ones, are variable. The struggle between orthodoxy and heterodoxy is pronounced in some fields (e.g. art and literature) and hidden in others (e.g. the military). Autonomy is always partial, and some fields (e.g. literature) have more of it than others do (e.g. fashion); therefore not all fields command the loyalties of their actors to the same degree. Related to this, the *illusio* of a field may be stronger or weaker compared to the *illusio* of other fields. And the entry fee may be set at a high or a low level. In addition, some fields cohere around distinct institutions (e.g. the state field, the university field, the religious field in predominantly Catholic countries) while others (e.g. artistic and literary fields) do not.

The trajectory of the field concept in U.S. sociology has been one of early neglect followed by an efflorescence of interest. Early importers of Bourdieu’s framework in the U.S. privileged the concepts of capital and habitus, but it is now understood that it is the

concept of field that unites various strands of his approach into a coherent whole (Sallaz and Zavisca 2007). The focus has consequently shifted from *ad hoc* descriptions of distinction in generic settings to the analyses of particular fields and of the interplay of multiple fields to produce large-scale social transformations. Recent applications of this mature Bourdieusian framework to topics as diverse as colonialism (Steinmetz 2007, 2008), fashion (Entwistle and Rocamora 2006), gambling (Sallaz 2006), gender and sexuality (Green 2008; Martin and George 2006), international relations (Go 2008; Kauppi 2003), media (Couldry 2003; Rohlinger 2007; Benson and Neveu 2005), social movements (Evans and Kay 2008) and sports (Monaghan 2008; Tulle 2007) suggest that field theory may be emerging as a new approach to social action in its own right.

This is most easily discernible in the sociology of art and in the sociology of intellectuals, the two substantive areas where Bourdieu developed the field approach in a number of very influential works like *Distinction* (1984), *Homo Academicus* (1988) and *The Rules of Art* (1996). Bourdieusian sociology of art has since flourished in both sides of the Atlantic. On one hand, field-based studies of other arts like architecture (Fowler and Wilson 2004; Lipstadt 2003), ballet (Wainwright and Turner 2006), music (Lena 2006; Moore 2007); and visual art (Grenfell and Hardy 2007) have emerged. On the other, Bourdieu's students have explored the dynamics of literary fields under very different political situations (Sapiro 1999; 2003) and their global dimension (Casanova 2004). However, there are few studies of U.S. literary fields yet (although see Guillory 1993; Hutchinson 1995; and Rifkin 2000).

*Methods of the field approach.* Bourdieu uses two methods to decide whether a social practice constitutes a field. The first is a statistical method called correspondence analysis (Greenacre 1984; Weller and Romney 1990). Correspondence analysis is a form of metric scaling—it aims to “summarize and reveal mutual relationships among variables of different kinds” (Weller and Romney 1990:7). It plots the distribution of two variables, a row variable and a column variable, without inferring an underlying real pattern as regression techniques do.

The second method is what might be called, for lack of a better term, historical ethnography. It involves the identification of key actors of a social practice using historical research, the analysis of their discourse, and close examination of their careers with the help of biographical materials. These methods lack the scientific aura of correspondence analysis, but Bourdieu’s own approach to the analyses of fields like literature (1993b, 1996), philosophy (1991c), and media (1998b) rely almost exclusively on them, and so does the research in this dissertation.

One reason for this is that for such historical fields, the collection of quantitative data may be impossible or unfeasible. But that is not all. Since what counts as field-specific capital is contested, its measurement over a period that spans multiple generations of newcomers is inherently tricky. In such circumstances, the identification of the relevant variables requires a deep immersion in the history of the practice in question, after which the computation of correspondences may add little to the analysis. In any case, the number of actors whose practices this study analyzes is too small to lend itself to correspondence analysis, while the written record they have left behind them is more than enough for the purposes of this research.

### 2.3. Twentieth-Century U.S. Poetry as Field

*The rules of poetry.* Evidence shows that U.S. poetry had rules of evaluation that set it apart from other games, and these rules were not to be dictated from the outside—“Poetry is what poets write,” wrote Allen Ginsberg in a letter, “and not what other people think they should write.”<sup>7</sup> Poets of all stripes agreed on this basic premise—when the 1949 Bollingen Prize for poetry was awarded to Ezra Pound, who was convicted of treason as a result of his wartime support of fascism, Robert Lowell, who was a rival of both Ginsberg and Pound, defended the rationale for the selection in these words:

I thought it was a very simple problem of voting for the best book of the year; and it seemed to me Pound's was. (...) The consequences of not giving the best book of the year a prize for extraneous reasons, even terrible ones in a sense—I think that's the death of art. (...) Pound's social credit, his Fascism, all these various things, were a tremendous gain to him; he'd be a very Parnassian poet without them. Even if they're bad beliefs—and some were bad, some weren't, and some were terrible, of course—they made him more human and more to do with life, more to do with the times.<sup>8</sup>

If poetry is defined, as in the Ginsberg quote above, as “what poets write,” whether any writing counts as poetry depends on whether its author is recognized as a poet. When, as in the case of U.S. poetry, there is no single central body with a complete monopoly on certification, getting recognition depends on giving recognition; mutual ties of recognition makes the claims of both parties stronger.

As in the French literary field, recognition could be negative as well as positive—that is, attacking the players one was attacked by also strengthened one's claims to being

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<sup>7</sup> Allen Ginsberg letter to John Hollander, September 7, 1958. In Morgan and Peters (2006:90).

<sup>8</sup> An Interview with Frederick Seidel, *Paris Review* XXV (Winter-Spring 1961), 57-95, In Lowell (1987:252).

a poet, since the denial of a hostile player's authority could, in the absence of a central certifying body, limit the damage from that actor's attacks. In that sense, the poetry field was truly relational—it made sense for players who were attacked to reciprocate the attack, regardless of their original intentions toward the other player. Poets with significant renown could sometimes resist the temptation to escalate conflict, as in Robert Lowell's defense of Ezra Pound above. In that case, however, the unity of poets against outside forces was at stake, and one wonders whether Lowell would have praised Pound so unequivocally in private.

The worst prospect for a young poet, then, was not the denial of his/her legitimacy in the field but being ignored: Poets were routinely under attack from their rivals – and sometimes from their friends<sup>9</sup>– and these attacks commonly targeted one's claim to poethood. Yet not being talked about at all upset them more. Unhappy with Allen Ginsberg's failure to take her poetry seriously, for instance, Andrea Dworkin wrote him the following in the postscript of a long letter dated December 24, 1964:

I wrote this, sent it to address on yr [*sic*] postcard, it was returned, so I'm resending it c/o Wilentz. Not that its [*sic*] that important, or what I want to say. Perhaps what disturbed me most was yr refusal to take the invective seriously, to deal with IT. To say its shit or whatever, but to address yrself [*sic*] to it.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, in a letter to Ginsberg that starts with much praise, Harold Norse wrote these lines:

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, Philip Whalen complained that in the Vancouver Poetry Conference of 1963, fellow Beat/San Francisco Renaissance poet Allen Ginsberg “alternately attacked and praised” him. (Journal entry in Box 1, Notebook 1. Philip Whalen papers. BANC MSS 2000/93p, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.)

<sup>10</sup> Andrea Dworkin letter to Allen Ginsberg, December 24, 1964. Allen Ginsberg papers, M0733. Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.

I also read yr [*sic*] interview in current *Partisan* [*Review*] and began to wonder at something that always troubled me... yr mention of friends at any point contiguous to you... yet you do not seem to realize my development as loner has been the hardest route, thru trial & error & not hooking up with groups out of maybe some vows never to succeed along lines of fame & money as these inevitably breed corruption... but in yr mention of w.c. williams [*sic*], you consistently leave me out of the published statements whereas it is only plain statement of historical fact and accuracy, if nothing else, that wms. [*sic*] singled me out for highest praise from 1950 on—Paul Blackburn knew this when it happened (dead now too, alas!) but never mentioned me... nobody DID... and it's a bad lousy habit... being out of the country 15 yrs [*sic*] just when it was all happening is part of the trouble... but I get tired, now that I'm back, of seeing all those anthologies without me in it and the readership I have is big, all over the country. (...) But only you can open the door—as it shd [*sic*] have been opened long ago—to getting me the attention I deserve... by mentioning me—in connection with wms, to publishers, whatever...<sup>11</sup>

Sometimes poets rebelled against the necessity of acknowledging other poets as their primary audience, especially when they felt underappreciated. Even then, however, they did not always embrace the masses in explicit denunciation of their peers, as Michael McClure's private journals show:

Writing for other writers is a form of masochism and self-defeatism and generally conceals the inability to write greatly. On the other hand writing in an attempt to please a general public is a servile form of journalism. Shelley wrote for all men and if they do not read him it is not the fault of Shelley.<sup>12</sup>

To summarize the preceding paragraphs, the only incontestable criterion for membership in the poetry field was mutual recognition, positive or negative. That said, the field did develop some impersonal rules of conduct, most importantly the call for the concrete rendering of subject matter. “Avant-garde” and “mainstream” poets agreed on

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<sup>11</sup> Harold Norse letter to Allen Ginsberg, December 21, 1971. Ginsberg papers.

<sup>12</sup> Journal entry in box 51. Michael McClure papers, BANC MSS 2003/222 c, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

this premise, which set poetry apart from scientific abstraction while reaffirming its validity as a distinct form of knowledge, as, in Gary Snyder's words, "the revelation of the particular in its thussness."<sup>13</sup> Among poets devoted primarily to the invention of new poetic forms, William Carlos Williams famously called for "no ideas but in things" in the 1930s, underscoring the necessity to avoid generalizations and to pursue concrete, particular images. Among poets whose primary concern was to perfect poetic forms already in existence, Robert Lowell's attitude toward rationalistic philosophies was representative:

I've been reading Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* lately. It's delightful just as a series of opinions, character sketches, etc. The empiricist, mathematician, logician and old-fashioned liberal moralist—a sympathetic person for me; but one who seems to reduce philosophy to a few scattered accurately-stated and verifiable scientific laws, not necessarily very coherent or momentous in themselves. As far as I can judge the old fixed wooden Aristotelian perennial philosophy that I painfully studied as a Catholic still stands. Russell and say Maritain use such different criteria, that I suppose they are irreconcilable. The writer, perhaps, shrinks from both: from the set mould of the Catholic and from the system-breaking of such a man as Russell, who breaks all the great philosophies like clay pots. The abilities and inspiration that make the imaginative writer timeless, work so poorly for the thinker!<sup>14</sup>

Disagreements often arose in second-order issues, but they never challenged this fundamental rule. One way to achieve concrete rendering of subject matter while still producing a verifiable knowledge of it, for instance, was the rejection of logical thinking and coherence, which defined John Ashbery's work:

What had you been thinking about

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<sup>13</sup> Journal entry in journal 2 (1957-Japan). Gary Snyder papers, D 050, Special Collections Library, University of California, Davis.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Lowell letter to George Santayana, March 10, 1952. In Hamilton (2005:185).

the face studiously bloodied  
heaven blotted region  
I go on loving you like water but  
there is a terrible breath in the way all of this  
You were not elected president, yet won the race  
All the way through fog and drizzle  
When you read it was sincere the coasts  
stammered with unintentional villages the  
horse strains fatigued I guess . . . the calls . . .  
I worry

the water beetle head  
why of course reflecting all  
then you redid you were breathing  
I thought going down to mail this  
of the kettle you jabbered as easily in the yard  
you come through but  
are incomparable the lovely tent  
mystery you don't want surrounded the real  
you dance  
in the spring there was clouds  
(John Ashbery, from "The Tennis Court Oath")

This poem is an exploration of the fragmentary nature of lived experience, the pursuit of an ontology that stresses blurred lines of distinction between phenomena as opposed to cut-and-dried ones reason establishes once and for all in the course of solving various problems one encounters daily. As such, it attempts to enact inconsistencies, eclipses of reason, and stray thought patterns that go nowhere in particular. It strives not toward mastering them in a systematic, rational framework, but to show in concrete how these chaotic patterns come to be.

Ashbery's method stands in contrast to those of the New Criticism, which aims at producing objective, rational techniques for rendering subjectivities concretely. Life might be uncertain and reason might falter, but rational, systematic poetic techniques like

rhyme, meter, and enjambment<sup>15</sup> were necessary because the only human faculty capable of appreciating concrete renderings of the failure of reason was, ironically, reason:

Beautifully Janet slept  
Till it was deeply morning. She woke then  
And thought about her dainty-feathered hen,  
To see how it had kept.

One kiss she gave her mother,  
Only a small one gave she to her daddy  
Who would have kissed each curl of his shining baby;  
No kiss at all for her brother.

“Old Chucky, Old Chucky!” she cried,  
Running on little pink feet upon the grass  
To Chucky’s house, and listening. But alas,  
Her Chucky had died.

It was a transmogrifying bee  
Came droning down on Chucky’s old bald head  
And sat and put the poison. It scarcely bled,  
But how exceedingly

And purplely did the knot  
Swell with the venom and communicate  
Its rigour! Now the poor comb stood up straight  
But Chucky did not.

So there was Janet  
Kneeling on the wet grass, crying her brown hen  
(Translated far beyond the daughters of men)  
To rise and walk upon it.

And weeping fast as she had breath  
Janet implored us, “Wake her from her sleep!”  
And would not be instructed in how deep  
Was the forgetful kingdom of death.  
(John Crowe Ransom, “Janet Walking”)

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<sup>15</sup> Enjambment refers to breaking grammatical units midway to make them conform to the metric pattern of the poem. It is not necessarily a failure to come up with sentences that conform to meter naturally; to the contrary, some of the best U.S. poets used it deliberately to shift emphasis, to destabilize meaning, to achieve rhythm, and to provoke thought.

Ashbery's embrace of the irrational and Ransom's turn to rational artifice were polar opposites. But their disagreement was about the appropriate means to achieve a goal that both poets took for granted. In other words, Ashbery and Ransom were at odds only because they agreed on the fundamentals; without the meta-premise of poetry as the concrete rendering of the particular, the two would have had no conversation whatsoever.

Asserting poetry's differences from other arts was a more difficult task, and poets who did this with relative success – like Frank O'Hara with his playful “Why I Am Not a Painter” – became highly respected. However, some problems they encountered in the process had no solution. According to Stanley Kunitz, for instance, the poem “wants to be pure sound and it also wants to be straight sense, and it can never be either”<sup>16</sup>—that is, poetry could never be fully independent of music and science. But such impasses were often useful—they perpetuated poetry's “game” by making it unsolvable, ensuring that young poets would always have something to strive for. In any case, non-poets were hardly aware of these problems, and the most knowledgeable outsiders found it easier to defer to poets rather than to challenge them on the fundamentals of poetry. Attacked by Allen Ginsberg about his review of a recent poetry book, for instance, the author Seymour Krim freely admitted that “as a person and prose writer (...) there are aspects of poetry that I don't or can't appreciate,”<sup>17</sup> and went on to apologize.

*The values of poetry.* The values U.S. poets embraced most frequently expressed and legitimized this pursuit of the concrete and the particular. These were individualism and complexity.

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Bellamy (1984:146).

<sup>17</sup> Seymour Krim letter to Allen Ginsberg, July 20, 1960. Allen Ginsberg papers.

Numerous scholars have argued convincingly that an anarchic individualism is the defining ideology of cutting edge art in Western modernity (Becker 1982; Bürger 1985; Calinescu 1987; Huyssen 1986; Poggioli 1968). According to the field approach, competitive artistic fields are in a state of constant revolution, which produces a constant turnover of artistic fashions (Bourdieu 1996:239-242). This makes the fleeting nature of movements visible to all participants by allowing them to observe “all that is solid” melt into air numerous times in their own lifetimes. Perhaps this is why some of the most radical U.S. poets never fully denounced American individualism in spite of their position taking as oppositional actors out to revolutionize American culture.

U.S. poets used individualism to express and legitimize their art by juxtaposing the distinction between the individual and the mass with the one between the concrete and the abstract. In each couplet, the first element was to be cherished and protected from the second, more powerful one. According to Michael McClure, for instance, the poet is the “Idealistic Psychotic” that rejects assimilation into the uniformity of mass society:

He is the dreaming Sociopath, he is the ultimate outsider, for the poet and artist existence is a vision locked into subjective ideals drawn from extra-social sources. The poet, the Artist, represents the desire locked in every man woman and babe – the desire to be free and to escape the maze of humanity, to regain animal freedom<sup>18</sup>.

According to Robert Duncan, individuality was the essence of freedom from assimilation into the masses and the best of U.S. poets were its defenders:

I’ve been reading *The New Freewoman* and *The Egoist*, finding out the environs where Pound, H.D., Marianne Moore, Williams first appear. And there it is—the

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<sup>18</sup> “Wolf Net,” articles and essays, folders 12 and 13. Michael McClure papers.

word we hardly hear today “free”—free that [*sic*], free verse and even will—particularly free love. Free women and men. A practiced and responsible scorn for the standards of the day; a responsibility to dress as an individual and not in “style,” to reject commodities and comforts and seek beauty and individuality, individuality, individuality.<sup>19</sup>

However, sometimes poets talked about their game as a communal practice.

Consider the following exchange between poet Gary Snyder and an interviewer:

Paul Geneson: Some people would say to a young poet, “Poetry is self-expression. Sit down and write what you can whenever you can. Would you say that?”

Gary Snyder: No, I wouldn’t say that. I don’t think that’s true. I think that poetry is a social and traditional art that is linked to its past and particularly its language (...) And that the expression of self, although it’s a nice kind of energy to start with, would not make any expression of poetry per se. (...) A great poet does not express his or her self, he expresses all of our selves. And to express all of ourselves you have to go beyond your own self. (...) And that’s why poetry’s not self-expression in those small self terms (Snyder 1980:65).

These discourses, however, were not necessarily mutually exclusive. For one thing, depending on the situation, the same poet could underscore the individualistic or the communal nature of the poetic game. When a journalist asked Gary Snyder, from whom the previous quote came, for his help on a book about the infamous community of poets Snyder was a part of, Snyder rejected him using the individualistic frame:

Mr. Aronowitz’s projected book of thirteen years ago would have been interesting. I have doubts about trying to resurrect it now. Bringing it up to date with a single chapter on “what happened after” strikes me as stretching it thin. As a poet, most of my work has been done since that period, and it serves no purpose to perpetuate a lop-sided identity with a media phenomenon of the late fifties.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Duncan letter to Denise Levertov, November 17, 1960. In Bertholf and Gelpi (2004:261).

<sup>20</sup> Gary Snyder letter to Dennis S. McNally, July 2, 1973. Allen Ginsberg papers.

This vacillation between individualism and communalism is understandable given the role mutual recognition played in constituting the field—unless tempered by a dose of communalism, the discourse of individualism could destroy the very fabric of the field. While using the signifier “individuality” in asserting the supremacy of poetry over the outside world was almost an obligation, using it to promote one’s reputation among poets was risky and poets had to exercise caution. Attacking one’s rivals as insufficiently individualistic could yield symbolic benefits, but if one took it too far his/her allies could be offended. The following exchange between Denise Levertov and Robert Duncan, who celebrated “individuality, individuality, individuality” above, illustrates the inherent difficulty of this task:

Brother Antoninus was here & I went to hear him yesterday expecting something good but it was terrible. He tried—even before reading a single poem—to *force* a show of response from the audience—so that whatever there was in the poems got lost anyway, because it was put on a basis of personality. First I was embarrassed, & guilty at *not* responding—by the end I was bored, hungry (...) and *resentful*—because he was trying to do me & everyone else a violence.

What a contrast to John Wieners’ modest & deeply moving reading a month ago, in which the *poems* spoke, were let to stand & speak & *did* speak—whereas Antoninus in arrogant humility was really trying to get an audience to emote because he was a religious face with a tortured (or sour?) face.<sup>21</sup>

Your impressions of Antoninus agree with accounts of recent readings here. I can’t bear the thot [*sic*] of investigating. I got his *Hazards of Holiness* out of the library, choked with outrage at his dismissal in his preface of the art: he wasn’t interested he said in mere craft or techniques of the poem—he was driven by really sincere feelings and wrote from the heart. I paraphrase, but he did deliberately pose “sincerity” as a substitute or superior to “art.” (...) The thing involved with the “personal appeal” is that we are askd [*sic*] not to respond to the actual poem but to the special claim of the man, as if in his person he were *sincere* or more real than in his attention and making in the poem.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Denise Levertov letter to Robert Duncan, n.d. (February 1963). In Bertholf and Gelpi (2004:381).

<sup>22</sup> Robert Duncan letter to Denise Levertov, February 10, 1963. In Bertholf and Gelpi (2004:382).

That is one reason why the most individualistic poets frequently paid homage to various groups and traditions in their prose writings and in their interviews, even inventing these groups and traditions when they did not yet exist. Consider the following exchange between Allen Ginsberg and an interviewer, where Ginsberg gives credit to a *community* of writers for enabling him to follow his unique *individual* voice:

A[llen] G[insberg]: So then—what happens if you make a distinction between what you tell your friends and what you tell your Muse? The problem is to break down that distinction: when you approach the Muse to talk as frankly as you would talk with yourself or with your friends. So I began finding, in conversations with [William] Burroughs and [Jack] Kerouac and Gregory Corso, in conversations with people whom I knew well, whose souls I respected, that the things we were telling each other for real were totally different from what was already in literature. (...) That meant, at that minute, a complete revision of what literature was supposed to be. (...)

T[om] C[lark]: So it's not just a matter of themes—sex, or any other one—

AG: It's the ability to commit to writing, to write, the same way that you...are!<sup>23</sup>

The celebration of the concrete as opposed to the abstract and the general presupposed a social ontology that refused to let the general stand for the particular, and this ontology was the polar opposite of the dominant ontology that the fields of politics, science, and religion shared at the time. In this view, the world is not a logical whole. Rather, it is a complex pluralistic template of infinite possibilities, each of which must be understood in its own terms, in its immediacy, without even attempting to subsume it under the sign of another. This view led to a celebration of complexity in all its forms, hence Robert Lowell's view of religion, expressed in a letter to fellow poet Cleanth Brooks:

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Ginsberg (2001:23-24).

The battle between religion and poetry is that the truths of one quite often don't fit in with the truths of the other, no system can really include the pluralism of the arts, nor can one man's art very well include another man's.<sup>24</sup>

In the political arena, this view required the rejection of the Machiavellian logic that embraced the enemy of one's enemy as one's friend—or at least the expression of discomfort with such “dirty” coalitions when they seemed unavoidable. During the Vietnam period, for instance, Robert Lowell wrote the following lines in a letter to a friend from the peace movement:

We have been to several draft-resistance meetings, somewhat arranged by Mitch Goodman, Denise Levertov's husband and one of those indicted with Spock. These things are on a level at which honesty is impossible. Little groups of non-G.I.s or draft-evaders are placed on the stage (samplings of the common man) few can speak at all, except in erroneous clichés. The one who got the most applause, was an oldish boy, obviously on dope, with a rented Viet-Cong uniform a Viet Cong flag he waved and an unintelligible story of facing a 23 year sentence for being caught with the needle, instead of attending a resistance rally.<sup>25</sup>

Complexity was not the exclusive property of mainstream, liberal, and academic poets like Lowell—poets with more radical political beliefs who lived without the benefits of a university appointment also embraced it. Consider, for instance, Charles Olson's criticism of Western science:

We stay unaware how two means of discourse the Greeks appear to have invented hugely intermit our participation in our experience, and so prevent discovery. They are what followed from Socrates' readiness to generalize, his willingness (from his own bias) to make a “universe” out of discourse instead of letting it rest in its most serviceable place. (It is not sufficiently observed that logos, and the reason necessary to it, are only a stage which a man must master and not what they are taken to be, final discipline. Beyond them is direct perception (...)) The

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Lowell letter to Cleanth and Edith Brooks, March 10, 1962. In Hamilton (2005:399).

<sup>25</sup> Robert Lowell letter to Mary McCarthy, February 5, In Hamilton (2005:495).

harmony of the universe, and I include man, is not logical, or better, is post-logical, as is the order of any created thing.) (Olson 1997:156-158).

Perhaps the most radical implication of this ontology is the one that regards human subjectivity. As opposed to the ideal of the Cartesian ego, poets embraced a view of their own selves as multiple, fractured, and potentially contradictory:

If the organism exists with problems, then the organism also exists with possibilities for solutions. All I am saying is we can grant recognition of that river within us which, in mixed vocabulary, could be the Hindu “we are all one,” but it would seem that that doesn’t lend any solution. “We are all one” is too easy. “I am many” is more where it’s at. I am happy when my manys agree.<sup>26</sup>

The world might be complex, but one implication of this view was rather simple: the truth of complexity must be defended against totalizing views. This is one reason why the necessity to consider all viewpoints and all sides did not paralyze U.S. poets during the Vietnam period—at stake was the conflict between a poetic worldview and its polar opposite, and this was enough to make the contemplative Robert Lowell, the poet who complained to his friends about the simple-mindedness of many protesters, write the following in an open letter:

We should have a national day of mourning, or better our own day of mourning, for the people we have sent into misery, desperation—that we have sent out of life; for our own soldiers, for the pro-American Vietnamese, and for the anti-American Vietnamese, those who have fought with unequalled ferocity, and probably hopeless courage, because they preferred annihilation to the despair of an American conquest.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Meltzer (2001:167).

<sup>27</sup> Robert Lowell letter to the editors of the New York Review of Books, February 4, 1968. In Hamilton (2005:495).

*Poet as primary identity.* Membership in the community of poets was typically the primary component of poets' identities. "The main part of my life, the part I hold closest to my sense of self," Lew Welch said in an interview, "is Lew Welch, the poet. I am also a father and a lover and a husband and a worker and a good shot or whatever it is that I think of myself, but always riding over it is: I am really Lew Welch, poet."<sup>28</sup> Reflecting on her teenage years, Diane di Prima wrote about embracing "poet" as her essence and the loss of worldly goods that, in her view, she now had to accept:

And finally one day it hit me that [poetry] wasn't just out there, it wasn't just heroes, other people, it was me. I could do this. I could do this. I cried a lot when I realized that. I was very sad because with it came the understanding that I was going to have to give up a lot of things regular people have. I wasn't going to be able to snuggle into regular human life. I don't know how I knew all that, but I did. And that's when I made my commitment to poetry. I was sitting in my backyard, and it hit me. Like that.<sup>29</sup>

Asked about the writers, movements, and artistic tendencies he supported, Robert Creeley answered in a similar language of joyful sacrifice:

There is a *company*, a kind of leaderless Robin Hood's band, which I dearly love. I'm sure there is even a horn to summon us all. There is no company dearer, more phenomenal, closer to my heart. (...) Whether learned by intuition or by act, one comes to respect and to love that company of artists for whom poetry is, in Bob Rose's phrase, 'active transformation,' not a purpose, not discretion, not even craftsmanship – but *revelation*, initial and eternal, whatever that last word can mean to one whose life is finite. Consequently I both identify with and support – and hope I might be permitted the company of – any man or woman whose experience of writing transcends some sense of its value as money in the bank, or edifying addition to one's identity, etc. (Creeley 1972:113)

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Meltzer (2001:311).

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Meltzer (2001:2-3).

In this discourse, poetry was not just the means of survival or expression; it was a sacred activity:

I suppose my main feeling is that writing poetry, for me, has been like breathing. It has been the condition of my existence. (...) The first poems come to you out of nowhere. You don't know that you are a vessel; all you know is that you have poems that have to be written.<sup>30</sup>

Significantly, those poets who made significant symbolic investments in other areas were no exception to this. Delmore Schwartz, known as much for his literary criticism as his poetry, reacted harshly to news items that referred to him not as a poet but as a critic (Bawer 1986); Gary Snyder, one of the first Americans of the postwar period who studied Zen Buddhism in Japan and became famous for it, wrote in a personal notebook that Zen is “vastly insignificant” compared to poetry<sup>31</sup>; and when William Everson converted to Catholicism and decided to join a religious order, he chose the Dominicans because, unlike other orders he considered, the Dominicans allowed him to keep writing poetry and cherished him as a poet (Meltzer 2001:33-35).

As a result, when poets took part in political movements, they had to do it not as revolutionaries but as poets—and that meant upholding the values of the field, individualism and complexity, against the logic of organizing against the state if need be. Consider the following statement from Stanley Kunitz:

When the black revolution was at its height, less than a decade ago, the sympathies of most poets, I think, were with the black revolutionaries. And yet the poetry that came out of it was, for the most part, coarse and shapeless and finally unreadable. That, of course, is not to negate the virtue of the cause for

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<sup>30</sup> Stanley Kunitz, quoted in Bellamy (1984:143-144).

<sup>31</sup> Journal entry in journal 2 (1957-Japan), Gary Snyder papers.

which it was written. By the same token, most of the poems overtly incited by the women's liberation movement are diminished by their rant and rhetoric. (...) [Akhmatova] is a political poet, but in her work the politics are subsumed in the life. You're hardly aware of the political content of the poems; what moves you is her personal involvement in the issues that make the poem.<sup>32</sup>

When the logic of the movement seemed to eclipse the logic of poetry, poets had to reassert their specific identities, as in the following symbolic confrontation between red-flag-waving, Vietcong-sympathizing radicals of the antiwar movement and Robert Lowell:

[Lowell] found himself committed to read at Harvard for a group which, as it turned out, was one of the many disruptive organizations abounding on the campus at that time. The major part of its members weren't students of the university at all but were outsiders, there for the purpose of stirring up violence. When my husband and the poet William Alfred and I arrived at the theater and took this fact in, we tried to warn Cal<sup>33</sup>, but he was late getting in from New York and suddenly he was there before us on the reader's platform—tall, awkward, disheveled, somewhat diffident, and gazing around him in what appeared to be a rather vague and absent way. Then he sat down. Someone wearing a red arm band came from the back of the hall to introduce him as “the great poet of the Revolution,” and a voice somewhere in the back of me yelled, “Let's have the poem ‘Che Guevara.’” Then another voice—“Yay, man, Che Guevara, viva la Revolucion!” Cal stood up, muttered something about being a poet, not a revolutionary, and began to read a poem that he had written to his daughter Harriet. And so for forty minutes or more he read some of his early poems and some more recent ones, while from time to time a voice from somewhere in the audience would call out for “Che Guevara, man, let's have the Che Guevara!” But Cal kept on: a new poem for Allen Tate, an older one for George Santayana, something from *Life Studies*, but no poem for Che Guevara, no Caracas, no March 1 or 2, not a single political poem. However vague or diffident or vulnerable he had seemed at the beginning, he had grasped the situation almost instantaneously and he had set out to defuse its potential explosiveness. He had turned a radical protest meeting into a poetry reading. He had fulfilled his commitment to read but he had not been used.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Bellamy (1984:150-151).

<sup>33</sup> Robert Lowell's nickname.

<sup>34</sup> Esther Brooks, quoted in Hamilton (1982:362-363).

*Poetry vs. market and state.* The U.S. poetry field was similar to the French literary field in looking like an “economic world turned upside down” (Bourdieu 1996:81)—only a handful of postwar U.S. poets were able to live off their royalties. Robert Frost, Allen Ginsberg and Robert Lowell were possibly the only ones, and even they struggled to make ends meet when poetry was their only source of income. In the early 1970s, at the apex of his fame, Ginsberg went on national reading tours when he ran out of money and Lowell complained of the difficulties of surviving on poetry throughout his life. In 1949, right after winning his first Pulitzer Prize and a Guggenheim Fellowship, he wrote to his mother that he and his wife have “little money and much uncertainty”<sup>35</sup> and in 1951 he complained that the royalties from his most recent book “just about canceled off the cost for its revisions”<sup>36</sup>. In 1971 this most famous of U.S. poets wrote these lines to his ex-wife:

I’m sorry to have sent you that fussy letter about money. I really can’t make out on my Essex salary. At our age it is hard to live on nothing, taxis etc. I think the only article of clothing I’ve bought in a year is an overcoat. If you need money at any time from the Farrar royalties I’ll give it to you. I am keeping the fourteen thousand as a reserve. I admit this sounds like an anti climax to my money groans, but I think you can understand the mental relief just having it gives me.<sup>37</sup>

Heartbreaking as these lines are, Lowell’s situation was quite good compared to other poets of his generation. Robert Creeley’s situation in 1970 is closer to being representative—he was a widely anthologized leader of the influential Black Mountain School, but not among the four or five poets who defined midcentury U.S. poetry. The

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<sup>35</sup> Robert Lowell letter to Charlotte Winslow Lowell, November 5, 1949. In Hamilton (2005:149).

<sup>36</sup> Robert Lowell letter to Elizabeth Bishop, November 6, 1951. In Hamilton (2005:179).

<sup>37</sup> Robert Lowell letter to Elizabeth Hardwick, n. d. (May 1971). In Hamilton (2005:572).

net gain to Creeley from book sales during 1970 was \$784.80<sup>38</sup>, the equivalent of \$4365.63 in 2009 terms<sup>39</sup>. The financial situation of younger or less famous poets, then, could be expected to be quite drastic.

As a result, postwar U.S. poets either came from very wealthy families or had to seek additional employment. Examples of the first include James Merrill, the son of a rich investment banker, Robert Lowell, who came from a patrician New England family, Robert Bly, whose father gave him a farm next to his own, and Robert Duncan and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who inherited considerable money from their families. As an example of the latter, teaching comes to mind first, but many poets also worked in advertising (e.g. Allen Ginsberg, Lew Welch). They also took manual jobs (e.g. Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, James Wright).

Poets also devised creative ways of cutting living costs. Art colonies in unlikely places like Bolinas, California, where poets like Ted Berrigan, Robert Creeley, Joanne Kyger and Lewis Warsh lived, arose out of a need to keep rents low. Poets who could not or did not want to leave urban areas made other arrangements, such as establishing communes like the East-West House in San Francisco, where Lenore Kandel and Lew Welch lived. Some poets even moved abroad to keep costs down—Harold Norse travelled all over Europe in search of lower living costs and Philip Whalen preferred living in Japan for its affordability<sup>40</sup>. Sometimes they used lower costs of publishing in other countries to their advantage, as Robert Creeley did when he transferred the editorship of *Black Mountain Review* to Mallorca, Spain.

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<sup>38</sup> Don Allen letter to Robert Creeley, December 22, 1970. Robert Creeley papers, M0662. Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.

<sup>39</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

<sup>40</sup> Philip Whalen letter to Velna Whalen, n/d (mailed September 30, 1969). Philip Whalen letters to Velna Whalen, BANC MSS 2004/118 cz, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

The sum total of these strategies was the partial decommodification of poets' lives. "The one thing I really liked about being a poet in New York," said Ron Padgett in an interview, "is that it gave one a lot of social mobility":

Not that one moved up or down in one's station. *It's almost as if one weren't in a station in New York.* So one night I would find myself walking the streets of the lower east side with Harry Fainlight, the next night I'd be at a salon or party at Lita Hornick's, or I would be at Andy Warhol's, or at a party at the Tibor de Nagy gallery and I'd meet Larry Rivers... I could be in all kinds of milieus, from real uptown to real downtown. I felt that was terrific. *That was exactly the kind of nondefinition of my status that I was looking for, that I wanted to perpetuate.*<sup>41</sup>

Padgett's words reveal that the financial difficulties associated with being a poet came to be something that poets accepted and even cherished—*amor fati* was quite real among some U.S. poets as it was among the French pure writers Bourdieu wrote about. Consider the following exchange between poet Mark Strand and an interviewer:

Richard Vine: Are you disturbed by a sense of coterie in recent poetry, by the fact that the audience is so small and ingrown?  
Strand: (...) The smallness of the audience doesn't bother me. I don't believe poetry is for everyone any more than I believe roast pork is for everyone. Poetry is demanding. It takes a certain amount of getting used to, a period of initiation. Only those people who are willing to spend time with it really get anything out of it. No, the lack of audience doesn't bother me. Some poets have 100,000 readers, but I don't believe that many really read poetry. I think if I had that many readers I'd begin to feel that something was wrong in my poems (Bellamy 1984:240).

Claiming access to this community on the basis of sales, then, was not a smart strategy, so very few people did it. The career of James Dickey, one of these handful cases, is illuminating. Upon learning that Dickey bragged about making lots of money from poetry, Robert Bly, poet and the editor of the literary journal *The Sixties*,

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Lenhart (2006:105), emphases mine.

automatically assumed that Dickey also supported the war in Vietnam—a position guaranteed to get a poet in trouble with colleagues. In winter 1964, Bly had applauded Dickey’s work in a review; in spring 1967, he reversed his position with a scathing attack. “The subject of [Dickey’s new] poems is power,” he wrote, “and the tone of the book is gloating—a gloating about power over others” (quoted in Sugg 1986:70). He went on to argue that Dickey’s approach to money and his support for the war were “associated somehow with the abrupt decline in the quality of his work” (quoted in Sugg 1986:79).

The decommodification of poets’ lives set their political concerns apart from the majority of the U.S. population, for whom a growing economy was the prerequisite for all desirable things, and turned them to the advocates of a different kind of politics—one that celebrated the values of poetry as opposed to following the dictates of means/ends rationality. The expansion of higher education after 1945 may have boosted bohemian enclaves, but avant-garde poets remained a tiny fraction of the population, so the liberal electoral politics that underwrote the growth machine could ignore them. Between 1940 and 1960, most of them perceived this kind of politics to be unassailable, and finding no viable alternative to it around them, turned away from politics. Consider, for instance, a letter Lew Welch wrote to his mother in 1950:

This country is through. It may take another hundred years to die, but it is through. The present hysteria attests to it. The military control of this state, a control that can only save some things by destroying others, but that cannot construct anything, attests to it. We are the Rome of Livy’s day. (...) I cannot, of course, identify with, or serve the other political organization involved. I am simply not political.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Lew Welch letter to Dorothy Brownsfield, July 26, 1950. In Welch (1980:16).

Welch's response to perceived self-weakness was leaving the country—during the Korean War, fearing the draft, he considered moving to Chile. Less easily disturbed poets turned to defending their institutions as best as they could. The most important of these were presses, which were never entirely free of government interference in this period. Lawrence Ferlinghetti was acquitted for publishing Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* in 1956-57, but as late as 1969 Ginsberg had to testify in court to defend Jack Micheline's *Skinny Dynamite* against obscenity charges. Similarly, poetry reading venues had to be protected: As late as 1975, Ginsberg was writing to Stanley Kunitz, poetry consultant to the Library of Congress, urging him to defend the poetry reading program at the Smithsonian, which was cancelled because Erica Jong did not “keep sex and politics out” of her performance there.<sup>43</sup>

As soon as they saw signs of weakness in this exceptionally powerful hegemony, they went on the offensive. The fearful, apolitical Lew Welch who considered running away to Chile in 1950 was an out-and-out revolutionary in 1967:

Well the revolution is finally happening. Detroit and 40 other cities blew up in July—the 1967 total is 70 cities and towns. (...) These niggers are only shooting at Authority: Greyhound buses, cop-cars, fire engines, poverty-program offices. It's not so much a racial revolution as a revolution of the poor. (...) I asked a friend of mine (black) if I could join the Black Panthers and help burn it down.<sup>44</sup>

Such wild vacillations were common among poets, but they hide a more fundamental stability in the political perspective that comes with membership in this particular community of poets—anarchism. Poggioli (1968:97) wrote that “the only omnipresent or recurring political ideology within the avant-garde is the least political or

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<sup>43</sup> Allen Ginsberg letter to Stanley Kunitz, January 17, 1975. Allen Ginsberg papers.

<sup>44</sup> Lew Welch letter to Gary Snyder, August 9, 1967. In Welch (1980:144).

the most antipolitical of all: libertarianism and anarchism,” and as far as U.S. poetry was concerned he was right:

Government should have no being except to hold back men from brutalities they might commit through greed & fear – when Government is a perpetrator of brutal deeds – especially when cruelties are masked in pretexts of ideology then Government must be prepared to surrender to a movement of love. All governments that have taken the side of finance & industry in preference to the needs of its citizens shall become brutal & have no function finally but to murder the citizens who are not in control of wealth & industry & the government thereby encourages War, mass destruction & genetic debility upon its own less fortunate members & opposes those men to the men of equivalent rank in other nations.

Government that has exceeded itself and grown of no use to its citizens – or government that has been always without constructive intent has attempted especially for the last 50 years to wash clean the spirits & minds of men so that they will not know that the ideal function it is to perform is the avoidance of war & protection of its members from pain & deeds of violence from without & within.<sup>45</sup>

Even poets known to be more “moderate” in their politics had an anarchist streak.

Consider the following excerpt from a letter by Robert Lowell, who was a fervent anticommunist at the time:

I’ve read Vanzetti’s letter to Sacco’s son for the first time. Their cause is mine— I’m sure the pro-Russian traitors are secretly supported by certain rich men (...) When I get out I’m going to do everything in my power to get the Sacco case reopened.<sup>46</sup>

This elective affinity between poetry and anarchism leads to the question of whether poets became anarchists because they became poets or vice versa—that is, whether or not the phenomenon is to be explained by reference to sociological or purely

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<sup>45</sup> Journal entry, notebooks box 3, folder 11 (1961 and 1962). Michael McClure papers.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Lowell letter to Randall Jarrell, May 21 1949. In Hamilton (2005:140).

personal dynamics. Another Lowell letter suggests that poetry came first, that is, that membership in a community of poets shapes one's politics decisively:

I am about midway in *The Group*, and have just reached the fine section seen through the stately eye of Hatton. Somehow he makes them all seem smaller and younger, and I am reminded more than ever of our curious clubby monosexual, but seething with tentacles world of St. Mark's. (...) Of course we were four or five years younger, straight Republicans, and hardly aware of any counter-currents, and expecting to move ahead on our advantages along the shining grooves of business.<sup>47</sup>

Lest this be interpreted as selective recall of distant memories, consider the following episode from Lowell's teenage years:

During his final year at St. Mark's [School], Lowell became associate editor of the school magazine, *Vindex* (Frank Parker was art editor), and published a few trifling and pretentious pieces in free verse. His most notable contribution, though, was an essay called "War: A Justification." It was an effort Caligula himself might not have been ashamed of. Lowell's aim is to counter the view that war merely "brings bloodshed, depravity and confusion." He concedes that "these are very serious objections" but goes on to demonstrate that "not only the good that [wars] bring far outweighs the evil, but also that they are essential for the preservation of life in its highest forms" (Hamilton 1982:23).

#### **2.4. The Peculiarities of the U.S. Poetry Field**

U.S. poetry constituted a field, but some characteristics of this field diverged from Bourdieu's description of French artistic and literary fields. The first of these was its relatively high degree of dependence on institutions for its continued functioning. Second, the relationships between poetry on one hand and the market and the state on the other were, closer examination reveals, more complicated than simple rejection.

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<sup>47</sup> Robert Lowell letter to Mary McCarthy, August 7, 1963. In Hamilton (2005:430-431).

*The institutional dimension.* Since poets constituted the audience that mattered most to poets, the continued production of poetry relied heavily on poets' continued communication. One way to make sure that poets had ongoing communication was to concentrate them geographically in places where their livelihoods would be secure, and in the U.S. this could not be taken for granted because of the sheer size of the country and the multiplicity of the urban cores that competed to dominate its cultural life.

Poetry institutions took care of this task. Poets were most likely to live in New York and San Francisco because these two cities were the centers of bohemian life in the U.S. But poetic bohemianism could not exist if it were not for the support provided by institutions. Some of these were informal institutions such as café circuits, where the "poetry reading" became a distinct cultural institution in the postwar period. Others were formal ones like poetry centers and creative writing departments of colleges and universities. The line between formal and informal institutions was not always easy to draw as the public funding of the arts produced a tendency to formalization; as I will explain in chapter 3, San Francisco Poetry Center and New York's St. Mark's Poetry Project were the formal "wings" of the café circuits of those cities.

But not all the formal institutions of U.S. poetry were located in New York and San Francisco, and here the contrast with the French case becomes especially stark. The U.S. poetry field has been less centralized geographically due to the diffusion of universities throughout the country and their postwar expansion. Because they housed respectable writing programs, Boulder, Buffalo, and Iowa City could become centers of poetic innovation in the U.S., whereas Paris has dominated the French countryside. Consequently, the dynamics of competition that divided Paris into rival literary zones has

played out between these centers. The rivalry between the writing programs of SUNY Buffalo and the University of Iowa was especially bitter. After Black Mountain College, where the first avant-gardes of the postwar period gathered, closed down, the legacy of Black Mountain poetry eventually went to Buffalo, where Robert Creeley, a Black Mountain alumnus, controlled the curriculum. The Iowa Writers' Workshop, on the other hand, was the incubator of confessional poetry. Since these two poetics were competing reactions to the declining hegemony of New Criticism (see next section), Buffalo and Iowa developed as arch-rivals.

*Negotiating money.* One of the most striking features of the French literary field according to Bourdieu's description is its wholesale rejection of sales as a measure of literary worth. This was no mere bracketing of money, in which case the relationship between sales and literary success would have been nil. More radically, high sales were a stigma—they proved the *lack* of literary value. In contrast, other scholars have argued that money and the market are not something to reject but something to negotiate for intellectuals (Moriarty 1994; Woodmansee 1994), therefore Bourdieu was not right in his strong claims (Lane 2006).

As I explained in the previous section, the objective situation of U.S. poets in the twentieth century was not too different from the French writers Bourdieu focused on. Only a handful of them could survive on poetry, and those who did did not attempt to use the money they made against their critics. To the contrary, the prose writings of Allen Ginsberg and Robert Lowell are full of statements that denounce the market principle.

But that was not the whole story. For one, some poets accepted the premise of poetry as anti-commodity, but disagreed with the strong claim that any compromise with holders of economic power is to be avoided. According to Lew Welch, for instance, private patronage was a perfectly acceptable form of funding:

I plan a huge book to be called “Bread”—a frank challenge to this economy. Why can’t we afford poetry? (...) I want to make a frank appeal for *patronage* & to be directed squarely at the people with real money, none of whom, I feel, realize how little it takes to keep a poet alive: that \$1500 a year to a man like Whalen will change the world forever. And I want it to make the point that what is needed is rent money, food money, bread! The rest takes care of itself. We want to give the *poetry* away. Etc. Definitely want something from you, if you’re interested. (...) In short, I see this as the right moment to challenge & change a totally unexamined cultural attitude, a dangerous attitude that is hurting everyone. How can you write true poetry if you’re forced by poverty to sing through rotten teeth? I don’t really think anyone wants us to. They just haven’t thought about it. When challenged all but the real rotten bastards are on my side in about ½ an hour. And part of it is our fault. Those French Impressionists stood flatly against, outside, etc., and made a stance unheard of in history. And many of us assume that stance without seeing how foolish it is. It does nobody any good. Ginsberg’s simple stance of: I am a Poet, Poets try to be great men, men of love, *that* is more like it.<sup>48</sup>

The private journals of some poets display both a commitment to poetry and a desire for monetary gain in exchange for the production of poetry. Consider the following journal entry by Michael McClure:

This is the end of the line. We are being praised for our idealism. We are amalgamated with Henry Luce. (...) We are handed Ginsberg and Kerouac – neither of whom I would put down, but they are handed to us. As are such other things as voluntary poverty – complete with a spokesman for it/for us. I want to be rich I want to go everywhere, I want to own everything, why shouldn’t I? Who deserves it more than me.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Lew Welch letter to Gary Snyder, 22 March 1963. In Welch (1980:104).

<sup>49</sup> Journal entry in notebooks, box 1, folder 7 (July-October 1957). Michael McClure papers.

McClure's thoughts could be considered mere ramblings, and the fact that he didn't make them public could be seen as an indication of an understanding that the poetry field was indeed like the French literary field. But other poets, known even more for their commitment to poetry, openly talked to one another about money in ways that would put Flaubert and Baudelaire to shame. Consider the following letter that Robert Duncan sent to Denise Levertov, where he discusses the conditions under which he will compromise his purist position and contribute to poetry anthologies whose editors he does not trust:

So I'm trying to hold to certain criteria for this business of contributing to anthologies:

1. That it be edited by someone genuinely concerned [*sic*] with poetry, certainly at a minimum that the editor be an involved poet. (...) Under this criterion, I am burned up that Don Allen, who is an entrepreneur cashing in on a good thing, should be the editor of the first (or any) anthology to present the work with which I am most concerned. (...) When [Don] Allen first proposed the anthology I wrote that I was eager to appear with those contemporaries who have given me directive and contrast, but that I had also a mistrust.
2. and/or that there be adequate payment. And that I set at fifty cents a line. The Auden anthology paid me \$15 a poem which came to that. Evergreen offers as far as I can figure out at \$2.50 for 44 lines about 17c a line.

If the poetry field had been exactly like the French literary field, the price for such compromises could not even exist because the value of poetry and the value of money would be incommensurable—no common metric could be used to evaluate the things of the world of poetry and the things of the mundane world. By coming up with an explicit exchange rate between art and money, Duncan was, one can say, willfully limiting the autonomy of the poetic from the economic.

Yet Duncan was not any poet—he was to break with Denise Levertov, to whom he wrote this letter, over the proper way for poets to deal with Vietnam War; and he refused to publish a new collection of poems for fifteen years to protest what he saw as the commodification of poetry following the “Beat boom” (see next section). The fact that he, of all people, could think of establishing a common metric for money and poetry – a price tag for a line of poetry – shows that there was a significant difference between the U.S. poetry field and Bourdieu’s ideal.

*Negotiating politics.* The relationship of the poetry field to mainstream politics was also one of strategic negotiation rather than one of pure and unconditional rejection. Close examination reveals that Robert Lowell, whose rebuff of President Johnson’s Vietnam policy in 1965 became notorious (see chapter 4), was not an opponent of politics-as-usual when it seemed to be on his side. In a move that directly belies Bourdieu’s claim that the intellectual stands in contrast to the earlier, pre-autonomy figure of the poet-turned-statesman, he praised the poet-statesmen to political figures he was on friendly terms with:

I see Pushkin goes far beyond Shelley, who only called poets “the *unacknowledged* legislators of mankind.” Alas, I am fairly blessed with the things of this world, am hungry for fame, and nobody has ever bowed down to me. Still, unlike the dervish, I do have a country. It was very gentle of you to write me in long hand, and to struggle with the elements to make Blair’s dinner. Your presence was in the wings, and we sorely missed you. I trust our meeting will come about.

I have always been fascinated by poets like Wyatt and Raleigh, who also are statesmen and show a double inspiration—the biggest of these must be Dante, who ruled Florence for a moment, and would never have written about Farinata and Manfredi without this experience. Larger parts of the *Commedia* are almost a

Ghibelline epic. Then there are those wonderful statesmen, like Lincoln and Edmund Burke, who were also great writers.<sup>50</sup>

Lowell's discourse is symptomatic of a newfound confidence in poets' political talents during the Vietnam War. Following the explosion of Beat and confessional poetry, poets had broken out of the self-imposed confines of the academy and were, unlike in the 1950s, actively pursuing political goals. For the most part, their involvement in politics was a challenge to politics-as-usual; poets wanted the U.S. out of Vietnam simply because it was the right thing to do and refused to dignify calculations of the value of Vietnamese lives vis-à-vis the goals of U.S. foreign policy. But every now and then, poets were enthusiastic about politics-as-usual. In 1966, for instance, Cid Corman wrote to Allen Ginsberg, who was already famous for resisting the U.S. government, asking him to run for president. He wrote:

No one is better qualified in every way than you are to take the central role. To run for any lesser office is meaningless and hopeless. *And you must campaign FOR election—not merely for splash.* Nor is it merely to scare the others shitless. That would be too easy—another Orson Welles' stunt. (...) I say you not only would draw at least 5 million votes—but you would get more voters to the polls than ever before.<sup>51</sup>

These quotes from Lowell and Corman could lead to one of two conclusions. The first is that U.S. poetry had no autonomy from the political after all. The second is that the autonomy of the field from the political was configured not as a rejection of the political but as its opportunistic negotiation.

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<sup>50</sup> Robert Lowell letter to Robert F. Kennedy, February 25, 1966. In Hamilton (2005:468-469).

<sup>51</sup> Cid Corman letter to Allen Ginsberg, September 12, 1966. Allen Ginsberg papers. Emphasis mine.

Based on these poets' *public* statements about the war, the second option is stronger. The evidence by which Bourdieu establishes pure rejection of the political as a component of the process of autonomization is the public statements of the writers he takes to be exemplary in this regard; *J'accuse* is not a letter to a friend or a journal entry but a newspaper article. In their public statements Ginsberg and Lowell were no different from Zola—the plotting, the calculation, the embrace of what they in public call base and vulgar come out only in their private notes and correspondence. Assuming that Bourdieu's theorization of autonomy is not completely off the mark, it is public statements that should matter in judging the extent of the autonomy of the field. Taking the private musings about political glory into consideration, one could say that poets spoke different languages with different audiences in an attempt to enlarge, as far as possible, their sphere of influence. In other words, their approach to the political was opportunistic—it was a matter of interested negotiation rather than principled rejection.

## **2.5. The History of the Poetry Field**

*From fireside poetry to modernism.* At the turn of the century U.S. poetry was published mainly in daily newspapers and was, therefore, local in character. There were no significant attempts to produce journals devoted to poetry, so interaction among poets was restricted and the concerns of non-poets carried significant weight. Local newspaper editors may or may not have been interested in the maintenance of the social fabric, but they prevented poets from exploring taboo subjects because they needed to avoid controversy. The necessity to appeal to an undifferentiated audience also dictated against formal experimentation.

Newspaper poetry, therefore, had few options other than following in the tradition established by poets like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and William Cullen Bryant in the nineteenth century. Called “fireside poets” because of their conscious attempt to write poems for family entertainment and education, these poets had used standard forms, regular meter, and rhymed stanzas, making their work easy to memorize and recite. Their subject matter was the domestic life, mythology, and politics of America, though none of them was associated with political movements outside the mainstream. Their choice to write for the “common people” underlies their sentimental and moralizing tone:

We watched the first red blaze appear,  
Heard the sharp crackle, caught the gleam  
On whitewashed wall and sagging beam,  
Until the old, rude-furnished room  
Burst, flower-like, into rosy bloom;  
While radiant with a mimic flame  
Outside the sparkling drift became,  
And through the bare-boughed lilac-tree  
Our own warm hearth seemed blazing free.  
(from “Snow-bound,” John Greenleaf Whittier)

So through the night rode Paul Revere;  
And so through the night went his cry of alarm  
To every Middlesex village and farm,—  
A cry of defiance, and not of fear,  
A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,  
And a word that shall echo forevermore!  
For, borne on the night-wind of the Past,  
Through all our history, to the last,  
In the hour of darkness and peril and need,  
The people will waken and listen to hear  
The hurrying hoof-beats of that steed,  
And the midnight message of Paul Revere.  
(from “Paul Revere’s Ride,” Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)

This situation changed from 1910 on as journals devoted solely to poetry started to appear in major metropolises of the Eastern seaboard. They allowed modernist poets to break with newspaper editors' expectations. The classic works of U.S. modernism, published in these journals, explored new poetic forms such as free verse and variable line. Rather than revolting against form as such, these explorations pursued a specifically modern poetic form, one that could render the modern experience by its structure alone.

In one way or another, all the innovations that took place at these "small magazines," as they were affectionately called, were tied to the life of Ezra Pound (1885-1972). Pound was born to cultural prominence—he was the grandson of a Lieutenant Governor of Wisconsin and his mother was related to Longfellow. He grew up in suburban Philadelphia and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania. Here, he met and befriended two poets whose work he was going to advocate as part of his agenda of launching a brand new, modernist, poetry: William Carlos Williams and Hilda Doolittle (H.D. to poetry readers).

In 1908, Pound moved to Europe. He settled first in Venice, but then he arrived in London, where he became a central figure in the arts scene. He became close friends with poets W. B. Yeats and Wyndham Lewis. With Lewis he published *BLAST* magazine, where the two earliest "-ism"s of literary modernism in English, Vorticism and Imagism, appeared. Imagism was born from Pound's collaboration with Yeats, when the two poets studied Chinese and Japanese language and literature as an alternative to the verbosity of Victorian English. Consequently, it emphasized clarity, precision, and verbal economy while rejecting traditional rhyme and meter. As an example, consider the following poems, presented in their entirety:

Green arsenic smeared on an egg-white cloth,  
Crushed strawberries! Come, let us feast our eyes.  
(Ezra Pound, "L'Art, 1910")

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.  
(Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro")

In 1915, as the overseas editor of *Poetry* magazine, Pound recommended to Harriet Monroe, the editor of the magazine, a long poem by T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) called "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Eliot was born and raised in St. Louis, but his family was originally from New England, one of the Boston Brahmins. Like Pound, he received an excellent education – he graduated from Harvard – before moving to Europe, where he met Pound.

Eliot became the best-known poet of modernism because of the popularity of *Prufrock*, which he followed up with "The Waste Land," a long, difficult poem about modernity that secured his canonical status. Like Pound, Eliot pursued a specifically modern poetic form, rejecting traditional rhyme and meter and attempting to capture the ambiguous and contradictory nature of modern experience in its very structure. Consider, for instance, the opening of "The Waste Land":

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.  
Winter kept us warm, covering  
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
A little life with dried tubers.

Significantly, the lines break not before “breeding,” “mixing,” “stirring,” “covering,” and “feeding,” but after them, which creates a sense of unease, curiosity, and ambiguity. The convention of the capitalization of the first word of each line creates, in line with this choice of line breaks, ambiguities in meaning. Consider, for instance, “Earth”—it is not clear at this point whether the reference is to the planet or to soil. Therefore the reader is presented, from the very beginning, with a choice to stop reading or to be alert to the multiple meanings that the poem can evoke. The lack of rhyme emphasizes the lack of an overall purpose in the world the poem describes. A tentative order is established with the pattern of line endings, but this is an order in the making, as the use of verbs as opposed to adjectives makes clear. And there is no guarantee that this ordering of the world will succeed; in fact, the conflicted imagery of the poem suggests otherwise—April, which typically conveys a sense of warmth, life, and new beginnings, is here called the cruellest month of the year, while winter is said to “keep us warm.”

With William Carlos Williams (1883-1963), another friend of Pound’s, the canonical trio of U.S. modernism in poetry is complete. Like Pound and Eliot, Williams was consciously seeking freedom from the artistic conventions of the past, which he regarded as inadequate to render the modern experience. This meant, as with Pound and Eliot, the rejection of rhyme and traditional meter in favor of less predictable but no less rigorously theorized forms. Unlike them, however, his commitment was not so much to an internationalism of the letters but to a particular local environment. That is, he was interested not in tracing the genealogy of modernism to Confucius and the troubadours like Pound or to sixteenth-century English metaphysical poetry like Eliot, but in revealing the already poetic nature of everyday North American speech—although he also visited

Paris during the 1920s, this was a brief episode and he was to spend most of his life practicing medicine in a small New Jersey town, writing at night and visiting bohemian friends in New York City in the weekend. His poetry, as a result, has a more “American” sound than Pound and Eliot’s:

I gotta  
buy me a new  
girdle.  
(I'll buy  
you one) O.K.  
(I wish

you'd wig-  
gle that way  
for me,

I'd be  
a happy man)  
I GOTTA

wig-  
gle for this.  
(You pig)  
(William Carlow Williams, “Après le Bain”)

With Williams, two defining feature of modern fields of cultural production according to Bourdieu, reflexivity with regard to the essence of art and the emphasis on form as opposed to content, appear as explicit concerns:

[I]t is no longer what you paint or what you write about that counts but how you do it: how you lay on the pigment, how you place the words to make a picture or a poem. (Williams 1978:218)

The invention of poetic modernism was the work of a small group of writers—alongside Pound, Eliot and Williams, one needs to mention only a few more names like Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, Hart Crane, and e. e. cummings to account for the full range of high modernist innovations. But modernism had a decisive edge over earlier poetics that the number of its advocates did not reveal: As an urban and upper middle class phenomenon, it was closer to sources of ideological and cultural power, and it cohered into a singular *program*. The differences among Pound, Eliot, and Williams were actually a sign of strength and vitality; compared to it, twentieth-century practitioners of fireside poetry were like, to allude to Marx’s description of peasantry, a “sack of potatoes”—they were all alike, but they were not always aware of one another, and so they did not communicate with one another effectively or act together. This is not to say that all local poetry scenes disappeared or became outposts of modernism—to the contrary. But after modernism, these poetics became subaltern in the full theoretical sense of the word—they were there, they were numerous, but they could not make themselves heard when they spoke. Therefore it is not a stretch to say that the poetry field begins with modernism and that membership of this field is predicated on a direct or indirect relationship with modernism, however antagonistic or revisionist<sup>52</sup>.

That “little magazines” became the heart of poetry is apparent from the fact that approximately 80 percent of the poets who became famous between 1912 and 1946 started their careers in them (McMillan 2005:397). Although many of these journals were

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<sup>52</sup> Some scholars date the beginning of a specifically American literature – a literature that is in the English language but distinct in its sensibilities from British literature – to nineteenth century writers like Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, but I could not verify this claim in its strong sense as the changes that occurred in the institutional setup and the social infrastructure of U.S. poetry mark a clear break from earlier practices. There are stylistic and ideological similarities between Whitman and modernists like Williams, but this may be due to a creative rediscovery of Whitman’s works around the turn of the century rather than to a continuous and unbroken lineage running from Whitman to modernism.

short-lived, they were able to play a crucial role because poets controlled them directly. Marianne Moore, one of the best-known modernists, was the last editor of *The Dial*, where T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* first appeared; and William Carlos Williams was first able to fulfill his poetic agenda when he published *Contact* between 1920 and 1923.

It was the switch to journals that forced poets like Williams to seriously ask what, after all, poetry is. Poetry journals increased the tempo of production and the freedom they gave to poets led to a proliferation of poetic styles in a very short amount of time—as I explained, Pound, Eliot and Williams were friends and they stood together against fireside poetry, but soon they developed distinct styles and started to disagree with one another on details that meant little to outsiders but were to have a defining impact on later generations of U.S. poetry. Some of them even developed multiple styles and periodically rejected their own earlier work, like in Pound's pursuit of one –ism after another.

There was one more structural reason why there were multiple versions of modernism. As artists aspiring to autonomy, poets were not only publishing in separate venues, rejecting the values of other fields, and increasing the pace of their communication with other poets. Because poetry was a written art form, they also needed to come up with a rationale for its continued production alongside other modes of writing, as a distinct kind of knowledge. This will to knowledge manifested itself primarily in poets' relationship with science, with the poetic embrace of complexities beyond the grasp of ordinary reason. But poets also had to distinguish their practice from other nonrational forms of knowledge like religion and what came to be called spirituality. As Gary Snyder put it, the true poem “must walk that edge between what can be said and that which cannot be said. That's the real razor's edge. The poem that falls all

the way over into what can be said can still be very exciting, but the farther it is from the razor's edge the less it has of the real magic" (1980:21). In other words, poets had to go as close to transcendental, extrascientific truth without actually dwelling in it, since they acknowledged that dealing with transcendental truth *as* transcendental truth required a different set of credentials – those that are thought of as religious or spiritual. Where exactly to stop, and how to decide where to stop, became perennial problems.

This double problem came to define poetry and rival groups developed alternative solutions to it. On one hand, an urbane “poetry of the intellect” influenced by Freud’s thought and shaped by the traumatic experience of World War I, saw the ultimate truth of the human condition as uncontrollable chaos, warned against the bohemian attitude of embracing it unconditionally, and emphasized the role of intelligence in identifying the limits of the poetic encounter with this ultimate reality. The task of poetry became the taming of this destructive reality—the creation of a civilized fortress built out of linguistic means. T. S. Eliot became the leading practitioner of this kind of poetry. On the other, Pound and Williams opted for a “poetry of the imagination<sup>53</sup>,” preferring Jungian psychology over Freud. The poetry of the imagination saw ultimate truth as the fact of being always-already undifferentiated from a benevolent Nature, taking the encounter with this force as far as words could carry. It warned of the tendency of symbols to devolve to clichés and asserted the possibility – however remote – of accessing the “thing in itself.”

*The difficulties of modernism and the rise of New Criticism.* As partisans of poetic autonomy, modernist poets had a complicated relationship to politics. On one hand, the

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<sup>53</sup> The terms are from T. S. Eliot’s groundbreaking formulation.

naïve patriotism of fireside poetry was to be avoided, and the rise of socialism as a political camp with simple truths produced an apolitical streak. On the other, the sacralization of the poetic as a distinct realm of knowledge created the seeds of an alternative politics.

The tension between these two currents became manifest with the onset of the Great Depression. The necessity to address massive social dislocation split modernism into two versions, one politically engaged, the other proudly and obstinately private. Eliot kept on addressing the private realm, and with the defection of Pound to fascism in Italy and Williams's indecisive – and for some critics, unsuccessful – exploration of a populist modernism, he emerged as the uncontested leader of modernism in its middle phase. The most famous representatives of politically engaged modernism were George Oppen, Carl Rakosi, and Louis Zukofsky, the leaders of Objectivism. They combined the formal experimentation and dense language of modernism with socialist themes. In addition, a genuine populism became resurgent and viable in the work of Edgar Lee Masters and Carl Sandburg. For a while, it seemed, the field was wide open.

This moment did not last long. The objectivists were soon sidelined by the Communist Party, of which they were active members. In 1936, the party stopped subsidizing *Partisan Review*, the flagship journal of politically committed modernism, in line with the new “popular front” agenda of the Soviet Union. The objectivists now had to choose between their artistic and political commitments, and most chose politics. Oppen went into poverty relief with the Communist Party and quit poetry—his next collection of poems would not appear until 1962; Rakosi left writing poetry for 25 years,

at some point making his publisher think that he must have died (Rozendal 2005:414). Of the group's core, only Zukofsky remained an active poet.

The rise of yet another poetic program, New Criticism, eliminated the other credible contender for hegemony, the populism of Masters and Sandburg. New Criticism developed as a rear guard of high modernism in the universities of the south, which hired the southern separatist leaders of New Criticism – John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren – as native sons and supported their flagship journal, the *Fugitive*. In the context of the late 1930s, the New Critical program gained national significance as the U.S. government cracked down on left-wing activity and the literary left imploded with infighting. The whole point of the modernist revolution was to gain independent social influence, and the acceptance of a smaller audience could serve that purpose if that audience could be made to consist of the right people. Institutionalizing poetry as a profession based in universities could solve this problem, and that is what New Criticism did.

The construction of the university/poetry nexus required concessions on formal experimentation, for if poets were to prove themselves useful to universities, they had to speak the language of scientific standardization that dominated the time. New Critics did this by replacing poetics, the *theory* of poetic value, with poetry criticism—standardized *methods* of evaluating poems. At the other end of the bargain, universities began to subsidize poetry, such that most U.S. poetry journals were associated with them by 1950 (McMillan 2005:398) As a result, New Critical poetry was completely liberated from the market. It was also detached from politics and favored reason over emotion. It was

difficult, but not impossible for readers with the necessary toolkit—reading methods provided by poet-professors in standard college courses.

It was also necessary to reject the political legacy of the 1930s, and New Critical poetic standards did this trick as well. By New Critical criteria, the work of populist poets did not qualify as poetry, and as universities became the greatest patrons of poetry, the populists were pushed out of the field. Carl Sandburg limited the damage by moving away from social and political issues in the 1940s, but Masters's reputation suffered significantly.

*The postwar era and the antiacademic coalition.* As the New Critical program reached its zenith in the late 1940s and early 1950s, movements opposed to it started to appear. Universities still dominated the production of poetry in the mid-1950s, but a number of new poetry journals sprang outside them. In these new journals new movements appeared, and these movements defined themselves as the opposition to New Criticism.

Perhaps the most important of these movements was Black Mountain poetry, named after the alternative/progressive institution of higher education where the leaders of the movement converged. Its standard bearer was Charles Olson, whose essay "Projective Verse" popularized a new, organicist approach to theorizing the relationship between poetic form and content. The novelty of this approach, which Olson summarized in his student Robert Creeley's motto, "form is nothing other than the extension of content," may not be apparent at first reading, but at the time it superseded the longstanding conflict between form and content, which had defined New Criticism. Creeley and Olson's formulation helped them reconcile their claim to poetic

sophistication with a celebration of free verse, which, after Eliot moved to England, had become the property of the now-discredited populism of the 1930s. Thus the lack of rhyme and predetermined meter now became the sign of fidelity to the subject matter, not, as the New Critics tended to think, of the lack of care and mastery. Therefore Black Mountain poets' rejection of "academic verse" was not an attack on high culture and "learned" qualities *per se*—quite the contrary—and it could not be easily dismissed as philistine.

The Black Mountain revolution was the result of a distinctly split habitus. Olson was the son of a working-class family, but he had attended Yale and Harvard and was briefly a rising figure in the Roosevelt administration. His unfinished Ph.D. thesis at Harvard carries the stamp of his family background – it has a distinctly populist streak – but it is also remarkably confident of itself as scholarly text. In his poetry too, Olson combined contraries – his poems moved with dizzying speed from the fishermen of Gloucester, Massachusetts to the ancient Mayas, from colloquialisms to Latin quotations, from descriptions of nature to philosophical musings. Other Black Mountain poets were similarly unclassifiable according to old schemas: Robert Creeley came from an old family and attended Harvard, but his family had lost its wealth during the Great Depression and he dropped out of Harvard, graduating from Black Mountain. Robert Duncan was an out homosexual and an anarchist, but his adoptive family was quite rich. Duncan's early poems had been accepted at leading New Critical journals, but John Crowe Ransom had personally stepped in and left them out because of Duncan's sexuality. Finally, Denise Levertov, originally from Britain, had no formal credentials of

learning because she was homeschooled, but she came from a family of writers, artists, and intellectuals.

A native Californian and a graduate of U.C. Berkeley, Robert Duncan also participated in the efflorescence of literary movements that later came to be called the San Francisco Renaissance. This was also a hybrid phenomenon, one that defied old literary oppositions. San Francisco Bay Area's location distinguished its culture from the high culture of the Eastern literary establishment, but its booming economy, diversity as a port city and liberal culture attracted a large number of artists and writers disillusioned with or dispossessed by New Criticism. The leaders of the Renaissance were, as a result, a mix of native talents – William Everson and Jack Spicer come to mind beside Duncan – and transplants like Kenneth Rexroth, Robin Blaser, Philip Whalen, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Gary Snyder. These poets also wrote primarily in free verse and combined populist and learned idioms.

The third component of the opposition to New Criticism was the New York School of John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, Frank O'Hara, and James Schuyler. Ashbery and O'Hara could have easily developed into young New Critics as they were, like Koch, Harvard graduates. Their style, however, owed much to the campy gay culture of New York City, where they moved after graduation, and as the fate of Duncan's poems shows, that was inadmissible within New Criticism. They also wrote in free verse and combined everyday themes, primarily life in New York, with subtle but effective explorations of cutting-edge literary techniques.

The last element of antiacademic dissent was Beat poetry. Unlike Black Mountain, New York School, and the San Francisco Renaissance, this was a distinctly

lower-class phenomenon: Of the three most prominent Beat poets, Jack Kerouac and Gregory Corso were working class through and through, and Allen Ginsberg, the third, was lower-middle class<sup>54</sup>. The rise of these three men to fame was partly a result of the steady expansion of U.S. higher education in midcentury—Kerouac and Ginsberg attended Columbia University on scholarships, and it is here that they acquired their knowledge of literature, became opposed to New Criticism, and crafted a scandalous collective self-presentation advocating free love and drugs, denouncing the nine-to-five routine in unequivocal terms, and championing the urban outcast. As such, they were initially opposed to the uptown sophistication of the New York School and the careful craftsmanship of the Black Mountain poets—they contributed very little to the poetics of the antiacademic revolt and their poems lacked the wit that gave even the simplest O’Hara poem a richness of meaning.

But these qualities also provided the Beats with access to mass media and mainstream culture, which the other movements could never imagine having. The events that surrounded the publication of Allen Ginsberg’s first book, *Howl and Other Poems*, underscored this: The book was printed in England to take advantage of lower costs, so when it arrived in the U.S. in the spring of 1957 it fell under the jurisdiction of the customs officials. An overzealous official confiscated the book for its explicit depiction of drug use and sexual activity, both heterosexual and homosexual, and Ginsberg’s publisher, the poet and essayist Lawrence Ferlinghetti, was sued with charges of obscenity. Under the newly liberalized laws of censorship, however, the case against *Howl* was weak. Seeing this, and with the support of ACLU behind him, Ferlinghetti

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<sup>54</sup> William S. Burroughs, the other major Beat writer, came from a very wealthy family but he never wrote poetry.

skillfully turned the lawsuit into a publicity event. As *Time* and *Life* magazines covered the trial, he lined up one literary expert after another who testified for the artistic value of Ginsberg's poems. The trial ended with his acquittal – the judge upheld the “redeeming social importance” of the book – and the embarrassment of the authorities.

This led to an even greater fascination of the mass media with the Beats. Dubbed the “only rebellion around” in the dull atmosphere of the 1950s, Ginsberg and his friends became the heroes of free expression for some and the most dangerous subversives for others. Some of the Beats, most importantly Ginsberg, exploited both views with a semi-conscious intention to increase coverage, and the desperate attempts of some other Beats like Jack Kerouac to escape media attention poured further fuel into the fire.

As a result, the Beats acquired a notorious reputation among poets, and not just among the New Critics who labeled them “run-of-the-mill garbage.”<sup>55</sup> Equally importantly, some leaders of Black Mountain poetry like Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov and a significant number of the older participants of the San Francisco Renaissance such as Kenneth Rexroth and Jack Spicer distanced themselves from the Beats, denouncing their easy-found fame and adopting a purist position.

But some other opponents of the New Critical establishment perceived the Beat boom as an opportunity to unseat the New Critics once and for all. The most important of these was Donald Allen. Allen used a combination of flattery, cajolery, and veiled threats to convince Duncan, Levertov, and Spicer to appear in a poetry anthology that also featured the Beats and the New York School. He called his anthology *The New American Poetry*, in its preface wrote that the common denominator of all the poets in its pages was a rejection of the “academic” style, and claimed the future for them. Excluding Eliot, who

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<sup>55</sup> Robert Lowell letter to W. S. Merwin, March 19, 1959. In Hamilton (2005:340).

had become the father figure of the New Criticism, from the canon and rediscovering the work of Pound, Williams, and Wallace Stevens, he invented a lineage for the movements he advocated, turning them to components of a unified phenomenon.

As the cultural atmosphere of the U.S. changed and as the New Critics got older, the hegemony of New Criticism was also challenged from within in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Some of the best students of the New Critics came together under the banner of two new movements, confessional poetry and deep image poetry, where they explored qualities associated with the antiacademic revolt—free verse, organic form, interest in French poetry and the native speech of the U.S., and the criticism of “academicism.” Confessional poetry was associated with Robert Lowell, W. D. Snodgrass, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, and to a lesser degree Adrienne Rich. It had some similarities to the work of Allen Ginsberg, but some of its leaders expressed unease with the association. Deep image poetry was primarily the work of Robert Bly, but one should also mention the names of W. S. Merwin and Galway Kinnell. With these movements, the cast of characters that will appear in the substantive chapters of this dissertation is complete.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**“AUTONOMY FROM WHAT?” UNIVERSITIES, POPULAR TASTE,  
THE STATE, AND THE POETRY FIELD, 1910-1975**

**3.1. Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I made the case for thinking of twentieth-century U.S. poetry as a social field in Bourdieu’s sense, albeit one with some peculiar characteristics. In this chapter, I ask what kind of impact the autonomy of this field had on the political interventions of the actors who played its game. The field approach to intellectuals is important, among other things, as an elegant and spirited defense of the political potential of autonomy. Extending a long line of scholarship, Bourdieu (1993, 1996, 2004; Bourdieu and Haacke 1995; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) contends that the relationship between the autonomy of cultural production and the influence dissenting cultural producers command is positive. In his view, intellectuals must reject any and all constraints on their autonomy in order to become effective participants of public debates. In contrast, an equally respectable scholarly tradition sees the autonomy of arts and sciences as an obstacle that must be overcome in all its guises if intellectuals are to be effective agents of social change (Bürger 1984; Gramsci 1971; Sartre 1988). Note that, in their disagreement, these two traditions agree on conceptualizing the autonomy/influence nexus independently of time and place.

Why, then, did one generation of U.S. poets embrace autonomy from popular taste in the twentieth century while the next rejected it, even though both were committed

to anti-authoritarianism and both kept their distance from the state? More interestingly, why did the collective cultural capital of poets – the broad cultural competence that was attributed to this social category and that could be converted to economic and political capital – increase with both generations? From the 1930s to the 1950s, New Critical poets used British English to build a poetic language far removed from the rhythms and sensibilities of American speech. In spite of their renunciation of the masses, the audience of poetry increased throughout the period. In the late 1950s and 60s, the leaders of New American Poetry reversed this direction and celebrated the “American voice,” arguably making poetry dependent on the approval of the masses. In the 1960s and 70s, they became visible participants in some of the cultural and political debates of the time. Under both generations, poetry penetrated deeper into the daily lives of ordinary Americans. Does all this mean that autonomy is irrelevant to intellectuals’ influence?

I argue that that is not the case. Existing theories of autonomy are of little help in making sense of this picture because they treat the “other” of intellectuals’ autonomy as an unchanging set of constraints, all seamlessly reinforcing one another. In this case, anti-autonomy theories would expect relatively influential and genuinely oppositional poets to consistently align themselves with the tastes of “the people.” Claiming to be autonomous from popular taste is also claiming to be autonomous from the class structure—an impossible proposition. Pro-autonomy theories would, on the other hand, expect all influential poets to deliberately create an artificial language that will turn the uninitiated away. Such autonomy creates, in this view, intense within-group solidarity and allows artists to steer clear from the state and the market as well. In both sides of the aisle, then, the question of “autonomy from *what*” rarely comes up, having been answered in

advance. If this question were to be seriously addressed, an autonomy-based explanation might well make sense of the case of U.S. poets.

Demonstrating that is the task of this chapter. By focusing on the changing strategies of twentieth-century U.S. poets, I show that autonomy is not a single-dimensional status, as participants of both camps have often implied, but a multidimensional process whose parameters are continuously shifting. This makes the strategic decisions intellectuals make in the course of their struggles with economic, political, and other cultural elites more consequential than existing theories allow. Changing circumstances require a rethinking of strategy, and there is no reason to think that intellectuals will always make the right call. Under what circumstances does that happen? In other words, why do intellectuals sometimes make bargains with hegemonic powers that eventually secure them a better position in the social space and why do they sometimes fail to do that?

I proceed as follows: In section 2, I discuss sociological views of the relationship between intellectuals' autonomy and the social influence they command. I pay special attention to the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Peter Bürger, which I identify as the best examples of pro- and anti-autonomy theories respectively. In sections 3 and 4, I examine the history of the U.S. poetry field and find that midcentury U.S. poets were able to use universities and popular taste against one another in their pursuit of cultural capital, switching sides when they perceived the cultural and political conjuncture to shift. In section 4, I ask why U.S. poets could consistently diagnose these shifts correctly. I argue that a certain kind of competition among poetry institutions made the field as a whole perceptive to changes in the political and cultural reality of which it was a part.

I conclude with the implications of my findings. I distinguish between “republican” and “federalist” discursive formations based on the structure of the terrain of autonomy. In republican formations like nineteenth-century France, the various parameters of autonomy are, for the most part, aligned together, so that in declaring one’s independence from one power – say, the market – one has to simultaneously take on the others – the state, religion, universities, and so on. In federalist formations like twentieth-century U.S., on the other hand, it is possible, in fact necessary, to make temporary alliances with some of these powers in order to gain ground against others. Therefore federalist discursive formations, unlike republican ones, call for a strategy of constantly negotiating the challenges to autonomy—in other words, in them there is no magic formula for success independent of time.

### **3.2. Intellectuals’ Autonomy and Their Cultural Capital: A Review**

Recent reviews argue that the sociology of intellectuals coheres around the problematic of class (Brym 2001; Kurzman and Owens 2002). Autonomy provides another vantage point from which to construct the history of the subfield. Like with class, all theories of cultural production have implications for the relationship between cultural producers’ social influence and their independence from various sources of power. Also like with class, this nexus is of secondary importance for some scholars (e.g. Collins 1998) and viewing all sociology of intellectuals from this perspective does not allow a full appreciation of some highly nuanced works (e.g. Karabel 1996). Nevertheless, the potential benefits of theoretical reflexivity outweigh the risk of oversimplifying a complex reality since this vantage point is currently underexplored.

*The public sociology debate.* As the most recent episode of focused reflection on intellectuals' relationship to society, the public sociology debate indicates that autonomy from the expectations of the public is very significant in shaping intellectuals' cultural capital stock. Burawoy's call for more public sociology (2004, 2005) was explicit about the importance of autonomy. His formulation of the relationship between public and professional sociology is typical of pro-autonomy theories: Far from being antithetical, in his view, public and professional sociology presuppose each other. As such, the advocacy of public sociology is simultaneously an advocacy of robust professional sociology, and public engagement is the only way to achieve higher autonomy as a profession.

Burawoy's Bourdieu-inspired defense of autonomy was inconsistent with his deeper commitment to Marxism, however, and that, together with the fact that Burawoy's call came in the context of his presidency of the American Sociological Association, led to a theoretical controversy. Conservative scholars appropriated the pro-autonomy stance by claiming that Burawoy's version of public sociology compromises sociology's legitimacy by making it subservient to Marxism (Nielsen 2004; Tittle 2004), while some left-radical sociologists viewed Burawoy's program as going only half the way. They opposed Burawoy by calling for the destruction of sociology's disciplinary turf (Aronowitz 2005), criticizing professional sociologists' tendency to play the role of the detached expert (Ghamari-Tabrizi 2005).

Significantly, Burawoy and these critics of his position agree on rejecting a third possibility—that the relationship between sociology's autonomy and sociologists' cultural capital may be variable. Other objections to Burawoy's program point precisely

in this direction. Some scholars point out that public sociology can fail and that failure could be costly (Best 2004; Grauerholz and Baker-Sperry 2007; Hall 2005; Holmwood 2007). Others feel that civil society, singled out by Burawoy as the natural ally of public sociologists, is not such an ideal partner (Acker 2005; Brady 2004; Calhoun 2005; McLaughlin and Turcotte 2007). Still others worry that mass media necessarily corrupts sociological discourse (Beck 2005; Ericson 2005; Stacey 2004). The task, then, is to find ways of getting publics interested in the inherently difficult products of a specialized discipline. According to Scott (2005:408), “the advocacy of public sociology is a claim for autonomy combined with a claim for engagement – and that is its challenge.”

*Earlier debates.* Had there been a third theoretical tradition they could draw on, these voices could have cohered around Scott’s conclusion and explicitly theorized the relationship between autonomy and engagement success as variable. But the pro-autonomy and anti-autonomy camps have together dominated the debate for a long time, and other voices have been marginal. In the 1920s and 1930s, Gramsci (1971, 1994) urged intellectuals to renounce autonomy as ideology and join forces with the masses by adopting their language and concerns. Similarly, Lukacs ([1938] 2006) accused the pro-autonomy writers and artists of modernism with complicity with the powers-that-be. On the other hand, Mannheim ([1929] 1985) argued that intellectuals’ independence from the expectations of the public allows them to uncover political truths that are hidden from actors with no such autonomy, and the illumination of these truths can help the forces of democracy. During the 1930s, Bloch ([1938] 2006) and Brecht ([1938] 2006) echoed Mannheim’s ideas, defending autonomy against Lukacs. After 1945, Adorno (1997,

[1965] 2006) and Barthes (1953) rejected Sartre's ([1948] 1988) distinction between committed and autonomous writing.

U.S. scholars became visible actors in this debate after 1945. On one hand, Greenberg (1961), Shils (1961, 1972), Coser (1970), Gouldner (1979), and Robbins (1990, 1993) argued that a separate realm for intellectual activity, free from the whims of laypeople, was of paramount importance. On the other, Mills (1963), Chomsky (1969, 1978), Jacoby (1987), Wald (1987), and Domhoff (1999) claimed that such a separation of intellectual and nonintellectual concerns is impossible and/or undesirable.

*The field approach and the theory of the avant-garde.* The scholars of both traditions above see the relationship between a group's autonomy and the size of its sphere of influence as an invariant because they treat autonomy as a single-dimensional status. In this subsection, I will illustrate this by closely examining two theories that I consider the best recent examples of pro- and anti-autonomy thought—Bourdieu's field approach (1993, 1996, 2004) and Peter Bürger's work on avant-garde art (1984), respectively.

Bourdieu has written much on intellectuals, but his most poignant assertions are in *The Rules of Art* (1996). In this book, he argues that the autonomization of the French literary field – the invention of a specifically literary capital – in the late nineteenth century, which came about as the result of writers like Flaubert and Baudelaire's simultaneous rejection of the state, the market, popular taste and public morality, enabled the next generation of writers to play a different kind of active political role. "Far from there existing, as is customarily believed, an antinomy between the search for autonomy

(...) and the search for political efficacy,” Bourdieu writes, “it is by increasing their autonomy (...) that intellectuals can increase the effectiveness of a political action whose ends and means have their origin in the specific logic of the fields of cultural production” (1996:340).

While *Rules of Art* focuses on writers and painters, its ideas are intended to apply to all cultural production (pp. 214-215), and Bourdieu has stated explicitly that the relationship between autonomy and engagement is the same in sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:187, f. 7). He argued forcefully that advancing autonomy at all costs is just as important for scientists (2004, 2007). A Bourdieusian sociology of science has since emerged (e.g. Heilbron 1995; Heilbron et al. 1998, Heilbron et al. 2004; Kim 2009), so it is not surprising to find that Bourdieu’s ideas underlie Burawoy’s call for public sociology (Burawoy 2004; Calhoun 2005).

Bourdieu’s assessment of autonomy stands in sharp contrast to Bürger (1984), who claims that the separation of the arts from social praxis, in other words their autonomy, makes them socially, culturally, and politically impotent. He finds that artists did not become aware of the limits autonomy places on their social influence before early twentieth century, and when they did, the result was the avant-garde. In his perspective, opposition to the separation of art and life is common to all artistic and literary movements that make up the historical avant-garde of the interwar period. Distinguishing between this genuine avant-garde and what he sees as its shallow repetitions after 1945, he evaluates the latter’s willy-nilly acceptance of autonomy as a second-best solution. While Bourdieu notes that intellectuals who extend the sphere of their collective

influence are those who protect the autonomy of their fields vehemently, Bürger expects this outcome to be the work of artists who renounce the autonomous status of the arts.

Despite this major difference, Bourdieu and Bürger discuss artistic autonomy in similar terms. Even though they explicitly recognize the complex nature of autonomy, implicitly they often treat it as a simple, single-dimensional status.

In his best moments, Bourdieu is aware that conquering the autonomy of a field from the state does not always result in increased independence from the market or vice versa (e.g. Bourdieu and Haacke 1995:69-72). His writings on the political field present the state as a contradictory entity, that is, a parameter of the struggles for autonomy rather than as a foe, pure and simple (e.g. Bourdieu 1998:33-34). *Rules of Art* includes an analysis, however underdeveloped, of the divisions among agents of autonomy, opening the way to seeing the division among sources of heteronomy (pp. 136-137). He is also explicit that the state and market do not exhaust the parameters of autonomy—the media, for instance, constitutes a formidable power in its own right (Bourdieu and Haacke 1995:21-23).

However, Bourdieu frequently contradicted himself in these matters, leading friendly critics to wonder how much to generalize from his historical analyses of particular fields (Calhoun 1993:82). By including private banks under the state, he conflated the state and the market (1998:1-2). In *The Rules of Art*, he presented the Royal Academy of the Arts as nothing but an extension of the state without examining whether it had its own partial autonomy from the state. And the nuanced view of the state came after Robbins (1993:109-110) warned that Bourdieu's "lazy assumptions" made his

analyses blind to the attacks the state has recently had to meet while defending art and science against the market.

These problems may have arisen from Bourdieu's nearly exclusive focus on France, where the particular development of the political field led to the alignment of arts and literature against both the market and the state in a crucial juncture. From then on, he assumes, and does not prove, that the autonomy of the literary field has developed – and sometimes regressed – along the same path defined by a single opposition – the field's inverted economy on one side, the market and the state on the other, other things important only to the extent that they mediate the effects of the state and the market. As such, Fowler (1997:108) notes, one can read Bourdieu's work on cultural production as introducing a new teleology in the sociology of art, regardless of his intentions. This evaluation may be exaggerated, but the charge needs to be taken seriously.

Bürger makes the same assumption because he accepts avant-garde movements' stated desire to reunite art with life at face value (van den Berg 2005). However, these movements rarely followed the utopian practice they preached (Scheunemann 2005; Silverberg 2006; Strong 1997, White 2005). Instead, they negotiated their conflicting goals and often settled for less than what their ideal called for: Destroying the institution of art, for instance, did not promise them much eventual fame, so the leaders of these movements indefinitely postponed the project when worldly success seemed within their reach. These strategies discriminated between various dimensions of autonomy, accepting some more than others: With regard to autonomy from the market, for example, the historical avant-garde had no disagreement with Flaubert's position, whereas autonomy from politics presented a contingent challenge.

There is much to be gained from reassessing this premise. If autonomy is multi-dimensional – if what matters is always autonomy *from* something – intellectuals’ struggle for it has different parameters in different periods. Some actors may make better diagnoses of the situation, giving strategic concessions on some fronts in order to make gains in other, more important ones. In that case, the important question is: Under what circumstances are intellectuals able to tell better deals from worse ones?

### **3.3. U.S. Poetry and Popular Taste in the Twentieth Century**

Recall from chapter 1 that the cultural capital of U.S. poets was steadily on the increase from the end of the 1930s to 1975. The conquest of the university made poetry independent from the market principle in the late 1930s and 1940s while expanding its audience; in the 1950s the next generation of U.S. poets added a new dimension to their sphere of influence by contributing significantly to the rise of the counterculture; and in the 1960s the combined strength of university-based and countercultural poets proved to be relatively effective in challenging U.S. policy in Vietnam.

This ascendance, however, took place under two radically different approaches to the autonomy of poetry from popular taste. Specifically, before the mid-1950s the dominant actors of U.S. poetry were pro-autonomy with regard to popular taste, whereas after this point in time the opposite was true. As such, the case of U.S. poetry belies both pro- and anti-autonomy traditions.

From about 1930 to about 1950, the reigning literary movement in the United States was New Criticism (Altieri 2006; Breslin 1983; Perkins 1987; von Hallberg 1985). New Criticism explicitly rejected reader response as a legitimate measure of literary quality, distinguishing between what a text is and what it does and calling the conflation of the two “affective fallacy.” It defined good literature by its rejection of immediacy and transparency, and by its extensive use of paradox, ambiguity and irony—hallmarks of difficulty. Poetry was the paradigm of literature since, the New Critics argued, in it these features were paramount (Beck 2001; Jancovitch 1993).

New Critics considered seventeenth-century English poetry an excellent example of such an art and tried to replicate its achievement. They forsook literary forms that developed in North America and relied on British English to the point of inventing archaisms. Their most trusted tool, iambic pentameter, produced in their poetry rhythms that would almost never appear in daily American speech:

There once the penitents took off their shoes  
And then walked barefoot the remaining mile;  
And the small trees, a stream and hedgerows file  
Slowly along the munching English lane,  
Like cows to the old shrine, until you lose  
Track of your dragging pain.  
(Robert Lowell, from “The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket”)

In this poem, note the regular alternation of unstressed and stressed syllables in the second line – the defining feature of iambic pentameter – which produces an artificial rhythm that heightens the language and emphasizes its separation from everyday speech. This structure is deliberately broken in the other lines to emphasize certain words – “penitents” in the first line, “small” in the third, “shrine” in the fifth – that are crucial for

the meaning of the poem. Also note the regular rhyme – “mile” with “file,” “shoes” with “lose,” “lane” with “pain” – that adds to the deliberately artificial sound of the poem without, thanks to the extensive use of enjambment (the decoupling of grammatical units from poetic lines), in any way making the poem “easier” to read, make sense of, or keep in mind.

To take another example:

Where we went in the black hull no light moved  
But a gull white-winged along the feckless wave,  
The breeze, unseen but fierce as a body loved,  
That boat drove onward like a willing slave  
(Allen Tate, from “The Mediterranean”)

Again note the overall pattern of alternating unstressed and stressed syllables, left intact in the last line but deliberately distorted in the others to emphasize crucial words – e.g. “white-winged” – or to insert definite or indefinite articles. Note also the regular rhyme and the use of words, like “feckless,” that do not appear in daily American speech. Most importantly, note that “moved” and “loved” are used, in Elizabethan fashion, as a rhyming couplet, declaring the poem’s allegiance to high British English.

In the late 1950s and 60s, things were very different. The dominant movements of the period, brought together by Donald Allen in *The New American Poetry*, called for bringing poetry back to the life of ordinary Americans. They gave up the artificial poetic language New Critics had built out of British materials and attempted to capture American speech patterns in their poetry:

Sourdough mountain called a fire in:  
Up Thunder Creek, high on a ridge.

Hiked eighteen hours, finally found  
A snag and a hundred feet around on fire:  
All afternoon and into night  
Digging the fire lane  
Falling the burning snag  
It fanned sparks down like shooting stars  
Over the dry woods, starting spot-fires  
Flaring in wind up Skagit valley  
From the Sound.  
Toward morning it rained.  
We slept in mud and ashes,  
Woke at dawn, the fire was out,  
The sky was clear, we saw  
The last glimmer of the morning star.  
(Gary Snyder, "Myths and Texts, Part III")

In contrast to the two poems above, this one uses "folksy" language – "up Skagit valley" – and words like "snag" that are native to a particular location in North America, which the poem explicitly establishes as its home. The theme of the poem is not the ordeal of a special person but the everyday menial work of a group of average working-class Americans in the Pacific Northwest. Its aim is not to separate its language from that of daily speech but to sharpen daily speech into poetry – that is, it attempts not to create a new language from foreign materials but to make apparent the already poetic nature of native speech. As such, there is no need here to pursue rhyme and balance it with enjambment, nor is there need to use a predetermined meter. Line breaks are used simply to emphasize certain developments in the narrative; they follow the everyday practice of pausing before saying something important – e.g. "the last glimmer of the morning star."

The way the author of this poem described his method of writing was equally populist:

I've recently come to realize that the rhythms of my poems follow the rhythm of the physical work I'm doing and life I'm leading at any given time (...) "Riprap"

is really a class of poems I wrote under the influence of the geology of the Sierra Nevada and the daily trail-crew work of picking up and placing granite stones in tight cobble patterns on hard slab. “What are you doing?” I asked old Roy Marchbanks. – “Riprapping” he said. His selection of natural rocks was perfect – the result looked like dressed stone fitting to hair-edge cracks. Walking, climbing, placing with the hands. I tried writing poems of tough, simple, short words, with the complexity far beneath the surface texture. (...) Myths and Texts grew between 1952 and 1956. Its several rhythms are based on long days of quiet in lookout cabins; settling chokers for the Warm Springs Lumber Co. (looping cables on logs & hooking them to D8 Caterpillars – dragging and rumbling through the brush) (Snyder 1960:420-421).

As another example, consider:

My wife is left-handed.  
Which implies a fierce de-  
termination. A complete other  
worldliness. IT’S WEIRD BABY  
The way some folks  
are always trying to be different.  
A sin & a shame.

But then, she’s been a bohemian  
all her life... black stockings,  
refusing to take orders. I sit  
patiently, trying to tell her  
what’s right. TAKE THAT DAMM  
PENCIL OUTTA THAT HAND. YOU’RE  
RITING BACKWARDS. & such. But  
to no avail. & it shows  
in her work. Left-handed coffee,  
left-handed eggs: when she comes  
in at night... it’s her left hand  
offered for me to kiss. DAMM.

& now her belly droops over the seat.  
They say it’s a child. But  
I ain’t quite so sure.  
(Leroi Jones, “For Hettie”)

This poem also uses a deliberately colloquial language and abandons meter and rhyme in favor of the “natural” rhythms of everyday American speech. The “I” of the poem is not an artificial poetic persona built specifically for this poem and to be discarded afterwards, but is intended to represent the poet himself, a black man from New York City, in his real-life experience—hence the use of racialized idioms and the playful, bluesy tone of the poem.

The leaders of New American Poetry were as conscious about these choices as the New Critics were. One of them wrote that poetry “indulging itself in “singing winds” & “O Woman, what would you have me do?”” – New Critical poetry from his perspective – fails to reach him because ““O Woman, &c.” would be likely to reply, “Get lost, Buster.””<sup>56</sup> Another wrote that their purpose, in contrast to such an artificial poetic language, was to “waken native aesthetic consciousness in these States.”<sup>57</sup> Another wrote the following in his private notebooks:

Poetry is held either to be one or the other of the following:

1. The poem an *objet d'art*, an end in itself, removed from here and now, from present reality, an embodiment of the eternal escape from reality. The artist conceived a la Joyce as the Supreme Artificer, with the conception of “language as artifice,” art as artifice, poetry as artifice, a figure upon a stage, on the far side of the proscenium arch.

OR

2. Poetry as reality itself. The word is not artifice. The word is the thing itself, not an artifice for the thing. A poem is not an ‘objet d’art,’ poetry is not removed from life, not an idol on a pedestal, not an eternal escape, not an ‘art form’ on the other side of the proscenium arch, removed from the audience. Poetry is not art, poetry is life itself speaking, and the poem should reach out and grab the audience and make it see and hear and feel what life is, as the poet sees it. From this point of view, speech is not artifice and the speaker is not an artificer except if he be a deceiver. The poet is not an artificer, not a dealer in illusion, except in so far as he

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<sup>56</sup> Philip Whalen letter to Gary Snyder, November 9, 1972, Gary Snyder papers.

<sup>57</sup> Allen Ginsberg letter to “National Book Award Literary Fellow Lady Judges,” January 20, 1971, Allen Ginsberg papers.

is a deceiver and misleader. Poetry is not illusion, not an objet d'art, it is the one art which should not deal in illusion but in the closest thing possible to reality itself, in the street—not behind a proscenium arch...

The absolute test for modern poetry should be in questions such as:

1. Will we remember anything of what this poet says in ten years, in twenty years?
2. Will it change your life?
3. Does it enlarge your vision of the world, your concept of reality, in any important way?
4. Is it saying anything of relevance to you, to everyone, today?
5. Is a great "world view" communicated lucidly?
6. Is the poet, as seen in this poetry, a great thinker?

The reason these questions have to be answered negatively in the case of many modern American poets in 1957 is the reason poetry has no audience<sup>58</sup>.

### **3.4. The Changing Parameters of Poetic Autonomy**

There is, therefore, no one-to-one relationship between the autonomy of the poetry field from popular taste and the amount of cultural capital poets command collectively. This finding may lead to one of two conclusions. First, if increasing the autonomy of the field from popular taste necessarily leads to higher autonomy from other constraints, in other words if autonomy can be treated as one dimensional for practical purposes, the influence of poets is unrelated to their autonomy. If so, both Bourdieu and Bürger's traditions are wrong.

Second, however, the various parameters of the process of autonomy may be working at cross-purposes. Making poetry more independent from popular taste may make it more, not less, dependent on the state, the market, and so on, as the case may be. If so, Bourdieu and Bürger's theories each illuminate the dynamics of cultural production partially and can be reconciled. In the same field, increasing autonomy with respect to

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<sup>58</sup> Journal entry dated February 20, 1957. Notebooks, Box 26, Folder 6. Lawrence Ferlinghetti papers.

one parameter *by decreasing autonomy with respect to another* may help intellectuals under some circumstances, and others may call for a reversal.

In this section, I will argue that the latter is the case by focusing on the relationship between popular taste and universities. I will consider universities not just as a resource, as I did in chapter 1, but more broadly as a parameter of field struggles—that is, as a feature of the autonomy process that affects different field actors differently and whose overall effect may change in time. From 1910 to 1975, this relationship constituted a real problem for U.S. poets, one that could not be solved once and for all by rejecting or embracing both sides of the equation. Instead, it had to be addressed anew in each new period.

In summary, the story goes as follows: After establishing poetry as a high art around 1910, U.S. poets debated the pros and cons of populism between 1930 and 1940. The New Critics prevailed in this debate and used universities to fortify themselves against politics and popular taste in the following decade. In the 1950s, the poets who would appear in *New American Poetry* (1960) felt that universities had turned to an obstacle for poetic autonomy. They revived popular taste as a criterion for the judgment of poetry precisely to save themselves from being too dependent on universities.

Recall from chapter 2 that U.S. poetry first acquired partial independence from public taste with the appearance of the first poetry journals around 1910 (Anderson and Kinzie 1978; McMillan 2005; Morrison 2001). Before this, the first venue of publication for poetry was newspapers, which gave poets access to a wide audience, but limited them in terms of both content and form: Newspapers editors expected poetry to contribute to

the maintenance of the social fabric, so they restricted poets from writing about taboo subjects. This moral function required poets to follow forms familiar to a general readership, dictating against formal experimentation. With the appearance of poetry journals, modernist poets started to break with these expectations. The classic works of U.S. modernism, published in these journals, explored new poetic forms such as free verse and variable line. Rather than revolting against form as such, these explorations pursued a specifically modern poetic form, one that could render the modern experience by its structure alone. Some of these works, such as Hart Crane's *Voyages*, started to explore taboo subjects like homosexuality.

That "little magazines" became the heart of the poetry field is apparent from the fact that approximately 80 percent of the poets who became famous between 1912 and 1946 started their careers in them (McMillan 2005:397). Although many of these journals were short-lived, they were able to play a crucial role because poets controlled them directly. Marianne Moore, one of the best-known modernists, was the last editor of *The Dial*, where T. S. Eliot's groundbreaking *The Waste Land* first appeared; and William Carlos Williams, another famous modernist, was first able to fulfill his poetic agenda when he published *Contact* between 1920 and 1923.

With such independence from public taste and morality, it became possible for modernist poets to revive their claim to be the "unacknowledged legislators of mankind". At this juncture, the Great Depression set in, forcing them to think through the specifics of this claim. Some poetry journals became entangled in Marxism, devoting themselves to "political poetry." As elsewhere, however, the relationship between the Communist Party and modernist artists quickly soured as the latter would not relinquish their

independence. Noticing these tendencies, in 1936 the party stopped subsidizing *Partisan Review* in line with the new “popular front” agenda of the Soviet Union.

The majority of modernist poets denounced newspapers and the Communist Party in order to gain independent social influence, and even the acceptance of a smaller audience could serve that purpose if that audience could be made to consist of the right people. In the 1940s, there was an even better way to achieve this: Institutionalizing poetry as a profession based in universities. But this required concessions on formal experimentation, for if poets were to prove themselves useful to universities, they had to speak the language of scientific standardization that dominated the 1940s. The poets of New Criticism did this by replacing poetics, the *theory* of poetic value, with poetry criticism—standardized *methods* of evaluating poems. At the other end of the bargain, universities began to subsidize poetry, such that most U.S. poetry journals were associated with them by 1950 (McMillan 2005:398) As a result, New Critical poetry was completely liberated from the market.

The New Critical program was not confined to any one kind of institution of higher education. The core New Critics found employment in both private schools like Vanderbilt University and public ones like Louisiana State University; in both small liberal arts colleges like Kenyon and in large research universities. If there was an early geographical pattern to the institutionalization of poetry in higher education – the New Critics launched their program in their native South – this was soon over as Northern and Western schools began to establish creative writing departments and staff them with poet-professors. Shortly, Yvor Winters, an ally of the New Critics, gained tenure at Stanford. Even before the construction of the poetry/university nexus in the south, in fact, Robert

Frost had become the poet-in-residence at the University of Massachusetts and at Harvard, also holding brief positions elsewhere, including Michigan.

The New Critical program could have damaged the cohesiveness of the field with its emphasis on explication, analysis, and criticism—Ransom and Tate’s theories bestowed on the figure of the poetry critic an unprecedented power over the poet *per se*. In practice, however, this danger never materialized as the core New Critics and those who took them seriously enough to follow them or argue against them were equally poet and critic—Ransom and Tate matched their criticism with their poetry, and their best students in criticism, John Berryman, Randall Jarrell, and Robert Lowell, did likewise. As a result it was understood that in order to produce good poetry criticism one had to be a good poet. Therefore the noise that the opponents of New Criticism made in this regard should be seen as motivated by field conflict more than anything else.

In the 1950s, however, New Critical hegemony began to suffer from the consequences of its own success. First, the limited number of teaching jobs turned a small but influential group of older poets against the New Critics. Earning their livelihood through a variety of other means and in touch with urban bohemia, these old masters wrote mostly in free verse and experimented with new forms. The New Critics wrote solely in traditional closed forms and dominated the field (see table 3.1). By now, they were thoroughly middle-class in outlook—here is how Donald Hall, a poet-professor with tenure at the University of Michigan, described his life in the fifties:

Teaching rather than writing was a letdown, but I returned to Ann Arbor friends. There were professors of English to argue literature with. (...) (...) There were also town friends—doctors, lawyers, automobile executives—who commuted to Detroit, who had chosen Ann Arbor to live in, rather than Grosse Pointe or

Bloomfield Hills, because of the university with its music and theater. There were long conversations in living rooms, a fresh drink always to hand. In these years, I lived the suburban life—wearing neckties to cocktail and dinner parties, swimming and playing tennis at the Racquet Club (Hall 2008:137).

Table 3.1. Leading academics and antiacademics during the 1940s and early 1950s.

	Teaching career	Poetic style	Poetic language
John Crowe Ransom	Vanderbilt University, Kenyon College	Closed forms	Artificial
Cleanth Brooks	Louisiana State University	Closed forms	Artificial
R. P. Warren	Southwestern College	Closed forms	Artificial
Allen Tate	Kenyon College	Closed forms	Artificial
Marianne Moore	None	Mixed	“Native”
Ezra Pound	None	Open forms	“Native”
Wallace Stevens	None	Open forms	“Native”
W. C. Williams	None	Open forms	“Native”
Louis Zukofsky	None	Open forms	Mixed

Second, as the number of college students increased rapidly after 1945, so did the number of students who aspired to become poet-professors. In order to join the academic ranks, however, students had to first become their professors’ apprentices. Sheer numbers dictated that not all of them could get such attention, and those who were excluded by the university establishment eventually allied with the older poets that the university-based circles of publication had passed by. Allen Ginsberg, who was later going to challenge the “New York literary establishment” on multiple occasions, first tried to gain Lionel

Trilling, his teacher at Columbia University, as a mentor. When that did not happen, he sought the support of William Carlos Williams, an old master of modernist poetry who never taught in universities, even though the two had significant stylistic differences—Ginsberg wrote in very long lines and became famous as a neo-romantic, whereas Williams was opposed to romanticism and made a point of using very short lines. Williams wrote the preface to Ginsberg's first volume of poems, and used the occasion to subtly attack the New Critics. Other "students" of Williams included Harold Norse, Lew Welch and Philip Whalen, all of who acquired fame as antiacademic poets after being rejected by the university establishment. This is how Welch described his first encounter with Williams in a letter to his family:

Williams is very exciting, and very very simple. Not one pretense or affectation. He was reading his poetry last night and got very worked up himself and very intense and simple, and it was like watching a good jam session. I never thought it possible, really, like a good jam session. He stopped in the middle after reading several of his things and said "these may not sound like poetry to you, no matter, don't define the damn things, let 'em come to you—AND BESIDES, he said, THEY'RE IN YOUR OWN LANGUAGE." That's his kick. We do not speak the language of England and our poetry should not have the English form. We talk American., and the poet's job is to intensify this dialect, sharpen it into poetry, keep the words clean and sharp, and MAKE things out of them. And my, he is right. One hears the language of conversation in a wholly different way after reading him.<sup>59</sup>

Third, just as the fields of poetry and higher education were converging, a new technology with the potential of freeing poetry from the constraints of its bargain with universities was becoming widespread: The mimeograph machine. In the 1950s this technology enabled poets outside the university establishment to cheaply produce a large

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<sup>59</sup> Lew Welch letter to Dorothy Brownsfield and Maitland and Virginia Griggs, November 4, 1950. Reproduced in Welch (1980:41).

number of new journals – e.g. *Black Mountain Review*, *Circle*, *Foot*, *J*, *Measure*, *Open Space*, *Origin*, *Yugen* – which retrospectively became famous as the breeding grounds of a new avant-garde. Like the first wave of poetry journals, they were controlled directly by poets—*Black Mountain Review* by Robert Creeley, *Foot* by Richard Duerden, *J* and *Open Space* by Jack Spicer, *Measure* by John Wieners, *Origin* by Cid Corman, and *Yugen* by Leroi Jones and Diane di Prima. As the number of poets who published primarily in these journals increased, the net contribution to poetry of the New Critical accord with universities became negative.

As a result, the problem of “academicism” split the field into two from 1955 to 1965. Against the New Critics and their students, poets of the Beat, Black Mountain, New York School and San Francisco Renaissance movements articulated a common “antiacademic” front by temporarily putting aside their numerous stylistic, personal, and political differences. They attacked the “academic” camp’s poetry anthology, *The New Poets of England and America* with their own *The New American Poetry* in 1960. While closed forms dominated the former book, the latter was a celebration of free verse (table 3.2). In its preface, Don Allen, the editor of the anthology, attacked the New Critics openly, emphasized the continuity of the antiacademic line with the masterpieces of modernism, and claimed the future for the poetry showcased in the book:

In the years since the [Second World W]ar American poetry has entered upon a singularly rich period. (...) These new younger poets have written a large body of work, but most of what has been published so far has appeared in a few little magazines, as broadsheets, pamphlets, and limited editions, or circulated in manuscript; a larger amount of it has reached its growing audience through poetry readings. As it has emerged in Berkeley and San Francisco, Boston, Black Mountain, and New York City, it has shown one common characteristic: a total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse. Following the practice

and precepts of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, it has built on their achievements and gone on to evolve new conceptions of the poem. These poets have already created their own tradition, their own press, and their own public. They are our avant-garde, the true continuers of the modern movement in American poetry. Through their work many are closely allied to modern jazz and abstract expressionist painting, today recognized throughout the world to be America's greatest achievements in contemporary culture. This anthology makes the same claim for the new American poetry, now becoming the dominant movement in the second phase of our twentieth-century literature and already exerting strong influence abroad. (Allen 1960:xi-xii)

The anthology also featured some very strong "Statements on Poetics," and these statements went further in denouncing the formalist verse of New Criticism:

I must be completely free to do just what I want, in the poem. "All is permitted": Ivan's crucial concept. There cannot be anything I must fit the poem into. Everything must be made to fit into the poem. There must not be any preconceived notion or design for what the poem ought to be. "Who knows what a poem ought to sound like? Until it's there." Says Charles Olson... & I follow closely with that. I'm not interested in writing sonnets, sestinas or anything... only poems. If the poem has got to be a sonnet (unlikely tho) or whatever, it'll certainly let me know. (...) Accentual verse, the regular metric of rumbling iambs, is dry as slivers of sand. Nothing happens in that frame anymore. We can get nothing from England. And the diluted formalism of the academy (the formal culture of the U.S.) is anaemic & fraught with incompetence & unreality. (Jones 1960:424-425)

Artists in any genre are of course drawn to the dominant art movement in the place where they live; in New York it is painting. Not to get mixed up in it would be a kind of blinders-on regression, like the campus dry-heads who wishfully descend tum-ti-tumming from Yeats out of Graves with a big kiss for Mother England (...) The big thing happening at home is a nuisance, a publicity plot, a cabal; and please don't track the carpet. They don't even excoriate American painting; they pretend it isn't there (Schuyler 1960:418)

A word on academies; poetry has been attacked by an ignorant & frightened bunch of bores who don't understand how it's made, & the trouble with these creeps is they wouldn't know Poetry if it came up and buggered them in broad daylight (Ginsberg 1960:417).

The response from the editors of the academics' anthology is worth noting as it is a mixture of shock, disbelief, denial, and frustration, all expressed in rather unconvincing language couched in terms of autonomy from popular taste. Here is an excerpt from the introduction to the section of the second selection of *New Poets* devoted to U.S. poetry:

Dividing American poetry today into two camps, the Academics and the Beats, has obscured the distinction between good and bad, honest and pretentious writing, and it has corrupted the unprofessional audience concerned with modern poetry by turning their attention from the poem to the personality of the poet. The assumption that led *Life* to do an article on the Beats is that gossip is more interesting than poetry; and *Time* despises whatever does not sell itself to popular taste: "Talented poets in this generation seem aware that readers outnumber poets, and seem willing to write something that might interest them. The poets apparently want to rejoin the human race," and. In its usual manner, reduces criticism to innuendo: "Most poets' friends are poets; usually even their wives are poets." would that be *Time's* last word on Wordsworth, the Brownings, or Yeats? (Pack 1962: 177)

Table 3.2. Leading academics and antiacademics in the late 1950s.

	Poetic style	Poetic language	Anthologized in
John Ashbery	Open forms	"Native"	<i>New American Poetry</i>
Robert Creeley	Open forms	"Native"	<i>New American Poetry</i>
Robert Duncan	Open forms	Mixed	<i>New American Poetry</i>
Lawrence Ferlinghetti	Open forms	"Native"	<i>New American Poetry</i>
Allen Ginsberg	Open forms	"Native"	<i>New American Poetry</i>
Denise Levertov	Open forms	"Native"	<i>New American Poetry</i>
Frank O'Hara	Open forms	"Native"	<i>New American Poetry</i>
Charles Olson	Open forms	Mixed	<i>New American Poetry</i>

Gary Snyder	Open forms	“Native”	<i>New American Poetry</i>
Philip Whalen	Open forms	“Native”	<i>New American Poetry</i>
Robert Bly	Closed forms	Artificial	<i>New Poets of England and America</i>
Donald Hall	Closed forms	Artificial	<i>New Poets of England and America</i>
John Hollander	Closed forms	Artificial	<i>New Poets of England and America</i>
Robert Lowell	Mixed	Mixed	<i>New Poets of England and America</i>
W. S. Merwin	Closed forms	Artificial	<i>New Poets of England and America</i>
Adrienne Rich	Closed forms	Artificial	<i>New Poets of England and America</i>
Louis Simpson	Closed forms	Artificial	<i>New Poets of England and America</i>
W. D. Snodgrass	Closed forms	Artificial	<i>New Poets of England and America</i>
Richard Wilbur	Closed forms	Artificial	<i>New Poets of England and America</i>
James Wright	Closed forms	Artificial	<i>New Poets of England and America</i>

Years later, another editor of *New Poets* offered a different account of the antagonism that more clearly shows its political nature:

Forty years after *Howl*, I took part in a symposium the day Allen Ginsberg died. The younger panelists spoke of the liberation they felt when *Howl* appeared. Not me. As I confessed that day, when *Howl* came out I felt attacked, not liberated—my castle razed by barbarian hordes—and for a couple of years I denounced the Beats. (...) In editing and grumbling, I was defensive and conservative, ungenerous and conventional. (...) The battle always had its artificiality. The poets of Donald Allen's *New American Poetry* did not hang together by an ethos or an aesthetic—they differed greatly, although most wrote free verse—but all shared the characteristic that they had not been collected in *The New Poets of England and America*. When we first assembled our anthology, John Ashbery was one of our poets. We had miscalculated the length and had to cut pages, and stupidly cut Ashbery. Robert Bly and W. S. Merwin, who never taught, appeared in our collection and therefore counted as academics. As a term of abuse, “academic poetry” appears to denigrate schoolteachers and book learning, but the phrase has another source. If a painter was called academic in the nineteenth century, it did not mean that he taught at an art school. The reference was to the Royal Academy and therefore to a tradition—portraits, landscapes, and horses, rendered in many browns—that excluded innovation (Hall 2008: 120-123).

From the perspective Bourdieu established in *Rules of Art*, the antagonism between the academics and the antiacademics was the occasion of a full-fledged artistic revolution as it had a morphological component as well as a cyclical one—it harnessed the ubiquitous dynamics that arise from generational change with the effects of the rapid expansion of higher education. This is apparent from an examination of the class dimension of the two anthologies. At first, there appears to be little difference between *New Poets* and *New American Poetry*—each had their share of inheritors of family fortunes and children of working- and lower-middle classes. This indicates that some young upstarts from upper class families were attempting to clear the ground from the previous generation. But *New American Poetry* had greater internal variety—the

movements that it showcased were rather different from one another classwise. Recall from chapter 2 that Black Mountain School, which produced the bulk of the theory of the antiacademic revolt, was an ambivalent phenomenon in terms of social class; Charles Olson came from a working-class family while Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan came from the upper-middle class. The New York School was a primarily upper-class phenomenon—John Ashbery, Frank O’Hara, and Kenneth Koch were all born to and raised in privilege. On the other hand, the Beats – the public face of the anthology for less devoted readers of poetry – were complete strangers to economic well-being—Allen Ginsberg was from the lower middle class, Jack Kerouac was from the working class, and Gregory Corso was from the urban underclass. Their fame indicated that the milieus of high poetry were now more open to lower classes, and this was made possible by the expansion – and to some degree, devaluation – of higher education. If Ginsberg and Kerouac knew anything about cutting-edge literature it was because they attended Columbia University on scholarships; if Corso did not remain a petty criminal it was because he came into contact with these two upstarts who taught him all he knew about art.

In *Rules of Art*, Bourdieu associates appeals to popular taste with the market principle and assigns “academic” art unflinchingly to the side of heteronomy in his discussion of Manet (pp. 131-137). In contrast, the history I presented above shows not only that the relationship between poetic autonomy and these two parameters was variable, but also that poets deliberately used them against one another. New Critics, unlike Manet’s academic rivals, were not attacking the spirit of autonomy in the name of

its letter: In the 1940s, their flight to universities saved poetry from being squeezed between Stalinism and the state, and deepened its autonomy from popular taste and the market. By recognizing their political powerlessness, in short, they were able to expand poetry's audience without surrendering to the market.

In order to dislodge New Criticism from its dominant position, the antiacademic camp rearranged these priorities while building on the infrastructure of influence the New Critics had erected. With the increasingly tight relationship between the state and universities during the cold war, there was a real chance for this once-sheltering environment to turn to a trap. On the other hand, with a larger portion of the population going to college, in the 1950s it was conceivable to write good, sophisticated poetry that also appealed to the public—or at least to a section of it that poets could imagine to be representative. Writing to a college classmate who was on his way to becoming a successful academic poet, Allen Ginsberg expressed these beliefs forcefully in 1958:

I'm now getting bugged at people setting themselves up as scholars and authorities and getting in the way of continuous creative work (...) And you're guilty of that too John, you've just got to drop it, and take me seriously, and listen to what I have to say. It doesn't mean you have to agree, or change your career or your writing, or anything hideous, it just means you've got to have the heart and decency to take people seriously and not depend only on your own university experience for arbitrary standard of value to judge others by. (...) I can't stand the pharisaical attitude of the whole treasonable intellectual group who think they are the civilization—basically the problem is they are not free, they have all sold their souls for money ego security conformity prestige university maturity social integration of the most spiteful and chicken kind.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Allen Ginsberg letter to John Hollander, September 7, 1958. Reproduced in Morgan and Peters (2006:85-95).

Ten years later, at the height of the Vietnam peace movement, he made a similar point in an interview, celebrating ordinary American speech as the basis of poetic innovation and rebuking the New Critics for failing to see that:

The key to early twentieth-century prosody change is that wherever there was this breakthrough beyond old form, the inspiration was actual speech, the rhythm of actual speech. (...) The basic problem was that “traditional” rhythmic form, old prosodaic rhythmic form, no longer reflected the emotional variation (the emotions and the speed variations) of speech. (...) So actually experimental prosody has been the main tradition in American and English poetry for the better part of this last century. And so one may say that it is *the* “Tradition” that the younger poets in America are working on, it’s the “real tradition.” And the paradox is that these younger poets who were working in this tradition have been accused of being aesthetic anarchists, of not working in any tradition at all. Unfair! Ignorant accusation! (...) The academy itself didn’t study hard enough to find out what was happening. And most professor-critics were not prepared, the ears in the academy were not tuned to recognize what specific forms were being used.<sup>61</sup>

Ginsberg’s words were timely—his position was made possible and urgent by the coming to maturity of the New Critical program that he was criticizing as a result of the steady expansion of higher education. Before 1955, the suggestion that poets give up closed forms and embrace popular taste could only come from someone who did not mind reducing the figure of the poet to the figure of the entertainer, as Jack Spicer had done in a symposium in 1949:

Here we are, holding a ghostly symposium—five poets holding forth on their peculiar problems. One will say magic; one will say God; one will say form. When my turn comes I can only ask an embarrassing question—“Why is nobody here? Who is listening to us?” (...) The truth is that pure poetry bores everybody. It is even a bore to the poet. The only real contribution of the New Critics is that they have demonstrated this so well. They have taken poetry (already removed from its main source of interest—the human voice) and have completed the job of

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<sup>61</sup> Ginsberg (2001:104-112). Original statement November 22, 1968.

denuding it of any remaining connection with person, place and time. What is left is proudly exhibited in their essays—the dull horror of naked, pure poetry.

Live poetry is a kind of singing. It differs from prose, as song does, in its complexity of stress and intonation. Poetry demands a human voice to sing it and demands an audience to hear it. Without these it is naked, pure, and incomplete—a bore. (...) Today we are not singers. We would rather publish poetry in a little magazine than read it in a large hall. If we do read in a hall, we do not take the most elementary steps to make our poetry vivid and entertaining. We are not singers. We do not use our bodies. We *recite* from a printed page.

Thirty years ago Vachel Lindsay saw that poetry must connect itself to vaudeville if it was to regain its voice. (Shakespeare, Webster and Marlowe had discovered this three centuries before him.) Our problem today is to make this connection, to regain our voices.

We must become singers, become entertainers. We must stop sitting on the pot of culture<sup>62</sup>.

Ginsberg's attacks on academicism became famous, but they were not the only ones. Lesser-known poets were also talking openly about the necessity of replacing academicism with popular taste as the basis of artistic innovation:

[Y]ou find you have to say to your cabdriving, pool-playing buddies that you are a poet, sooner or later. You have to tell them, you have to let them in on it, you have to. (...) Anyway, I told them at this pool game. I said, "By the way, do you know that I am a poet? If you don't mind, I would like to read you one." And I read them "After Anacreon." And they stopped chalking their cues, and they stopped playing, and they really started listening. And when I finished, they said, "Goddamn, Lewie, I don't know whether or not that is a poem, but that is the way it *is* to drive a cab."

I said, "Thanks, I am just testing it."

Now, Po Chu-i used to do that, too. He was a very great poet that used to have a peasant lady who was illiterate yet very, very smart. She was a peasant lady who ran a good garden down the road, and he would go and engage her in conversation. (...) If she had a little "huh?" about it or something, if it seemed awkward to her or wrong, somehow ungraceful, then Po Chu-i would go back and fix it. At the same time, that very poem would have more literary references in it for the literate reader than we can imagine today.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Pp. 43-45 in "The Poet and Poetry – A Symposium." *Occident*, fall 1949. Jack Spicer papers.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Lew Welch, 1969. Reproduced in Meltzer (2001:311).

The rejection of academic elitism in favor of everyday American experience also provided poets with their most common discursive frame during the Vietnam period—poets who were most active in the antiwar movement were, with very few exceptions, practicing in open forms, celebrating everyday American speech, and speaking against the political and artistic conservatism of the university establishment, as table 3.3 shows.

Many poets actively opposed U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, but not all of them played leadership roles in the antiwar movement. Neither did all of them maintain their participation throughout the entire Vietnam War period, and the most vocal ones were not necessarily the most consistently and reliably active. Table 3.3, in contrast, lists the poets who challenged the war in leadership roles and those saw their commitment to the very end. The nationwide antiwar poetry readings of 1969 provide the single best indicator of the former—according to the secondary sources of the peace movement and poets’ involvement in it, the time and energy that had to be devoted to organizing these readings were greater than any other similar initiative. Therefore the table includes, first of all, the five leaders of this initiative: Robert Bly, Allen Ginsberg, Galway Kinnell, Denise Levertov, and Adrienne Rich.

In order to identify poets whose devotion to the antiwar cause was most consistent, I conducted research in four major newspapers – *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Los Angeles Times* – that together span all the major regions of the U.S. and its mainstream ideological continuum, focusing on the period from 1965 to 1975. To the list of the five poets above, this search added three more: Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Robert Lowell, and Muriel Rukeyser.

But not all poets who were active in the struggle against the war were visible to the news media, since some political practices were more reportable than others. To identify such practices and the poets who consistently and patiently undertook them, I did an extensive study of secondary sources, focusing on the history of U.S. literature in midcentury (Beidler 1982; Bibby 1996; Brunner 2001; Chattarji 2001; Davidson 1989; French 1991; Kane 2003; Lehman 1998; Perkins 1987; Smith 1995), the history of the peace movement (Allen 2008; Anderson 1995; Anderson and Ernst 2007; Cavallo 1999; Chalmers 1996; DeBenedetti and Chatfield 1990; Farrell 1997; Gardner and Gittinger 2004; Gitlin 1993; Isserman and Kazin 2004; Perry 1984; Small and Hoover 1992), and literary criticism (Altieri 2006; Breslin 1983; Harrington 2002; Perloff 2002; Stein 1996; von Hallberg 1985). I then used archival and biographical materials to confirm and, where necessary, correct the claims in these sources. These archival and biographical materials are listed under separate titles in the bibliography. Four poets emerge from this procedure with a level of engagement that matches the eight above—Gary Snyder for his leadership in the back-to-the-land movement and the San Francisco Human Be-In; Robert Duncan for his poetry and for his willingness to break with his close friend Denise Levertov over the proper way for poets to get involved; and W. S. Merwin and William Stafford for their poetry. Many poets of the antiacademic coalition whose later writings glorified their involvement in the movement – e.g. Ed Dorn, Ed Sanders, Kenneth Koch, Paul Blackburn, Michael McClure, Lew Welch, Diane di Prima – are left out because, as far as I can tell, their involvement was sporadic.

The reliance of this procedure on secondary sources means that there are two inherent biases in it. First, the dominant trends in U.S. literary history and criticism favor

modernism and the movements that claim its legacy over populist poetics, devoting a disproportionate amount of their attention to them. But this is not as dangerous as it seems. Modernism was not the most populous movement in U.S. literature, but as I argued in chapter two, it is the force that turned U.S. poetry to a veritable field in the twentieth century. As such, poets who did not in one way or another work in the attention space created by the modernist revolution were not fully accepted citizens of the field of poetry, and the primary goal of this dissertation is to find how field dynamics shape the patterns of intellectuals' politicization.

Second, the histories of U.S. literature do not pay much attention to poets whose success in accumulating symbolic or economic capital was relatively limited. This is a very real shortcoming, but logistical considerations dictate against a more sound research strategy. As I explained in chapter two, twentieth-century U.S. poetry was a relatively open field; its boundaries were relatively porous. It was also quite large and not concentrated physically in one or two densely populated regions. If the research object was contemporary poetry, ethnographic research could be deployed in one or two key sites to allow less accomplished poets to come into the picture, although it should be noted that this would compromise generalizability to the entire field. But since the focus is on a historical period that ended nearly forty years ago, relying on secondary sources was inevitable given the funds available for this research.

It may also be argued that the choice of which archival collections to focus on may have produced another selection bias as the poets whose papers I examined constitute a rather one-sided sample of midcentury U.S. poetry—almost all are associated with the antiacademic camp. While this is true, these poets did not correspond with their

closest friends alone—their papers yield information about the political activities of a much wider variety of poets than will be apparent at first sight. Furthermore, the biographical materials I used – biographies and autobiographies, printed correspondence, essays, and interviews – provide, for the academic camp, the kind of information that archival collections provide for the antiacademic coalition.

That the biographical materials are printed makes censorship and self-censorship possible, but in them I have found much unflattering information about their authors. It is of course possible that some embarrassing and unfavorable pieces of information were allowed to remain in these texts to create a semblance of impartiality, objectivity, fairness and self-confidence, but the archives are equally problematic in this regard as they are voluntary donations or sales, either by the poets themselves or by the executors of their literary estate, who were often close friends, spouses, or editors. As such, both archival and biographical materials have limited reliability as sources from which to construct an argument; hence my use of both kinds of data source in the second and not the first stage of the construction of this table.

Some of the poets in table 3.3, interestingly, are former students of the New Critics who realized, with the success of *New American Poetry*, that the combination of free verse and everyday American speech was superior to their teachers' practices given the cultural and political climate of the 1960s. As early as 1961, Robert Lowell had realized that the safe space New Criticism had provided to U.S. poets in the universities did not allow them to accumulate more cultural capital by engaging with pressing cultural issues:

[I]t seems to me we've gotten into a sort of Alexandrian age. Poets of my generation and particularly younger ones have gotten terribly proficient at these [closed] forms. They write a very musical, difficult poem with tremendous skill, perhaps there's never been such skill. Yet the writing seems divorced from the culture. It's become too much something specialized that can't handle much experience. It's become a craft, purely a craft, and there must be some breakthrough into life.<sup>64</sup>

Table 3.3. Poets of the Vietnam antiwar movement.

	Open forms?	Everyday language?	Spoke against academic poetry?
Robert Bly	Yes	Yes	Yes
Robert Duncan	Yes	Mixed	Yes
Lawrence Ferlinghetti	Yes	Yes	Yes
Allen Ginsberg	Yes	Yes	Yes
Galway Kinnell	Yes	Yes	Yes
Denise Levertov	Yes	Yes	Yes
Robert Lowell	Mixed	Mixed	Yes
W. S. Merwin	Yes	Mixed	Yes
Adrienne Rich	Yes	Yes	Yes
Muriel Rukeyser	Yes	Mixed	Yes
Gary Snyder	Yes	Yes	Yes
William Stafford	No	Yes	Yes

<sup>64</sup> Robert Lowell, "An Interview with Frederick Seidel," *Paris Review* 25 (Winter-Spring 1961), pp. 57-95. Reproduced in Lowell (1987:244).

This loss of contact with the popular became an especially widespread concern with students of New Criticism during the Vietnam period. Robert Bly, another convert to the style of New American Poetry, drew a parallel between U.S. military aggression and the New Critical emphasis on “technique” in a 1966 interview:

In America there is an obsession with technique... We are determined to win our wars by using superior technique. We have got wonderful, magnificent boots that have steel plates in the bottom so pongo sticks can't come through and they cost \$80 a pair... (...) Instead of trying to think, to imagine what the people want, we are going to use technique and defeat them no matter what they think. We have to abandon such stupidity. The same thing applies to poetry.<sup>65</sup>

Indeed, an analysis of the “second generation” of New Criticism shows that almost all the prominent students of the New Critics eventually came closer to the antiacademic style (table 3.4). They also forged personal relationships with poets from the antiacademic camp. The “academic” Wendell Berry, Galway Kinnell, and W. S. Merwin joined the “antiacademic” Gary Snyder in creating a new nature poetry; Donald Hall, an editor of *New Poets of England and America*, included Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder in his next anthology and found Ginsberg’s protégé Ted Berrigan a temporary teaching job in 1969<sup>66</sup>; and the “academic” Adrienne Rich singled out the “antiacademic” Diane Wakoski as a major woman poet in 1971<sup>67</sup>. The convergence gained pace with the Vietnam War, showing that former students of New Criticism found something valuable in the antiacademic attitude in the political and cultural climate of the period. Years later,

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<sup>65</sup> Robert Bly, “Going Out on the Plain in the Moonlight: An Interview with Cynthia Lofsness and Kathy Otto, with Fred Manfred,” Madison, Minnesota, Spring 1966. Reproduced in Bly (1980:52-53).

<sup>66</sup> Ted Berrigan letter to Robert Creeley, April 8, 1969, Robert Creeley papers, M0662, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.

<sup>67</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1971, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision.” Reproduced in Gelpi and Gelpi (1993:168).

Donald Hall fondly remembered singing “Yellow Submarine” with Robert Creeley and Gary Snyder while traveling to an antiwar poetry reading (Lenhart 2006:89). Such events gave poets from both sides of the aisle a chance to explore one another’s viewpoints and personalities. “For a time,” wrote Hall, “the Battle of the Anthologies raged among followers while the poets themselves turned ecumenical, departing the barricades to argue poetry while drinking beer” (2008:122). All in all, then, the 1960s saw the rise of a rather odd (by the criteria of *Rules of Art*) phenomenon: A group of antiacademic artists committed to formal experimentation and to political action that also celebrated the “American voice.”

Table 3.4. The second generation of New Criticism.

	Early career	Late career
Marvin Bell	New Critical	New Critical
John Berryman	New Critical	Partial convergence with <i>New American Poetry</i>
Robert Bly	New Critical	Full convergence with <i>New American Poetry</i>
Donald Hall	New Critical	Partial convergence with <i>New American Poetry</i>
Randall Jarrell	New Critical	Partial convergence with <i>New American Poetry</i>
Galway Kinnell	New Critical	Full convergence with <i>New American Poetry</i>
Robert Lowell	New Critical	Partial convergence with <i>New American Poetry</i>
W. S. Merwin	New Critical	Full convergence with <i>New American Poetry</i>
Adrienne Rich	New Critical	Full convergence with <i>New American Poetry</i>
Louis Simpson	New Critical	Partial convergence with <i>New American Poetry</i>
Richard Wilbur	New Critical	New Critical

In this renunciation of autonomy from popular taste and the consequent flirtation with the market principle, however, these poets were articulating a pro-autonomy stance with regard to the state—the parameter of autonomy that they saw as most threatening, the reason why universities were no longer to be seen as the bastion of poetic freedom. Robert Bly, whose equation of New Criticism with the flaws of U.S. foreign policy I mentioned, cherished autonomy when it was defined in terms of the link between state bureaucracies and art:

I think that there are two entire streams of human life. There is a stream that goes through business and goes through government and goes on in a conventional way. Then, there is another stream that Blake represented as a rebellious stream, a stream interested in the inner life of people, not in whether they make money. Now the artist is almost always in this second stream. It isn't that he attacks the government; it's the fact that he is committed to a different style of life than those in the other stream. (...) Now, suppose that they're going along like this, and then the state builds a channel between the two streams and the artist looks over. Instead of getting his money from the readers who buy his books—who are also in that stream—instead, he gets it from the government. He gets a link with this stream; maybe he goes over to this stream. Maybe they eventually are able to pull all the artists over to this stream and the other stream dies completely. That is the danger (...) I would rather have this firm division here, even if the little magazine suffers.<sup>68</sup>

This history shows that, instead of progressing or regressing along a single path defined in advance, autonomy is a struggle with varying parameters in which movement can occur in multiple directions at any moment. Based on their understanding of the situation, twentieth-century U.S. poets used one potential source of heteronomy against another, and reversed their direction when they felt that balance was lost. This shows that

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<sup>68</sup> Robert Bly, "On Government Support for the Arts: An Interview with N. G. Schuessler," Dayton, Ohio, Spring 1971. Reproduced in Bly (1980:76-77).

autonomy is always relative to particular, changing stakes, and rather than being a *status*, it should be conceived of as a constantly unfolding *process*.

As a result, the divisions within the U.S. poetry field corresponded not simply to pro-autonomy or pro-heteronomy stances but to different ways of seeing the stakes of autonomy—that is, to *multiple pro-autonomy programs*. As in the struggles leading to the end of New Critical hegemony, some of these programs had more objective chances of success. However, the reason for this was not the self-evident nature and direction of autonomy. It was the relative weight of the parties and the unpredictable fit between, on one hand, their collective skills and dispositions, and on the other, the cultural and political atmosphere.

### **3.5. The Role of Poetry Institutions**

What mechanisms, then, made sure that the groups whose relative weights were greatest also had dispositions that matched the cultural and political reality of the day? If, as I have argued so far, autonomy is a multidimensional process that requires constant negotiation, it is not certain that the actors who occupy the most important positions in the field will always have good negotiation skills. And yet, in the period under study, U.S. poets could rely on themselves to make the right call. Why?

The transition from the hegemony of New Criticism to the hegemony of New American Poetry indicates that the reason has to do with the institutional setup of poetic practice. During the twentieth century, the institutional setup of U.S. poetry increasingly became “diversely competitive.” By this term I mean three things. First, poetry institutions in the U.S. were not monopolistic—there was no one institution, formal or

informal, that managed to dominate the entire practice, and the institutions that supported poetry were in competition for recognition. As such, one can perhaps talk about a parallel field of poetry organizations. Second, these institutions mirrored the diversity of the practice of poetry in their competition. Different kinds of poets found support for their activities in different kinds of institutions, such that there was a poetry institution for every poet. Third, between-institution diversity did not preclude within-institution diversity. While poetry institutions each had reputations for supporting certain kinds of poetry, perhaps out of a desire to keep their options open they also kept an eye on other poetries. They occasionally invited poets associated with rival institutions, allowing poets to preserve communication across party lines.

Diverse competition allowed multiple subgroups within the field, each with its own program for autonomy, to survive and flourish. It also allowed renegades in each subgroup to switch sides when they found the possibilities of another subgroup more to their liking. The greater the number of such groups in a field, one can generalize, the greater the likelihood that at least one of them will stumble into a program that will give the field a more advantageous position vis-à-vis outside forces. In my case, such groups were able to carry the day because they won younger actors over by displaying their competence in the arenas of struggle that were most relevant for the next generation.

New American poets were able to supplant the New Critics primarily because they subverted the very success of New Criticism by building their own institutions. The first of these was café societies, which flourished in coastal cities and around campuses, attracting college students who were now relatively knowledgeable about poetry as a

result of the New Critics' success but were, like young people everywhere, looking for something new. In New York's lower east side, the poetry reading programs at Les Deux Megots and Le Metro acted as the incubator of avant-garde poetries that universities did not support (Kane 2003). In San Francisco, bars like The Cellar and The Place and coffeehouses like Caffé Trieste served the same function (Cherkovski 1999; Ellingham and Killian 1998; French 1991).

The crowning achievement of café societies came with the establishment of alternative formal institutions. Before 1950, two highly elitist organizations in New York, controlled by poets employed in universities, dominated this organizational field. After 1950, both the number and the geographical spread of formal poetry institutions grew (see table 3.5). The newly established San Francisco Poetry Center owed its liveliness to the bustling café societies of the Bay Area, which became a major attraction for young avant-garde poets after the closure of their previous gathering place, Black Mountain College. The movements associated with Les Deux Megots and Le Metro in New York were similarly indispensable for St. Mark's Poetry Project, providing it with its directors, the backbone of its workforce, and its audience (Kane 2003).

Table 3.5. U.S. poetry institutions.

	Poetry Society of America	Academy of American Poets	S.F. Poetry Center	St. Mark's Poetry Project	National Poetry Foundation	Naropa Institute
Founded	1910	1934	1954	1966	1971	1974

Location	NYC (Upper East Side)	NYC (Upper East Side)	San Francisco	NYC (Lower East Side)	Maine	Colorado
Reputation	Elite	Elite	Avant- garde	Avant- garde	Avant- garde	Avant- garde

These developments were due in part to the greater availability of funds, which were again a result of the success of the New Critical program. Poetry Center was made possible by a gift to San Francisco State College, and St. Mark's Poetry Project by federal funding. But these one-time grants are only part of the story, as the history of poetry awards shows. The earliest major poetry awards were instituted in the 1920s, and no new major award came into being until 1949. Newer awards tended to have bigger cash prizes and they were less restrictive. Fewer of them were "lifetime achievement" awards, so they were open to younger poets. Some of them were specifically geared toward poets who were not yet widely published. Most interestingly, it was the elite Academy of American Poets who conferred this last set of awards. With an older, smaller, less energetic base compared to younger institutions, the Academy could keep defining the future of poetry only by outspending its rivals (see table 3.6).

Table 3.6. Major poetry awards.

Award name	Starting date	Agency conferring	Given for	Purse

Pulitzer Prize for Poetry	1922	Pulitzer Board and Columbia University	Best book in past year	\$10,000
Shelley Memorial Award	1929	Poetry Society of America	Genius and need	\$6,000 to \$9,000
Frost Medal	1930	Poetry Society of America	Lifetime service	\$2,500
Bollingen Prize	1949	Yale University Library	Best book published in previous two years	\$50,000
National Book Award for Poetry	1950	National Book Foundation	Best book published during award year	\$10,000
James Laughlin Award	1954	Academy of American Poets	Given to a second book already under contract	\$5,000 and purchase of 10,000 copies of book for distribution to members of the Academy
Lenore	1975	<i>Nation</i>	Best book	\$10,000

Marshall Poetry Prize		magazine and the Academy of American Poets	published in the previous year	
Walt Whitman Award	1975	Academy of American Poets	Given to a book who has not yet published a book	\$5000, one-month residency at the Vermont Studio Center, publication of first book

The result of these institutional developments was the intensification of activity in all quarters, as the evolution of poetry readings shows. In the interwar period, these were uncommon events, but in the 1950s they became weekly occurrences as café societies flourished. In 1960, San Francisco-based poet Lew Welch reported:

We now have a huge audience, almost (strangely enough) too big. I've had 2 readings in San Francisco where, literally, hundreds of people hang on every word, laugh with joy, remain struck and silent, as the poem works into the room and them.<sup>69</sup>

Kenneth Rexroth, who had moved to San Francisco in the 1930s, described the literary history of the city in similar terms:

The poetry is in direct relationship. The poetry is the kind of thing existing in San Francisco, that continuous human contact. At one time just the Libertarian Circle and Bob Stock's basement and now... God knows how many... there must be a

<sup>69</sup> Lew Welch letter to William Carlos Williams, May 18, 1960. Reproduced in Welch (1980:203).

hundred poetry readings a night in the damn city, in crash pads, in coffee shops, everyplace under the sun.<sup>70</sup>

Yet the readings were not confined just to San Francisco and New York; they had become a truly national phenomenon:

Late in the 1950s, poetry readings started to flourish. Until this moment, they had been rare; only Robert Frost did many. Famous poets like Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams did one or two a year. Did the poetry reading seem too much an entertainment or performance? The literary scene was stuffy. When William Butler Yeats had crisscrossed America in 1935, a decade after his Nobel, he was not asked to read his poems. He delivered a lecture called “Three Great Irishmen.” Maybe it was Dylan Thomas’s famous voice that started things. One day my phone rang, a lecture agent asking if he could represent me, selling me to colleges and taking a thirty percent cut. I was amazed. If I sold all of a book’s poem to magazines, the pay would not equal the take from one reading. (...) For years, critics had talked about “a poet’s audience,” making a metaphor; now the audience was literal, rows and rows of young faces. They were young because the readings were mostly at colleges, but later there were urban poetry festivals, summer conferences, readings in nursing homes and prisons and bars. The skies turned thick with poets traveling to say their lines (Hall 2008:130).

Because of their symbiotic relationship with café societies, alternative formal institutions took it for granted that the organization of poetry readings was a central task. The director of St. Mark’s Poetry Project was expected to find a steady supply of poets looking for “gigs.” After the first holder of the office proved unwilling to do it, the community settled on the twenty-five-year-old poet Anne Waldman because, even though she was a virtual unknown, she displayed great enthusiasm for the job and a rare talent for networking. Similarly, the sole job of the assistant director of the San Francisco Poetry Center was to bring poets from other parts of the country for readings. The job went to Robert Duncan, another energetic poet/community builder.

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Kenneth Rexroth, 1969. Reproduced in Meltzer (2001:239).

As part of their jobs, Duncan and Waldman extended invitations not just to their friends (although their friends got a disproportionate amount of stage time) but also to some of the brightest young poets of the university establishment. In 1957, Robert Lowell, a student of the New Critics, went on a reading tour in California, which included a performance at the San Francisco Poetry Center. Two years later, he published *Life Studies*, where he broke with the New Critical style. In 1961 he attributed the breakthrough to his California trip:

By the time I came to *Life Studies* I'd been writing my autobiography and also writing poems that broke meter. I'd been doing a lot of reading aloud. I went on a trip to the West Coast and read at least once a day and sometimes twice for fourteen days, and more and more I found that I was simplifying my poems. If I had a Latin quotation, I'd translate it into English. If adding a couple of syllables in a line made it clearer I'd add them, and I'd make little changes just impromptu as I read.<sup>71</sup>

Soon after Lowell's breakthrough—he already had won a Pulitzer Prize in 1949, so *Life Studies* sent shockwaves through the university establishment—administrators of English departments joined the poetry reading bandwagon, believing that it would not last and eventually things would return to normal:

In the sixties when the poetry reading boom got going people went to their state universities and heard poets read. When they went back to their towns they got the community college to bring poets in or they set up their own series through an arts group. Readings have proliferated enormously and spread sideways from universities to community colleges, prep schools, and arts associations. I used to think, Well, this is nice while it lasts but it'll go away. It hasn't gone away. There are more than ever.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Robert Lowell, "An Interview with Frederick Seidel," *Paris Review* 25 (Winter-Spring 1961), pp. 57-95. Reproduced in Lowell (1987:242-243).

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Stitt (1991:12).

It is in this atmosphere that Robert Lowell made his trip to California, saw the potential of poetry readings, and parted with his teachers. His motives were shaped, ironically, by the very success of the New Critics—Ransom and Tate’s grand synthesis, precisely because it left younger poets nothing to say, pushed some of their best students to revolt. Individual differences also played a role: Lowell’s psychotic breaks, W. D. Snodgrass’s divorce, Adrienne Rich’s homosexuality, and John Berryman, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton’s clinical depression made for a chaos that the detached New Criticism could not fully accommodate or express. Nevertheless, their defection was a genuinely sociological phenomenon—these personal differences were salient only because the later New Critics’ insistence on irony, paradox, detachment, and ambiguity enabled a very limited range of human experience to be expressed; the field’s dynamic of constant revolution forced younger poets to eventually challenge their elders if they did not gracefully bow out; and a powerful alternative to the elders’ program was beginning to make its presence felt via new kinds of poetry institution.

Some rivalries forged in the academic-antiacademic conflict continued in the 1970s, but the field’s code of behavior channeled these clashes into avenues that benefited the field. Robert Lowell, for instance, acknowledged Allen Ginsberg’s influence on his style, but he considered himself the superior poet, expressing his dislike for Ginsberg explicitly in private and implicitly in public. In a 1959 letter, Lowell wrote:

[Ginsberg and his friends] are phony in [a] way because they have made a lot of publicity out of very little talent. But in another way, they are pathetic and doomed. How can you make a go for long by reciting so-so verse to half-jeering swarms of college students?<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Robert Lowell letter to Elizabeth Bishop, April 7, 1959. Reproduced in Hamilton (2005:343).

In a 1971 interview, he distinguished himself from an “anonymous” poet who has achieved widespread fame among youth:

Suppose some writer wrote poems about violence as the essential experience—I haven’t, but I have written splintery things—he shouldn’t be flattered if crowds of twenty-year olds say violence is *the* essential experience, and then, without light or passion, begin chanting, “Guns are beautiful.” I would be bored and horrified. I have a schoolteacher’s conceit that I know more than my students. I really must. I’ve had the time. Most students, now and always, are the philistines, old fraternity brothers. In our society, culture, I fear, must be *elite*; the bulk and brawn of any generation, new or past, can’t tell the *Sentimental Education* from education.<sup>74</sup>

There were two ways for Lowell to act on these feelings. The first was refusing to participate in protest events in which Ginsberg also took part; the second was to share the stage with him to get at least partial credit for the event. The incentives that the poetry field’s code of behavior associated with protest overwhelmed his personal and artistic dislike for Ginsberg each time, bringing the two poets together in a number of occasions including the Pentagon March. This was at least partly because Lowell could treat such events as opportunities to strike subtly at his rival. In his Pentagon March speech, for instance, he underscored that he participated in the event as a “serious man,”<sup>75</sup> distinguishing his public persona from Ginsberg and Snyder’s “merry prankster” style.

### 3.6. Conclusion

Bourdieu and Bürger each have a simple advice to dissenting intellectuals who would like to acquire cultural, social and/or political influence: Bourdieu tells them to

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<sup>74</sup> Robert Lowell, “A Conversation with Ian Hamilton.” *The Review*, Summer 1971, pp. 10-29. Reproduced in Lowell (1987:281).

<sup>75</sup> Cited in Hamilton (1982:366).

increase their autonomy, Bürger to decrease it. The view of autonomy that I outlined requires a follow-up question: From what? If the powers-that-be are “themselves irreducible, multiple, and potentially contradictory” (Benson 1998:483), how should they decide which one(s) they should deal with?

Bourdieu could ignore this question in *Rules of Art* because in the French case he examined, gaining autonomy from one adversary meant gaining it from all. On the relationship between writers and painters, he wrote:

“Progress towards autonomy having been accomplished at different times in two universes, because of different economic or morphological changes, and in relation to powers which also differed (such as the Académie or the market), the writers could benefit from the conquests of the painters to increase their independence, and vice versa” (1996:132).

This process culminated in the Dreyfus affair, where all these foes of autonomy crumbled away in a stroke of amazing good fortune. In other contexts, however, intellectuals may not be that lucky, since gaining autonomy from the market, for instance, may produce dependence on the state, and vice versa. Nor do they *need* to be that lucky: The total victory of the Dreyfusards is one path among others to greater political influence. In other places like the U.S., the articulation of potential sources of heteronomy may be weaker. In that case, a series of strategic concessions given over a longer period of time – such as New Critics’ limitation of formal experimentation to avoid the market or the antiacademic coalition’s recourse to populism while challenging the state – may provide intellectuals with a more advantageous position. The advice to U.S. intellectuals should then be: “Pick your battles wisely.”

This is because, instead of one total break with all powers followed by gradual movement in the path that this break foreordains, in the U.S. case we have a potentially infinite number of unpredictable partial breaks, which are also partial continuities. Actors of one break may partly or completely undo the moves of previous ones, such that artistic change looks not like the determined and steady movement of a regular army across plains but like the zigzagging of a difficult terrain, one that itself shifts with new developments, by a band of guerillas.

*The Rules of Art* provides support for both of these spatial/military metaphors, depending on which part of the text one emphasizes and how much one decides to generalize Bourdieu's statements in *Rules of Art* beyond nineteenth-century France. One also finds echoes of both views in his other writings, such that, when dealing with cultural change and its relationship to power and inequality, one can say that there are two Bourdieus. The first one sees the powers-that-be as working in concert another against intellectuals, even though they are not fully reducible to one another. The destination for intellectuals and the directions to it are clear. The second Bourdieu, on the other hand, takes the multidimensionality of the terrain of autonomy seriously. In this view, the state, market, popular taste, and mainstream religiosity may not always bolster one another. As a result, the ultimate destination – full freedom from all constraint – may be clear, but at any point it is both practically and theoretically unattainable as today's allies are tomorrow's foes and "progress" always comes as a result of compromise. What one generation of artists embraces the other attacks, not just because one must deny one's elders in order to open breathing space, but also because this is the strategy that works in dealing with other, usually more powerful, elites. As Adorno (1997:6) put it, then, the

autonomy process inevitably produces its own other, whether intellectuals are renouncing or affirming autonomy. Therefore, full autonomy is not only impossible in practice, it is also impossible in principle.

In places like nineteenth-century France, where the various parameters of the autonomy process do work in concert, the simpler view is in fact desirable. Insisting on the multidimensionality of autonomy adds nothing new to the analysis of these settings, and it requires more work. One can generalize beyond France to the extent that the case at hand has the same features—a hegemonic view of the state as the handholder of the market; the absence of a distinction between national culture and high culture; a dominant religious tradition that emphasizes cooperation with political authority rather than resisting it; and universities controlled by the central political authority. In such “republican” settings, Bourdieu’s advice to intellectuals to jealously guard their autonomy from all possible sources of interference is as sound as ever.

At the other end of the spectrum, we have another ideal type—what I would like to call “federalist” discursive formations. Here, the state and the market are constructed as antagonistic in discourse; national culture and high culture are distinguishable; dominant religious traditions are anti-statist, and in some cases, anti-market; and universities are controlled by local elites determined to protect their power base against possible centralization attempts. The U.S. is closer to this, and in places like it intellectuals have a rather different task at hand: Balancing the competing demands of the shifting terrain of autonomy by negotiating the challenges to autonomy on a case-by-case basis.

How, then, can intellectuals manage this process? If, in places like the U.S., there is no recipe for individual-level literary/political success with clear and unequivocal instructions formulated independently of context, does that mean that intellectuals' interventions will be successful to the extent that they are lucky? Not really. This is because the history of twentieth-century U.S. poets also reveals that there is a way to successfully balance the demands of the terrain of autonomy—building a diversely competitive institutional setup to support intellectual practice. Even if particular writers, artists, and scientists need to be in the right place at the right time to do the “right thing” given the political and cultural conjuncture, collectively – in their very competition – they can build that right place and the right time by constructing such an institutional arrangement to support their art.

## CHAPTER 4

### TWO PATHS OF POLITICIZATION IN THE POETRY FIELD: ALLEN GINSBERG AND ROBERT LOWELL DURING THE VIETNAM PERIOD

#### 4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I asked how intellectuals can, as a group, expand their sphere of social, cultural, and political influence. I argued that balancing the competing demands of a shifting terrain of autonomy by building diversely competitive institutions is crucial for this outcome over long periods of time. But this answer says very little about what individual writers and artists can do in the short term to build effective public personae. Diverse competition may make it more likely that some poets are always equipped with the necessary dispositions and credentials for the games that happen to matter most at the moment, but what distinguishes such actors from their peers who are equally passionate about political issues but unable to make their voices heard or to control the ways in which their discourse circulates?

This article focuses on the contrast between Allen Ginsberg and Robert Lowell, two prominent Vietnam-era U.S. poets, to answer this question. Both Ginsberg and Lowell were active in the antiwar movement and in the early phases of the war both were able to attract favorable media attention for their antiwar activities. They were also both able to use the spotlight to embarrass political elites and garnered considerable respect from other intellectuals as a result. Later in the Vietnam period, however, only Lowell

held on to these kinds of success while Ginsberg's status in the poetry field and in the public sphere declined.

Classical explanations of intellectuals' political practices are not very helpful in making sense of this picture. Ginsberg and Lowell came from radically different class backgrounds, but a brief study of a larger number of U.S. poets in the same period shows that inherited resources, whether economic or cultural, fail to explain some very significant variation in politicization. They were also spokesmen of antagonistic artistic networks with little overlap, but evidence shows that politically effective poets were almost equally likely to come from either cluster. Ginsberg's public persona was less acceptable to mainstream culture than Lowell's, but this difference itself needs to be explained historically since their paths into the public spotlight were neither predetermined nor inevitable—they were consequence as much as cause. Finally, discourse-theoretical approaches have limited purchase since the frames Ginsberg and Lowell used in discussing U.S. foreign policy were stable throughout the entire Vietnam period.

The field approach provides a compelling alternative to these approaches. In this view, the drive for symbolic capital in partially autonomous fields of cultural production is the key independent variable. Either to compensate for the suspicion inadvertently acquired fame raises among intellectual circles, or to achieve the rare status of literary/artistic giant, Bourdieu argues, intellectuals turn public issues to conflicts between the reason of the state and the values of their field (1993, 1996; also see Casanova 2004; Charle 1990; Sapiro 1999, 2003). Consciously or not, they derive symbolic benefits from resisting government policies that do not affect them materially.

In this context, the contrast between Ginsberg and Lowell's careers constitutes a theoretical puzzle as well as an empirical curiosity. While twentieth-century U.S. poetry constituted a field of cultural production and while both Ginsberg and Lowell joined the antiwar movement in defense of the values of their field, Bourdieu's work does not fully anticipate the turns their careers took. The reputations of both poets stood to gain from political interventions by Bourdieu's criteria, but as I show in detail below, only Lowell's public persona was effective in the public sphere throughout the entire Vietnam period and only Lowell was rewarded in the poetry field for his political activity in the 1970s. Moreover, the strategy Lowell pursued in the 1970s was different from what Bourdieu outlined in his work on cultural production. Unlike the writers and artists Bourdieu celebrates for their political activities, he was curiously absent from protest events and rarely addressed the war directly in mainstream news media. Instead, he reflected on the effects of the war primarily in his elegant and difficult poetry.

This chapter is an attempt to solve this puzzle. First, I discuss key terms of the study and the criteria for measuring the success of poets' political practices. Then I explain in greater detail why the cases of Ginsberg and Lowell pose some difficulties for the field approach. Next, I show that while parsimonious explanations based on class, network position, hegemonic masculinity and self-presentation, and discursive frames are not fully satisfactory, political opportunity structure provides a promising but incomplete lead.

I then examine the cases of Ginsberg and Lowell closely, using evidence from archival and biographical sources. Distinguishing between two ideal-typical kinds of activity they undertook, I argue that the interaction of their field trajectories – the

sequence and timing of the positions they occupied in the poetry field – with the political opportunity structure is the crucial independent variable. “Frontstage” actions address the news media and political elites directly, have a short duration and immediate impact, and are “offensive.” In contrast, “backstage” activities’ audience consists primarily of other intellectuals, they have a longer duration and delayed impact, and are “defensive.” Under favorable political conditions, U.S. intellectuals need relatively little backstage activity to make their frontstage actions successful. But when they have few political opportunities, I find, more backstage activity is needed to sustain the same level of frontstage activity. And, depending on how intellectuals come to occupy their field positions, the composition of their action repertoire is more or less flexible in responding to changes in political conjuncture.

Rather than proving Bourdieu wrong, my findings suggest that his work on French fields of cultural production provides concepts that are flexible enough to work in other contexts, provided that scholars selectively bring in insights from other approaches, in this case, political process theory (McAdam 1982; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Tilly 1978). An important difference between Bourdieu’s work and this study is my distinction between political interventions and their consequences, and this follows directly from the empirical differences between twentieth-century U.S. and nineteenth-century France. While French political elites have often relied on intellectuals to construct the nation as a viable entity, their U.S. counterparts have rarely needed intellectuals to play this mediating role. Consequently, the mere willingness to stick one’s nose into political affairs and the ability to organize provided intellectuals with considerable political clout in France in the closing decades of the

nineteenth century, while twentieth-century U.S. intellectuals could never take such influence for granted.

#### **4.2. Defining the Terms**

By political intervention, I refer to the activities intellectuals undertake in support of political causes, such as writing “political literature”; voicing their opinions in interviews and essays; drafting and signing petitions; and organizing political events. I call politicization the cumulative trajectory of an intellectual’s political interventions.

For two reasons, criteria for success in political interventions of the sort I discuss should not be limited to fulfilling the ends intellectuals explicitly state. First, a cursory study of intellectuals’ political engagements in the twentieth century shows that this criterion is too exacting. Poets typically cannot end wars or force dictators out of office, but it does not follow that they never “get anything done.” Granted, artists often overestimate their abilities to bring about social change, and they almost never achieve the goals they set for themselves. But they have a unique set of skills that can, during periods of crisis, limit political elites’ options, especially when combined with other social forces. Second, and more importantly, this understanding of political success may be naïve: Instead of being motivated purely by the lofty goals of the movements they join, intellectuals may be ultimately interested in securing more mundane things like prestige and admiration for themselves. And since the line between ends and means is often blurred in innovative protest movements like those of the Vietnam period, intellectuals’ motives can slip in undetected, sometimes without their own awareness.

I use the term literary/political to denote such historical intertwining of literary and political interests, values, actions, and milieus. Literary/political actions are evaluated in in two analytically distinct but historically related registers—the particular artistic field of their authors and the broad public sphere that encompasses this field. These milieus are analytically distinct because political and artistic fields do not constitute one monolithic field of action. The same literary/political action may have different meanings vis-à-vis the values that shape these two fields—a literary/political action may be more successful in demonstrating one’s courage and devotion to art as a total way of life to fellow artists than in increasing the esteem that broader segments of the population accord to the category of the artist, or vice versa. Consequently, literary/political actions lead to the accumulation – or loss – of at least two distinct kinds of capital; one in recognition of the defense of the values of the artistic fields in the eyes of fellow writers and artists, others in recognition of the broad cultural competence of the actors who undertake them in the eyes of the lay public.

They are also historically related, however, since the meanings of literary/political activity are not necessarily *completely* different in artistic and political fields—while some literary/political actions are successful in only one of these two registers, others may simultaneously improve the standing of their individual authors among artists and the standing of the category of the artist *tout court* in the public sphere. This is because the kind of cultural capital that accrues from successful political interventions is highly convertible to the kind of symbolic capital that is specific to artistic fields. Far from being an unorthodox revision of the field approach with its insistence on the multiplicity of the sites of human practice, then, this formulation of literary/political activity follows directly

from Bourdieu's own work, particularly *The Rules of Art*, which theorizes a specifically *intellectual* form of *political* intervention made possible by the partial separation of art and politics as autonomous realms of human practice in modernity.

Accordingly, I measure success in the Vietnam period by a number of criteria beyond simply ending the war. Regarding generic cultural competence and political acuity, these are gaining visibility in the mass media for one's antiwar efforts and using this visibility to embarrass political elites without being discredited in the public sphere. Regarding specifically poetic recognition, they are receiving major poetry awards as a result of one's actions during the period and, to a smaller degree, influencing their peers' political practices by setting up an example of properly poetic handling of events outside the immediate concern of art.

These criteria of evaluation are compatible with Bourdieu's writings on artistic and scientific fields, therefore my construction of the Ginsberg/Lowell couple is comparable to the Zola/Sartre one in Bourdieu's oeuvre. Where the values of such fields are constituted as oppositional to the reason of the state, being able to embarrass political elites is in itself commendable for writers and artists, independently of the consequences such actions may have. The calculation, even consideration, of the exact consequences of political activity smacks of instrumentalism, which literary and artistic fields renounce. Winning poetry awards confirms and consolidates one's poetic credentials when poets control the selection process, as was the case in the U.S. in this period. According to Bourdieu, the desire for such recognition is intimately related to the political activities intellectuals undertake.

These criteria are sociological constructs, but they are derived from the logic of literary/political activity as poets and intellectuals of the Vietnam period saw it. That is, they reflect the dominated status of intellectual fields against the logic of ordinary politics and intellectuals' semi-conscious reassertion of the rules and values of their fields. Consider, for instance, novelist and poet Norman Mailer's recollection of a protest event that, in his and some other intellectuals' eyes, failed—writer Mitchell Goodman's attempt to protest the Vice President at the 1967 National Book Awards ceremony by staging a writers' walkout from the event:

The war in Vietnam was probably to be protested on every occasion, and any attempt to twist Hubert Humphrey's nose was, in all favorable winds, a venture to applaud, but the exodus from the national Book Award's assembly, as one might have predicted, was small, pilgrim small, by reports not unfarical (...) If one was going to take part in literary demonstration, it had better work, since novelists like movie stars like to keep their politics in their pocket rather than wear them as ashes on the brow; if it is hard for people in the literary world to applaud any act braver or more self-sacrificing than their own, it is impossible for them to forgive any gallant move which is by consensus unsuccessful. The measure of the failure on this occasion had been that Bernard Malamud, who won the 1966 award in fiction for his novel *The Fixer*, did not boycott the Vice-President, but on the contrary had given his prepared speech in its proper place. Since Malamud was also opposed to the war in Vietnam, Goodman's action presumably had failed to light an outstanding fire in the sympathizers (Mailer 1968:7-8).

Two things stand out in Mailer's account. First, he considers the embarrassment of the Vice President a worthy goal in and of itself, regardless of the exact consequences of this outcome for writers and poets' material interests—that is, symbolic interests are just as important. Second, failure is in some ways worse than inaction—if mass media can portray the event as the work of a small group of irresponsible and noisy writers with

little knowledge of the “real world,” not only do political elites avoid embarrassment but also the cause as a whole is discredited.

#### **4.3. Logic of Case Selection: The Rules of Poetry and Vietnam War**

Bourdieu’s narrative of the autonomization of French intellectual activity (1983; 1991b; 1993; 1996; also see Bourdieu and Haacke 1995; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) points toward two distinct but equivalent paths to successful politicization exemplified by the figures of Emile Zola and Jean-Paul Sartre. Having compromised his reputation by becoming, against his intentions, a bestselling novelist, Zola compensated by framing the Dreyfus affair as a conflict between the values of the literary field and those of the field of power. He mythologized his stance by inventing the figure of the public intellectual who intervenes in politics in the name of higher values that originate in the artistic and scientific fields (1996:129-131). The myth eventually became so powerful that, in the twentieth century, writers claiming the status of literary giant felt compelled to repeat Zola’s feat—hence Sartre’s criticism of French policies in Algeria and his call for an engaged literature (1991b; 1996:342).

Allen Ginsberg and Robert Lowell’s paths are equivalents of these two paths in twentieth-century U.S. poetry. Ginsberg suddenly and unexpectedly came to national attention in 1957 when his first book was sued for obscenity and acquitted. He spent the 1960s and 70s trying to compensate for this sudden fame with politicization. Lowell, on the other hand, was poised to become the next great American poet in the early 1960s, having won the 1947 Pulitzer Prize for poetry at the age of 30.

And yet, Bourdieu's picture of the fields of cultural production provides little to explain Ginsberg and Lowell's diverging paths. Both poets were highly involved with the antiwar movement in the 1960s, and both were able to satisfy the two audiences of literary/political activity, accumulating both specifically poetic and generally cultural capital in the process. They were both fairly good at attracting media coverage for their antiwar activities, and both men's reputations *as poets* benefited from these events. In other words, in this period "the poet" became a more politically and culturally relevant figure in the news media partly as a result of their presence in the public sphere, though not necessarily by as much, and both poets' individual standing in the poetry field improved as a result of their literary/political activities, though not necessarily by as much. In the 1970s, however, only Ginsberg maintained this kind of engagement. More intriguingly, it was Lowell who preserved his status in the news media and in poetry circles, the two audiences of literary/political activity, while Ginsberg was taken less seriously in both. Regarding the accumulation of generic cultural capital, the treatment Ginsberg received in the news media for his political actions deteriorated; regarding poetic capital converted from cultural capital, by the end of the Vietnam period he was conspicuously "under-decorated" for an intellectual of his presence – he shared with Adrienne Rich the 1974 National Book Award for poetry, the least prestigious of the major poetry awards, but he was never considered for the Pulitzer or the Bollingen. In contrast, Lowell managed to avoid political showdowns he knew he could not win while successfully taking credit for the few that he got involved in, and he received a second Pulitzer in 1974 before his untimely death in 1977.

The fact that Ginsberg and Lowell were poets, Zola was a novelist, and Sartre was primarily a philosopher who also wrote plays and novels does not make the Ginsberg/Lowell couple incomparable to the Zola/Sartre one. The crucial matter is that all four men framed recent actions of the state as violations of the values of their chosen brand of cultural production. For Ginsberg, U.S. poetry's mission was to prevent capitalist competition and bureaucratic uniformity from completely extinguishing love, the bridge between individuality and community:

[H]ere we are, sitting on top of this fantastic 60-billion-dollar-a-year war outlay, when the rest of the world is waiting for the United States to turn its heart inside out and do something, and be the America it was supposed to be according to its founding fathers, its founding heart, its early traditions, like the good, grey poet, Whitman (...) That's America. That's the *Tradition*. And it's the tradition that because of the anxieties of the Cold War is now being denigrated by the more isolated or paranoid or anxiety-stricken of the politicians or thinkers.<sup>76</sup>

For Lowell, poetry's function in modernity was to "express what it feels like to be a living creature in the universe" in all its complexity<sup>77</sup>. Therefore, the Vietnam-era poet's duty was to reflect all the destruction that the war unleashed on all sides, and this made him/her a political figure against his/her wishes.

It is true that Ginsberg has more name recognition than Lowell does today. But that is the result of the revival of interest in the Beat Generation, the literary movement Ginsberg was a part of, in the 1990s. Also, part of Lowell's accomplishment was the potential his actions created for further successful politicization, and Lowell was unable to fully exploit this potential only because he died in 1977 at the age of 60. Had he lived

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<sup>76</sup> Ginsberg (2001:59), original statement in 1964.

<sup>77</sup> Lowell (1988:91), original statement in 1964.

on, my analysis suggests, he would have used his Vietnam-era record to build a name that would dwarf Ginsberg's.

#### **4.4. Classes, Networks, Hegemonies, Frames, Opportunity: Intellectuals in Politics**

Why did things take such different turns for Ginsberg and Lowell in the 1970s when the war was equally on the national agenda as in the 1960s? In this section I examine some parsimonious explanations of their diverging paths based on class, network position, masculinities, discursive frames, and political opportunity. Class- and network-based explanations seem to capture the overall dynamics of U.S. poets' politicization quite well, but a brief review of evidence reveals important exceptional cases for both. Class and network, then, are part of the story but not all of it. The same goes for self-presentation: The openly homosexual and hippy Ginsberg was much more of an outsider to prevailing norms of masculinity than Lowell, but his public persona was as chosen as imposed. The frames Ginsberg and Lowell used to criticize the war, although somewhat different, were stable throughout the Vietnam period, therefore failing to account for their diverging outcomes. Political opportunity structure, on the other hand, provides a promising new lead but the relationship between political opportunity and field dynamics needs to be developed.

Throughout this section, I use the methods of agreement and difference (Mill 1950; Skocpol 1979; Skocpol and Somers 1980; also see Paige 1999). The shortcomings of these methods in reaching generalizable conclusions is very well established (see Burawoy 1989; Lieberman 1991, 1994; Sewell 1996; Steinmetz 2004), but their critics agree that they are suitable for the purpose of this section—that is, eliminating, not

confirming, some hypotheses to decrease the number of plausible causal *mechanisms* (Bhaskar 1998; Collier 1994) to be investigated in depth in the following sections.

*Class:* An obvious difference between Ginsberg and Lowell is class. Belonging to the “merely comfortable branch” (Hamilton 1982:6) of a Boston Brahmin family, Lowell was on the fast track to America’s cultural elite from his birth. He went to the highly prestigious St. Mark’s School before entering Harvard. Ginsberg, in contrast, came from a lower-middle class background—his father, a second-generation Jewish American, was a schoolteacher in the New Jersey public schools and his mother was an immigrant from Russia. He graduated from a public school and attended Columbia University on a trade union scholarship. This is important because there is a long tradition that expects intellectuals’ class of origin to shape their political practices decisively (Gramsci 1971; also see Burawoy 2004; Chomsky 1969, 1978; Domhoff 1999; Foucault 1984; Mills 1963; Said 1994).

The consequences of poets’ literary/political activities do, for the most part, seem to be related to the economic capital they inherit. Some of the poets who dealt with news media most effectively came from wealthy families. Beside Lowell, there is also the example of Lawrence Ferlinghetti, publisher of Ginsberg’s books and a well-known poet in his own right. Working- and lower-middle class poets who had Lowell and Ferlinghetti’s level of activity were noticeably less effective public figures than them. Beside Ginsberg, Galway Kinnell, son of an immigrant carpenter, comes to mind: Kinnell was one of the five organizers of the nationwide poetry readings against the war in 1967,

and he had the distinction of being the only one with ties to the civil rights movement. Yet his antiwar activities were, for the most part, invisible to the press.

The problem, however, is the wide variation around this pattern. Inherited economic capital may explain poets' politicization in its broad contours, but by itself, it cannot account for some historically important cases. Gary Snyder, a poet from working-class origins, had too much visibility and intellectual influence for class-bound theories; and Denise Levertov, an upper-middle class one, had too little. Snyder spent most of the 1960s in Japan, but in his brief visits to the U.S. he figured prominently in antiwar activities such as the famous San Francisco Human Be-In of January 1967. Although he was initially associated with the controversial Beat movement, over time he developed robust links with poets from a wide variety of artistic tendencies. In 1974, he received the Pulitzer Prize. Levertov, on the other hand, alienated many U.S. poets in the 1970s with her insistence on a particular kind of political engagement against the war (Gelpi and Bertholf 2006). Her poetry, held in very high esteem prior to 1965, suffered in the later Vietnam period because of the uncompromising position she took about the war (von Hallberg 1985:146). Levertov is an especially important case, because the outcomes of her political practices followed a path very similar to Ginsberg's even though they had distinctly different class backgrounds. Table 4.1 summarizes these findings.

Table 4.1. Inherited economic capital and political effectiveness among selected U.S. poets.

	Family's economic capital	Political effectiveness (relative)
Allen Ginsberg	Low	Low

Galway Kinnell	Low	Low
Gary Snyder	Low	High
Robert Lowell	High	High
Lawrence Ferlinghetti	High	High
Denise Levertov	High	Low

Cultural capital fares no better than economic capital in this regard. True, Lowell and Ferlinghetti, the two politically influential poets I mentioned above, scored high on this register, and Ginsberg and Kinnell didn't. But Snyder was, besides having few economic resources while growing up, also the first college graduate in his family, and his rural roots provided him with no easy entrance to the art world of New York. And Levertov, whose literary/political fortunes followed Ginsberg's, was an ideal candidate for that world: As a child, she "lived in a house full of books," and everybody in her family "did some kind of writing" (Bellamy 1984:155). Table 4.2 presents these findings.

Table 4.2. Inherited cultural capital and political effectiveness among selected U.S. poets.

	Family's cultural capital (relative)	Political effectiveness (relative)
Allen Ginsberg	Low	Low
Galway Kinnell	Low	Low
Gary Snyder	Low	High
Robert Lowell	High	High
Lawrence Ferlinghetti	High	High

Denise Levertov	High	Low
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The task with regard to social class, then, is to find how exactly it determines the outcomes of most actors while failing to do that in a number of historically important cases—that is, to find out the mechanisms that mediate, temper, and sometimes thwart its impact.

*Network position:* Ginsberg and Lowell were also spokesmen of two rival poetic groups with little overlap: In the late 1950s, Lowell was a leading representative of what was called “academic poetry” whereas Ginsberg was part of the anti-academic camp.

Some scholars frame the quarrel between these two camps as a conflict between conservatism and liberalism (Davidson 1989; French 1991; Kane 2003; Perkins 1987). If this is correct, the fact that Lowell, the spokesman of the more “conservative” (but still quite liberal by 1950s standards) group, had more success with journalists and mainstream politicians, is not surprising—network theories (e.g. Collins 1998; Granovetter 1995; Mizruchi 1992; Padgett and Ansell 1993) would expect academic poets to be the ideal group to challenge the war since they were safe with tenure, diffused across the centers of ideological power in the country, and only one step removed from major publishers, career politicians, and local elites by virtue of their involvement in higher education.

Like class, however, this difference fails to explain much of the variation in U.S. poets’ politicization—both camps had their share of literary/political success and failure. On the academic side, Lowell’s highly effective public personality stands in contrast to

Galway Kinnell’s invisibility in the mass media; on the anti-academic side, Ginsberg’s decline tells us little about why his close friend and publisher Ferlinghetti did not suffer the same fate. As with class, then, even if the network position poets occupy is significant at the macro level, there are quite a few important details that we cannot make sense of by using network analysis alone. Table 4.3 summarizes these findings.

Table 4.3. Network affiliation and political effectiveness among selected U.S. poets.

	Poetic network affiliation	Political effectiveness (relative)
Allen Ginsberg	Antiacademic	Low
Lawrence Ferlinghetti	Antiacademic	High
Robert Lowell	Academic	High
Galway Kinnell	Academic	Low

Therefore, the task of the analysis with regard to artistic networks is the same as in social class—the exploration of the mechanisms that mediate, temper, and sometimes thwart their impact.

*Hegemonic and dominated masculinities:* Retrospectively, the question of why Lowell had fewer difficulties with politicians and mainstream media than Ginsberg may seem facile because the two poets had very different public personae, and Lowell’s was much more in line with the hegemonic masculinity of its time.

Lowell's public image was that of a clean-shaven, grey-haired moderate. He was always photographed in conservative dress; he was not known for drug use; and he looked decidedly straight and monogamous. In his public statements, he underscored the rational and serious basis of his objection to the war. Consider his speech during the October 1967 Pentagon March:

[U]nlike the authorities who are running this country, we are not searching for tricks, we try to think of ourselves as serious men, if the press, that is, can comprehend such an effort, and we will protest this war by every means available to our conscience and therefore not try to avoid whatever may arise in the way of retribution" (quoted in Hamilton 1982:366).

All these created an aura of responsibility and self-control around him, which Ginsberg was utterly lacking with his long, tangled hair and beard, his "beatnik" turtleneck or "hippy" t-shirt. He was openly gay and promiscuous; he was an advocate of mind-altering drugs; and his public statements appealed more to emotion than to cold reason. Consider, for instance, this interview:

Ernie Barry: About 6 months ago an obscure Greenwich Village poetry magazine called *Fuck You* published an account of you and poet Peter Orlovsky making it together. Giving each other blow-jobs to be specific. Since it was co-written by you and published seemingly with your permission I assume you place some value to it.

Allen Ginsberg: (...) At the time, I was ashamed of it, we were supposed to be interviewing each other for City Lights' *Journal for Protection of All Beings*, and I thought Orlovsky was being irrelevant. However now I see he had the right heart: bringing everything mental right down back into the body and disclosure of the secrets of the body's feelings. (...)

EB: It seems to me that the anti-intellectual nature of American colleges would be an aid to, as you say, bringing everything mental right down back to the body.

AG: American colleges are not anti-intellectual, they're too intellectual: that is, the spectre of objective mental intellect and reason has them in its power. Until the human universe of direct feeling returns the colleges will feel like machines

and people in them will be afflicted by impersonal, non-personal, coldwar subjectivity.<sup>78</sup>

But this explanation raises more questions than it answers. Ginsberg was not the only politically active midcentury U.S. poet with left-wing views whose sexuality and lifestyle defied dominant practices of the time, given the examples of Robert Duncan, Frank O'Hara, Jack Spicer, and John Wieners. But he was unique among these poets in the degree to which he actively flaunted his marginality as the hallmark of a genuine poet. Therefore, one can argue that he was treated poorly in the mass media not because of his homosexuality, his promiscuity, and his drug use but because he chose to put these at the front and center of his self-presentation. And he developed this strategy over time—the Allen Ginsberg of the early 1940s, while aspiring to be a poet, was not aspiring to be a *poet maudit*. His appearance was rather mainstream and the themes and forms of his poems were completely acceptable for the conservative literary establishment of the day. Consider the following poem, “On Reading William Blake’s ‘The Sick Rose,’” that Ginsberg wrote in 1948:

Rose of spirit, rose of light,  
Flower whereof all will tell,  
Is this black vision of my sight  
The fashion of a prideful spell,  
Mystic charm or magic bright,  
O Judgment of fire and of fright?

What everlasting force confounded  
In its being, like some human  
Spirit shrunken in a bounded  
Immortality, what Blossom  
Gathers us inward, astounded?  
Is this the Sickness that is Doom?

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<sup>78</sup> Ginsberg (2001:14-15), original statement in 1963.

In this poem, first note that there is a fairly conventional use of rhyme. Second, with exceptions chosen to bolster the meaning structure, each line has seven syllables and that accented and unaccented syllables alternate. This, therefore, is not the kind of rhyme- and meter-free poem that made Ginsberg famous in the 1950s. Third, the language of the poem, while subtly violating the New Critical injunction against flirtation with romanticism – William Blake was a romantic poet – relies more on high British English than on the North American colloquialisms that made Ginsberg’s literary movement famous. Lastly, the theme of the poem is not, as was going to be case in virtually all of Ginsberg’s poems in the height of his career, sex, mind-expanding drugs or rebellion against prevailing mores.

Furthermore, if Ginsberg had his drugs, orgies, and homosexuality, Lowell had frequent mental breakdowns due to bipolar disorder—if Ginsberg had “crazy ideas,” Lowell was literally “crazy.” During manic episodes, he became abusive, arrogant, and dangerous, causing emotional and physical harm to the people around him. He was hospitalized 11 times from 1949 to 1965 as a result, and these episodes could rarely be kept secret—Lowell’s family name and his literary reputation combined with his outrageous behavior to ensure that his psychological difficulties became widely known. Furthermore, in the 1950s and 1960s his illness was not very well understood and it carried a stigma. Later in his life, lithium treatment gave him some control over his illness, but this was an imperfect solution—from 1970 to 1977, he was hospitalized three more times. Considering all this, Lowell’s Vietnam-era public image is itself a curiosity, an achievement in the literary/political arena as much as a prerequisite of it.

While it is plausible that Lowell's public persona was better suited to challenge the U.S. government in mass media than Ginsberg's, then, this difference is itself a curiosity. It is possible that a third factor can simultaneously account for the two poets' diverging public personae and literary/political outcomes—and I will make the case for that scenario below.

*Discursive frames:* With the partial exceptions of Gramsci's own work and the scholarship on hegemonic masculinity, the preceding explanations all fail to take into account the actual content of intellectuals' objection to the war. In contrast, the framing approach to social movements (Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994) emphasizes the causal efficacy of discursive factors. In this view, the divergence of Ginsberg and Lowell's outcomes must be the result of a change, around 1970, in the terms these two poets used to discuss political issues, including Vietnam War.

This, however, was not the case, as both poets' discourse on politics showed remarkable consistency throughout the Vietnam period. As these two statements, the first in 1963 and the second in 1972, show, Ginsberg consistently justified his involvement in politics by framing it as a defense of "the whole person":

Until the human universe of direct feeling returns the colleges will feel like machines and people in them will be afflicted by impersonal, non-personal, coldwar subjectivity. However, everyone wants to feel, and wants to feel loved and to love, so there's inevitable Hope beneath every grim mask. (...) Anger and fury of left wing will only drive the humanoid bureaucrats and cops into deeper humanoidism. Only affection and tenderness will make the world safe for democracy (Ginsberg 2001:14-15).

I wish that when [a bath of emotion and comradeship and trust] appeared in May '68 it had been more informed by adhesive tenderness between men as an overt

understanding, and greater experience in psychedelic modes, and some of the mellowness of character that Kerouac displays in *Doctor Sax*, the sense of Buddhist time illusion. I doubt that the revolution would have succeeded any more than it did but perhaps the effects might have been more durable if more consciousness had been reclaimed as well as more matter (Ginsberg 2001:298).

Lowell, on the other hand, consistently challenged U.S. foreign policy for being too rigid, too idealistic, and not sufficiently mindful of the complexities of the real world, as the following statements, the first from 1963 and the second from 1976, show:

I'm very conscious of belonging to the country I do, which is a very powerful country and, if I have an image of it, it would be one taken from Melville's *Moby Dick*: the fanatical idealist who brings the world down in ruins through some sort of simplicity of mind (Lowell 1988:19).

Q: Are you implying that there is an inevitable connection between American principles, or Puritanism, and violence?

A: I had the idea that a simplistic, idealistic, coherent view of life turned out to be too brittle for the facts and so leads people into violence. Once you idealize the principles of the Founding Fathers and the Constitution you get something that is awfully simple that is bordering on hypocrisy. (...) I myself think that these principles are necessary for us, but they are curiously fragile in action. They bring disaster and tragedy because they simplify things beyond reality (Alvarez 1976:D1).

*Political opportunity*: All four explanations above assume that intellectuals' political success is relatively independent of the political conjuncture. The political process approach to social movements (Costain 1992; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1989; Tilly 1978) is based on the opposite premise. In this perspective, social movement organizations may influence their context in the long term (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001), but at any given moment, external conditions are more important in shaping the prospects of movement success and they are subject to drastic change.

The problem with this approach is its lack of a precise definition of opportunity structure: Meyer (2004:135) lists nine different uses of the term. This has led critics of the political process approach to claim that it amounts to a tautology when it is not outright false (e.g. Jasper and Goodwin 2004). When the concept of opportunity is used narrowly, these critics argue, hypotheses that derive from it are easily refuted. When it is used broadly, on the other hand, it can provide empirical support to almost any claim.

The challenge, then, is to define opportunity narrowly enough to be meaningful as well as significant. For this project this is possible, since the party that controls the presidency may be the single most important factor shaping intellectuals' political opportunities in post-civil rights United States. The shift of southern whites' allegiance to the Republicans in reaction to the civil rights movement made it more urgent for the Democratic Party to secure the votes of middle- and upper-middle class white voters elsewhere, and intellectuals could help there. They were, as a group, more dependent on the Democratic Party than the party was on them, as Republican administrations actively promoted anti-intellectualism in politics. But Democratic leadership had to ensure that intellectuals played their role wholeheartedly. Even though writers had no credible sanctions against the party as a group, individually they could derive significant symbolic benefits from resisting Democratic policies they could portray as antithetical to their vocation. If such "renegades" made enough noise, they could encourage the opposition within the party to challenge the leadership.

Even if political opportunity is significant, however, it does not necessarily affect all actors in the same way, as the contrast between Ginsberg and Lowell's paths show. The question, then, is: Why did Lowell adapt to the Nixon presidency better than

Ginsberg did? That is the question I take up in the next section, by looking at these cases in more depth.

#### 4.5. Making the Best of Opportunities: Frontstage vs. Backstage Activity

Examining these cases more closely means distinguishing between the kinds of literary/political activity these poets undertook. I propose to call “frontstage” those highly visible actions that address the news media and/or political elites directly with a clear political message. The duration of these actions is relatively short and more easily delimited, and their impact is more or less immediate. They are “offensive” actions in the sense that they extend literary and artistic values to the political realm. At the other end of the spectrum are what I propose to call “backstage” actions—less easily noticeable actions that require sustained effort, work in the longer term, appear more “cultural” or “intellectual” than “political,” and whose primary audience consists of other intellectuals. They are not as obviously political, and they are “defensive” in the sense of operating in the literary/artistic fields and keeping them free of the logic of the state. Table 4.4 summarizes these differences.

Table 4.4. Frontstage vs. backstage actions.

	Frontstage actions	Backstage actions
Primary audience	Political elites, mass media	Other intellectuals
Duration	Short, easily delimited	Long, diffuse
Gestation period	Short	Long
Tactical priority	Offensive	Defensive

Appearance	Primarily “political”	Primarily “cultural” or “intellectual”
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These terms should not be confused with Goffman’s (1959) similarly named concepts. Like him, I emphasize the notion of audience and the multiplicity of audiences to address. I also share with him the understanding that adjustment to changing circumstances is key in shaping the reception of one’s “performance.” But unlike him, I contend that it is objective changes in political opportunity and not intersubjective definitions of the situation that decide the coherence of a performance. Relatedly, I focus not on collective efforts of face-saving but on the opportunities for “one-upmanship” that different political conjunctures provide.

The relationship between frontstage and backstage activities is zero-sum in terms of the resources to be devoted to them, but frontstage actions need backstage support to be successful for two reasons. First, intellectuals need to maintain the appearance, if not the fact, of unity against powerful adversaries. Sympathizers must, then, be turned to activists and kept that way, and the person to achieve this task needs to spend time working with other intellectuals—convincing or cajoling them to join the activist ranks by framing protest as the “poetic” thing to do; organizing them into collective action once they are committed; and preserving the unity of this community so that dissenting intellectuals, not journalists or political elites, will define the legacy of the frontstage activity in question.

Backstage activity can be expected to help all these tasks. The reputation of an accomplished intellectual, a by-product of backstage activity, may ease sympathizers’

concerns about the purity and urgency of the cause—when the organizer of a protest event is widely believed to put poetry before politics, people who are considering participation in the event may be assured that they will not be perceived as self-interested political opportunists. Another by-product of backstage activity, the reputation of a maker of artistic communities – being known as an effective networker known who supports other poets and writers during difficult times – may increase the symbolic costs of free riding since saying “no” to someone that everyone knows and appreciates can have a detrimental impact on a reputation. It is not even necessary that the rejected community maker hold a grudge—the institutions that he/she builds may be sufficient for that outcome.

Second, intellectuals need to invent a language that challenges the political without partaking fully in the political. Recall from chapter 2 that the logic of ordinary politics is means/ends rationality whereas the poetry field presumes a social ontology that cherishes complexities that defy means/ends rationality. As such, poets are at a disadvantage in speaking the language of ordinary politics and they must draw on other discourses to challenge political elites. In this task, they face two challenges: First, no poetic language can survive in the political arena for long, because there is a fundamental incompatibility between mass politics and individualistic imagination—the best that poetic languages can do is to introduce confusion by using the element of surprise, throwing sand into the wheels of national politics. Therefore, intellectuals must periodically renew the language they use against political elites to maintain its shock value. Second, by virtue of its dominant status, means/ends rationality constantly makes inroads into the poetry field, undermining poets’ alternative ontology in its home turf.

Therefore, the constant pursuit of new ways to articulate outwardly nonpolitical themes like love, religious devotion, and the unity of being has a latent political function: It checks the advances of means/ends rationality in the poetic realm by blurring the distinction between means and ends in poets' discourse. Without it, poets themselves may forget the real basis of their objection to the actions of political elites.

As with the criteria I employ for literary/political success, the distinction between frontstage and backstage activity is primarily a sociological construct. But also like criteria for literary/political success, it is not an entirely arbitrary imposition on poets' thought—evidence reveals that poets themselves have a semi-conscious notion of backstage activity as an arduous, seemingly nonpolitical activity that may make a different kind of politics possible in the unforeseeable future:

Poetry effects change by fiddling with the archetypes and getting at people's dreams about a century before it actually effects historical change. A poet would be, in terms of the ecology of symbols, noting the main structural connections and seeing which parts of the symbol system are no longer useful or applicable, though everyone is giving them credence. (...) Thus, you proceed from an animistic idea that you can hear voices from the trees. And a few decades later a lawyer, like Christopher Stone, writes a legalistic argument—"Should Trees Have Standing?"<sup>79</sup>

From all this, it follows that organizing and participating in protest events, writing political essays, and signing petitions are frontstage actions, while coupling novel cultural forms with a legacy of resistance and maintaining key resources like presses, funding sources, and poetry-reading programs are examples of backstage activity. Poetry with political themes can be either frontstage or backstage, depending on the intended

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<sup>79</sup> Snyder (1980:71), original statement in 1977.

audience (popular poetry vs. “poets’ poetry”) and the method of delivery (e.g. reading on a platform vs. publishing in small magazines).

Some actions have elements of both frontstage and backstage activity. For instance, publicly attacking a fellow intellectual’s political practices addresses the media and political elites as well as intellectuals. Furthermore, such actions may have both long-term and short-term effects, and the short, easily delimited outburst of energy they involve may be preceded by a history of mutual antagonism between the parties. Nevertheless, it is often possible to tell which element predominates in such actions. For one, the exact wording of the attack may reveal it to focus more on political or “strictly intellectual” aspects. For another, the form of the attack is significant—open letters are more frontstage than interviews, which are in turn more frontstage than poems.

Viewed in these terms, Ginsberg and Lowell’s political practices were quite similar during the Johnson presidency – both poets had a lot of frontstage activity. Soon after Nixon took office, however, Lowell reduced his level of frontstage engagement, focusing more on backstage activity. Ginsberg, on the other hand, was practically the same kind of public intellectual in the 1970s on as before.

*1965-November 1968:* Already in 1943, Lowell had vocally rejected military service and was briefly jailed for it. While he was not alone in his generation of writers in doing so, his aristocratic background had assured widespread media coverage of the incident. But in 1943, Lowell was only 26 years old and did not yet have the reputation of a great poet. Furthermore, his manic-depressive illness prevented him from presenting the coolheaded and dignified public persona that such interventions require.

When the war in Vietnam became a major news item in 1965, Lowell took up the public intellectual mantle again. Earlier in the 1960s, he had let the U.S. government use him in the Cold War (Hamilton 1982:299), so it made sense for President Johnson to invite Lowell to the 1965 White House Arts Festival, an effort to buttress his administration's declining legitimacy among the literati—the organizer of the event confessed in his memoirs that the festival was to some extent “a tool to quiet opposition to the war” (quoted in Hamilton 1982:320). Lowell made a huge splash when he craftily rejected the invitation on account of the war and of his membership in the community of poets in an open letter to the President.

The exact sequence of events suggests that Lowell may have been trying to maximize the impact of his rejection, both on the administration and on other intellectuals. Another literary dignitary that was invited to attend the festival was Edmund Wilson, who immediately refused (Hamilton 1982:321). As a result, the White House never advertised his name among the participants of the event and his refusal made little noise. Lowell, on the other hand, initially agreed to attend. A few days later, however, he notified the White House that not only was he not going to attend, but that he was going to decline the President's invitation publicly in an open letter “because his acceptance had been announced in the newspapers.” As Lowell's friend Blair Clark reflected on the event later, this was a shrewd maneuver with a brilliant timing:

You have to say that that was a very successful operation of high-level cultural publicism. Cal<sup>80</sup> the public figure—he knew what he was doing. I'm sure there were people who were terribly envious of his ability to manipulate himself as a public figure. He did it without any pomposity—but he definitely believed that he *was* a public figure (quoted in Hamilton 1982:323, emphasis in the original).

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<sup>80</sup> Robert Lowell's nickname.

Media coverage of Lowell's rebuff to the president was mostly favorable—*The New York Times* reported Lowell's rejection in its front page. Because of this, other writers intending to attend the festival felt the need to reconsider:

[T]he Lowell letter hung challengingly over the entire event. Even those writers, such as Saul Bellow, who believed that Lowell's gesture had been inappropriate, became 'decidedly unsettled'—he was, he said, 'under pressure from the New York crowd' to withdraw or to make some form of protest; he had been accused of 'turncoating for publicity and preferment.' There were similar complaints from Ralph Ellison. Almost everyone who turned up, it seemed, felt the need to explain what he was doing there (...) All in all—and largely thanks to Lowell—the event was 'an unmitigated disaster' (Hamilton 1982:326).

Johnson's reaction to Lowell's letter is particularly worth noting: According to the Johnson staff member who organized the festival, "the roar in the Oval Office could be heard all the way into the East Wing" (quoted in Hamilton 1982:322). As a result of all this, Lowell gained considerable stature as a public intellectual, as novelist Normal Mailer's description of how he met Lowell shows:

The novelist gave a fulsome welcome to the poet. He did not speak of his poetry (...) nor of his prose which he thought excellent—Mailer told instead of why he had respect for Lowell as a man. A couple of years ago, the poet had refused an invitation from President Johnson to attend a garden party for artists and intellectuals, and it had attracted much attention at the time for it was one of the first dramatic acts of protest against the war (1968:43).

For the next four years, Lowell was constantly on the move in support of the antiwar cause. He talked about the war in interviews, participated in poetry readings against the war, publicly pledged "to raise funds to aid youths who resist the draft and the Vietnam war," and joined the October 1967 March on Pentagon, where he gave a speech.

Although he knew the Kennedys, he actively supported Eugene McCarthy's 1968 presidential bid, judging him to be the peace candidate. The media paid close attention to these activities.

Ginsberg, on the other hand, suddenly came to national attention in 1957 when an overzealous customs supervisor confiscated his first book, *Howl and Other Poems*, a celebration of free love, homosexuality, and drugs. The obscenity trial that followed, which Ginsberg's publisher skillfully brought to the attention of the press, became an embarrassment for the authorities, resulted in the acquittal of the book, and catapulted Ginsberg into national fame.

This event had a monumental impact on Ginsberg's career—for a substantial number of older poets, he had risen to stardom without paying his dues. In less than a year, "Beat," the name of the movement he was leading, had become a codeword for sloppy poetry not just among the academic poets he was vocally challenging, but also among the older and more sophisticated leaders of the antiacademic camp. For instance, in a letter dated November 18, 1958, Denise Levertov told her close friend Robert Duncan that she was "declining to send poems to *Yugen*<sup>81</sup> because its standards seem so low (poor poems even by good people) and so 'beat'" (Bertholf and Gelpi 2004:149). In another letter a month later, she described her impression of Ginsberg in a rather condescending language:

There was a reading at NYU Friday night, I read and Allen Ginsberg, & contrary to all expectation he really read some good things—I think you'd have thought so too. Also he is very mild chastened & not bouncing all over the joint like Tigger

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<sup>81</sup> A New-York based literary magazine.

in The House at Pooh Corner—which almost is sad somehow. Like with a child; at one stage one can't wait for them to grow up, & yet when they begin to one actually feels a twinge of regret for all the noise etc. they used to make (ibid., p.156).

Since the values of the poetry field were defined as distinct from the reason of the state, it was possible to compensate for such “accidental” fame by taking up the defense of the values of the field against encroachment by the state. Ginsberg probably did not have an explicit awareness of these rules of the game, but he certainly had a highly developed practical sense of how to conduct himself among poets. Consequently, over the course of the 1950s he turned himself into a banner of free speech in the Emile Zola tradition, rushing to the defense of artists fighting censorship around the country<sup>82</sup>. His intense antiwar activity after 1965 should also be seen in this context: He appeared at the 1967 Human Be-In; wrote the text for the tongue-in-cheek levitation of the Pentagon in October 1967<sup>83</sup>; organized and participated in antiwar poetry readings across the nation; and figured prominently in the antiwar demonstrations during the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

Ginsberg's actions attracted increasing attention from the leading newspapers. The tone of the coverage was initially sarcastic – as late as March 24, 1968, *The New York Times* carried a front-page story with the title “Political Activism New Hippie ‘Thing,’” suggesting that hippies' interest in politics, which the story tied to Ginsberg,

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<sup>82</sup> Ginsberg's politics seems to have changed after the Howl incident. During World War II he had urged his congressman to vote for the war. From now on, pacifism and anarchism were going to characterize his politics. Especially after travelling to Cuba and Czechoslovakia, where dissidents greeted him as a cultural hero of the democratic left, causing the ruling communist elite to expel him for “immoral behavior,” he was equally critical of U.S. and Soviet foreign policies. Partly for this reason, the pro-Soviet left branded him an apolitical naïf, and the label has been hard to shrug off.

<sup>83</sup> The levitation of the Pentagon was part of the October 1967 March to Pentagon that Lowell also participated in. Mailer documents it as a hidden clash between the public personae of Ginsberg and Lowell—literary rivalry carried on in political guise (1968:124-125).

was shallow and fleeting. But it improved toward the end of Johnson's presidency. The same *New York Times* covered Ginsberg's participation in the antiwar protests that accompanied the 1968 Democratic National Convention extensively, and the sarcasm of earlier Ginsberg-related reports was considerably toned down. Regarding political elites, Ginsberg's gentle and soft manner – confronted with Chicago police armed to the teeth, he sat a large group of protesters down and got them to chant Buddhist mantras to defuse conflict – made it difficult for old-school Democratic authorities like Mayor Daley of Chicago to portray protesters as violent and dangerous. Instead, 1968 DNC was going to be remembered for the brutality of the police and the arrogance of the party leadership.

*November 1968-1975:* After Nixon's election, Lowell moved to England to focus on his poetry and was no longer the fixture in protest events that he used to be. This was not, however, a retreat from politics—in the years that followed, he simply shifted the medium by which he voiced his objection to the war from interviews and speeches to poetry. To be sure, he had always written poetry with public and political themes, but in the 1970s, two things were different. First, his art was now his primary, though not the only, means of addressing the war. Second, he deliberately made his poetry more difficult to understand, underscoring his commitment to pure poetry. Because of this, critics would often underestimate the political dimension of Lowell's later poetry, as this exchange with an interviewer in 1971 shows:

[Dudley Young:] “Notebook” is surely a more private book than your previous ones, which have all had at least some poems in them which have gestured toward a public space. Would you not agree with this, and also that this is not wholly a function of your own development, but has quite a lot to do with America itself?

[Lowell:] I don't see that it is more private. It has poems on Alexander the Great and Lincoln, the Pentagon march and things like that; but the spine of the book is my own life (...) It's about as personal as that and I wanted to make it more difficult and complicated because more can perhaps be said thrusting through complication. I am writing in a much more difficult style. I don't think I've entirely gained by taking a complicated style but on the whole I have. What I wanted to get away from was the photograph of reality. It really doesn't matter whether one style is better than the last. When it no longer serves, you must adventure. (Young 1971:B32)

This exchange also reveals that Lowell was aware of the need to modify his literary/political strategy in the 1970s. Ginsberg, on the other hand, showed no signs of such a realization until the very end of the decade.

Lowell's increased backstage activity after November 1968 did not entirely root out his frontstage activity, though it reduced it. Right after Nixon's election, for instance, he turned a spar with writer Diana Trilling about student protest at Columbia University into an attack on the Vietnam War in two open letters. In the second of these, he wrote:

[Trilling's] rather majestic irony about my "radical piety," and my signing petitions, appearing at rallies, seems to suggest that I act to draw applause from the young, get in fashion, whatever. This may be consoling to her own picture of herself as some housekeeping goddess of reason, preferring the confines of her mind to experience (...) On the great day, when she meets her Maker, John Stuart Mill on his right hand and Diderot on his left, they will say, "Liberalism gave you a standard; what have you done for liberalism?" Then she will answer that her record is clear of agitation about the Vietnam war, clear of a feverish concern for the drafting of reluctant young men to fight it, free of a nervous fear about the militarization of our country. Terror of the nuclear bombs never forced her to lose hope. She seems more preoccupied with the little violence of the unarmed student uprisings than with the great violence of the nation at war. She implies that we who are horrified by napalm on human flesh are somehow indifferent to the piss on President Kirk's carpet.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Robert Lowell letter to the Editor, *Commentary*, n.d. (Winter 1969). Reproduced in Hamilton (2005:513). Grayson Kirk was the president of Columbia University from 1953 to 1968; student activists occupied his office during protests in 1968.

A year and a half later, when President Nixon turned the prison sentence of Lieutenant William Calley – the only U.S. government official convicted for the massacre of civilians in My Lai, Vietnam, in 1968 – to house arrest, he wrote another open letter and attacked the Nixon Administration:

A principle may kill more than an incident. I am sick with fresh impressions. Has no one the compassion to pass judgment on William Calley? His atrocity is cleared by the President, public, polls, rank and file of the right and left. He looks almost alive; like an old song, he stirs us with the gruff poignance of the professional young soldier. He too fought under television for our place in the sun. Why should the bait be eaten when the sharks swim free?<sup>85</sup>

In retrospect, Lowell's moves were wise. Nearly all of the poets who were active in the peace movement had to deal with charges of doing a disservice to their art by oversimplifying reality in their political poetry – the “photograph of reality” theme in the 1971 interview above – and Lowell is untainted by this kind of criticism. The consensus among literary critics is that his politics did not compromise the quality of his poetry, and in this regard Lowell stands out among his contemporaries. If another literary/political opportunity were to present itself he would have been in a much better position to benefit from it. Unfortunately, he died unexpectedly in 1977.

In the meantime, Ginsberg continued to attend and organize meetings, antiwar poetry readings, and high-profile protest events like those during 1972 Republican National Convention. The media paid less attention to his by-now-predictable activities, and their coverage was not as positive as in 1967-68 even though the major newspapers had, by this time, given up their initial support for the war. When activist Abbie

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<sup>85</sup> Robert Lowell letter to the Editors, *New York Review of Books*, May 6, 1971. Reproduced in Hamilton (2005:570-571).

Hoffman, with whom Ginsberg collaborated in planning antiwar events, complained of the media's indifference to protest during 1972 RNC, his words revealed clearly what was wrong with Ginsberg's strategy:

We got a f— elephant dragging a f— coffin down the street, and we can't even get on the 11 o'clock news. S—, four years ago when we turned a couple of pigs loose we were on the air all f— week” (McGinniss 1972:12, censorship in the original).

Like Lowell, Ginsberg devoted much of his poetry to antiwar themes, but the quality of his poetry suffered from a tendency to moralize and to orate. One of the most respected scholars of U.S. poetry has this to say about the later Ginsberg: “He wrote too much, he mythologized rather than criticized himself, and he repeated himself like a dotard. His Vietnam invectives, dream horrors, sex memories, religious chantings, mystical ecstasies, middle-aged alarms over balding and impotence, and fascinated terror of death all become wearisome, and so do his doleful images” (Perkins 1987:552).

The secret of Lowell's continued success and Ginsberg's downturn, then, seems to be in how they dealt with changes in political conjuncture. When the political conjuncture provides intellectuals with numerous political opportunities, it makes sense to focus on frontstage activities. Since open political opportunity structures may not last, it makes sense to focus on activities that bear their fruit in the short run. Such periods are defined by increased dependence of political elites on intellectuals, so the autonomy of the fields of cultural production is relatively safe and intellectuals can afford to go on the offensive. When the political opportunity structure is closed, on the other hand,

intellectuals need to devote a greater proportion of their efforts to maintaining the “defenses” of their own fields.

Both of these dynamics can be observed in Ginsberg and Lowell’s careers. If Johnson had not been desperate to appease writers and artists, there would have been no White House Festival of the Arts and Lowell would not have had the chance of appearing on the front page of *The New York Times*. Even after this incident, Johnson refrained from meddling with the autonomy of art, as the history of censorship laws during his presidency shows. When the autonomy of poetry was not perceived to be under grave threat, a bestselling author like Ginsberg could become a political superstar without having to worry about the negative consequences of such high profile activities.

These dynamics, however, were not in place after the Republican Party captured the presidency in November 1968. Confident of southern states’ loyalty, all Nixon had to do from now on was to create enough support among the more conservative whites of the Midwest, which he did by inventing a “silent majority.” He had no truck with art festivals in the White House, and censorship laws regressed under his administration.

Without openings like the White House Arts Festival and 1968 DNC, poets could sustain their public profile only by regularly appearing in the arts and book review sections of leading newspapers. The editors of these sections, as gatekeepers of the artistic pantheon, cared more about the quality of one’s poetry than editors-in-chief did, and with very few exceptions, they looked down on overt political engagement, especially when it was undertaken individually. Acceptable forms of protest were grim, respectable, collective ones that could never be perceived as opportunistic publicity seeking. The best protest was the one that looked furthest into the future, and for this it

was necessary to spend more time on formal experimentation and on the exploration of novel cultural resources, discourses on “the good life” that could later be brought to the political arena to justify antiwar mobilization. All these meant that more backstage activity was now required to sustain the same level of frontstage engagement.

As a result, the kind of coverage Ginsberg and Lowell received in these supplements was very different after 1969. Here is an excerpt from a review of his *Planet News*:

Ginsberg does not flinch, but it can be argued that he has taken a wrong turn in abandoning the domestic for the planetary. His own word for this collection is “picaresque,” and it is that, but the *picaro* has lost the early rage of “Howl” and instead dispassionately distributes dishonors (...) Instead of scrambling to a private sanctuary, Ginsberg evangelizes America, exerting pure will power, declaring all by himself the end of the Vietnam War (...) His current project – a long chronicle-in-progress, “These States,” is here represented here by an extract called “Wichita Vortex Sutra,” a “mind collage” which is depressingly nowhere near so good as his sublime elegy for his mother, “Kaddish.”<sup>86</sup>

Or consider this one:

It is one thing to end an English poem with “Shantih, shantih, shantih,” but to end “Om Om Om Sa Ra Wa Bu Da Da Ki Ni Yea,” etc., for three more lines is disaster. Then, too, Ginsberg strikes certain prophetic attitudes whose irony is their own undoing (...) The book allows sentimental confessions and masochistic self-abasement unaccompanied by (so far as I can see) any redeeming poetic value, except a programmatic confessional one.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Helen Vendler, “Planet News: A Onetime Wunderkind Reports on the Globe’s New Hopes and Woes—and His Own.” *The New York Times*, August 31, 1969, p. BR8. “Kaddish” is the name of a poem that Ginsberg published in an earlier volume.

<sup>87</sup> Helen Vendler, “The Fall of America: Marking Time between Youth and Old Age, Allen Ginsberg Considers His Country and Himself.” *The New York Times*, April 15, 1973, p. 368.

In contrast, here is an example of how Lowell was treated in those same milieux:

Complex and imperfect, like most of the accomplishments of serious men and women today, Robert Lowell's "Notebooks 1967-68" is nevertheless a beautiful and major work. In what seems a propitiatory act to the modern god of chaos, the poet offers an account of his personal history as it has painstakingly ordered itself in images. It is the response of a racked but magnanimous mind, the response of a poet. (...) Many of the events in the "Notebook" are drawn from our common history of recent months, our wars and demonstrations, our assassinations and riots. Others are intensely, even hermetically, private. But throughout burns a passionate intelligence, a conscience, which the reader feels is trustworthy. After the worst has been said, it can still mete out praise, it is accountable for blame.<sup>88</sup>

From this perspective, it is easy to understand why Lowell did not achieve the status of literary giant in spite of his smart decisions: Although the proportion of his backstage activity increased, his overall level of engagement suffered from personal circumstances. Unlike Sartre, who matched his frontstage activity with equally impressive backstage work – the creation of a popular philosophy that helped a new generation to convert widespread feelings of personal insecurity to a quasi-political agenda – Lowell had no backstage activity other than his elegant poetry. He did not participate in the counterculture, he could not keep a poetry community going, and so his relationship with youth was never very robust. But these should be judged in the context of what else could have happened: Put simply, he could have done less. His bipolar disorder incapacitated him for extended periods of time, destroying the momentum that slowly builds up in the course of backstage activity. And there was a generational chasm between him and the emerging counterculture—he was nine years older than Ginsberg, a

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<sup>88</sup> William Meredith, "Notebook 1967-68". *The New York Times*, June 15, 1969, p. BR1.

very significant difference in terms of social age. What he did after 1969 is, given all this, quite remarkable.

Ginsberg, on the other hand, supported fellow poets financially, launched institutions of poetry that survive to this day, and crafted a left-liberal individualism out of Eastern spiritualities, Jewish mysticism, and British romanticism that the peace movement took as its own. But his strategy had a self-defeating element: His generous support of other poets alleviated the damage to his reputation in the short run, but since it was dependent on the money he made from poetry, in the long run it may have hurt him more. At any rate, his unabated frontstage activity required more backstage support than before, which was impossible since he had already been, quite literally, hyperactive since 1957.

#### **4.6. The Role of Field Trajectory**

Yet another question emerges at this point: Why did Ginsberg insist on unabated frontstage activity and not follow Lowell? In a sense, the answer is simple: He had conflicting desires. He enjoyed and wanted both poetic and widespread recognition, as is evident from his willingness to give interviews not only to literary journals like *Partisan Review* but also to mass-market magazines like the *New Age Journal* and *Playboy*. Ginsberg's style, as Perkins (1987:549) noted, was accessible and popular, betraying a semi-conscious desire for being recognized by as many people as possible as early as possible. But he also wanted to leave his mark for posterity, as the following excerpt from an interview published in the highbrow *Paris Review* shows:

Usually during the composition, step by step, word by word and adjective by adjective, if it's at all spontaneous, I don't know whether it even makes sense sometimes. Sometimes I do know it makes complete sense, and I start crying. Because I realize I'm hitting some area which is absolutely true. And in that sense applicable universally, or understandable universally. In that sense able to survive through time—in that sense to be read by somebody and wept to, maybe, centuries later. (Ginsberg 2001:26)

Evidence suggests that U.S. poets reacted to this double ambition the same way Bourdieu claims French writers do – they saw the desire for widespread fame as a threat to the autonomy of their field. For instance, Robert Duncan, an older leader of antiacademic poetry who nevertheless emphasized erudition in his poetry, told his friend Denise Levertov that his own belief in his fame is “so lovely [a dream] that what a public (of two, twenty, two hundred etc.) offers of fame seems ugly” (Bertholf and Gelpi 2004:154). He was intensely suspicious of the reaction Ginsberg's poetry elicited from large numbers of people, as the following excerpt from a letter from 1959 shows:

Last Saturday we had a group reading for *Measure*—where Ginsberg read from his “Kaddish” for his mother—and for the first time I heard him read “with emotion”; once you grasp that the poem—like “Howl” is designd [*sic*] in order to wind up an hysterical pitch (at the close of the poem he was shouting like Hitler or an evangelist, so that the audience having risen with him on wave upon wave of momentous lines ROARD). As the seizure of the poem increased, the content became disorderd, then idiotic and finally disappeared. But no wonder it is impossible to attack his work as bad writing—it is almost exactly calculated to be an agency for such a frenzy. And what we see (hear) when it is not used to arrive at the seizure, is like the funny expressions of a face separated from the terrifying fit it is going thru.

I dislike *using* a poem, and that's the crux of the matter (ibid., p. 172, emphasis in the original).

Ginsberg's friends as well as his opponents saw him this way:

D[avid] M[eltzer]: So Allen was vanguardist and mother hen...

L[awrence] F[erlinghetti]: Well, that's how he started out. He had this really great discipline for economy and prose and direct statement, but I feel he didn't develop beyond that. He wanted to be a rock star, instead. Allen wanted to be more and more a performance poet with music on stage...performing with Bob Dylan, for instance, and hanging out with the Beatles. I think it did his poetry a lot of harm. (Meltzer 2001:101)

The mere existence of a disposition like this, then, will eventually scuttle a literary/political career unless favorable political conjunctures keep reproducing themselves on end. This simple answer, however, begs yet another question. Why did Ginsberg want both kinds of success, whereas Lowell was content with securing the respect of an incomparably smaller community of writers and artists?

It is not, as the easiest answer would have it, because Ginsberg did not care about the autonomy of poetry—evidence shows that he did. From the *Howl* incident on, he took pains to argue that his poetry marked new innovations in poetic form and that it was abundantly learned with respect to the traditions that made poetry an independent genre<sup>89</sup>. Nor is it his lack of cultural and social capital – there were poets in Ginsberg's circle who came from similar social backgrounds and who did not crave widespread fame the way he did. And it certainly is not the volume of his symbolic capital—he was not the only U.S. poet whom the New York art world failed to recognize instantly.

The difference is in the trajectories of the two poets—the sequence and timing of the positions they occupied in the poetry field. While the way Lowell entered the field made it possible for him to be patient enough in the 1950s and 1970s, Ginsberg's career was the progressive solidification of a self-destructive bundle of aspirations and of an

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<sup>89</sup> In a letter to John Hollander, a Columbia classmate who had recently written a negative review of Ginsberg's book, Ginsberg focused almost entirely on the formal qualities of his poetry: "Basically no one has insight into poetry techniques except people who are exercising them. (...) the horrible irony of all these jerks who can't read trying to lecture me (us) on FORM. (...) but nobody's interested in literature, in technique" (Morgan and Peters 2006:85-88).

action repertoire built around these aspirations. At every step of the way, Ginsberg's options narrowed while Lowell's broadened.

As I argued above, Ginsberg's career began with an accident that gave him too much fame. The *Howl* incident convinced Ginsberg that, if he matched his high sales and widespread fame with high-profile political actions, he could avoid the wrath of the gatekeepers of poetic consecration. But this strategy was self-defeating in the long run. His frontstage activity brought him more fame and, presumably, more sales, while losing its shock value over time. His career was progressively locked into a vicious cycle of popularity laundered through increasingly predictable political interventions that ended up giving him more popularity—a literary/political Ponzi scheme. And unlike Zola, who was 58 years old at the time of the Dreyfus affair and died four years later, Ginsberg's "accident" had taken place very early in his career, so it was a matter of time before this pattern led to its own demise. Lowell, in contrast, could afford to be patient and shrewd, as he did not need political engagement desperately. As the low political profile he kept between 1943 and 1965 shows, he could wait for his time.

#### **4.7. Discussion: Field Trajectory vs. Class, Networks and Self-Presentation**

Recall that class- and network-based explanations of U.S. poets' politicization leave out some historically important cases while making sense of the general picture. Also recall that self-presentation may be a consequence of past episodes of politicization as much as a cause of future ones. Now it can be seen why.

Class is a part of the explanation to the extent that Ginsberg and Lowell's class backgrounds shaped their field trajectories; and artistic networks are relevant to the extent

that they mediated the impact of class. Ginsberg and Lowell came to fame the way they did as a result of a series of events that were all, in one way or another, related to their class background via the mediation of artistic networks. In high school, Lowell had a personal relationship with a famous poet, Richard Eberhart, because the latter was the headmaster of Lowell's elite boarding school (Hamilton 1982:22). When Lowell decided to pursue poetry, Eberhart referred him to John Crowe Ransom, a towering presence in midcentury academic poetry. A sequence of events leading to his first Pulitzer Prize thus got underway.

In contrast, when Ginsberg, who graduated from a public high school, sought the support of his Columbia University professor Lionel Trilling, Trilling chose to focus his efforts on Ginsberg's classmate John Hollander, the son of a physiologist, who had received, like Lowell, an early introduction to the unwritten rules of literature. Failing to get much attention from the New York literary establishment, Ginsberg eventually found his way to San Francisco, where he joined the circle of Kenneth Rexroth, an anarchist poet from a working-class background whose poetic style and enmity to the academic establishment inspired "Howl."

The contrast between the public personae of Ginsberg and Lowell – the notorious homosexual poet of drugs and orgies vs. the thoughtful moderate – was to some degree a product of these diverging event sequences. The *Howl* incident did not just dispose Ginsberg to write in an accessible style and to undertake visible political activity. It also pointed toward the poetic content and the self-presentation that would continuously secure him the public spotlight—poetry that, like "Howl," chronicled and celebrated

marginal sexual practices; a self-presentation that, like the one he developed during the incident, was built on flaunting these practices.

However, the chain of events that constituted Ginsberg and Lowell's careers could have broken off in a number of points. Unlike Ginsberg, some lower-class poets like Galway Kinnell did gain admission into the circle of academic poetry, and unlike *Howl and Other Poems*, other poetry books sued for obscenity in the 1950s and 60s, like Lenore Kandel's *Love Book*, did not make so much noise. If Lowell's first book had been held back for a year, it would have had to compete against the canonical W. H. Auden's *The Age of Anxiety* for the Pulitzer, most likely resulting in defeat. Because of the loose coupling between class and artistic networks on one hand and literary and political events on the other, field trajectory is not reducible to a weighted average of these static features.

#### **4.8. Conclusion**

To summarize the argument: While Ginsberg and Lowell came from very different class backgrounds, were affiliated with antagonistic artistic networks, and differed in terms of their conformity to hegemonic postwar U.S. masculinity, the crucial variable in explaining their diverging literary/political outcomes in the 1970s is the interaction of their trajectories in the poetry field with the political opportunity structure. While both poets were good candidates for politicization – for using political intervention as a means to furthering their poetic careers – by Bourdieu's criteria, the sequence of events that shaped their entrance to the poetry field led them to develop different strategies to gain recognition in the poetry field. Ginsberg's strategy was based on converting part of the economic capital he gained from book sales into symbolic capital

by way of continuous political intervention, and the very success of this strategy in the late 1950s and 1960s made it impossible for him to develop new ones in the 1970s. Lowell's strategy, on the other hand, was more flexible. He had the luxury to decide how exactly to apportion his limited time and energy between, on one hand, selectively chosen, overt, and intensive political engagements, and on the other, extensive work on crafting new poetic forms to express public and political sensibilities. The former, as I argued, called for more of the latter when political opportunities of intellectuals declined. As a result, while both poets were relatively successful in using political intervention to accumulate both specifically poetic and generally cultural capital in the 1960s, in the 1970s Lowell surpassed Ginsberg in both of these games.

The Ginsberg-Lowell contrast shows that, in contexts like the U.S., we need to distinguish between at least two ideal-typical patterns of intellectual politicization. When the disposition to engage in political activity arises from the necessity to manage a spoiled artistic reputation, we have what I propose to call, after Bourdieu's discussion of the French literary field, the "Zola effect." When it arises from the ambition to cross the threshold between good and excellent reputations, we have what I propose to call the "Sartre effect." While the Zola effect disposes intellectuals to undertake ever-increasing amounts of frontstage activity, the Sartre effect allows them to shift the composition of their action repertoire as the political situation changes. Since the outcomes of backstage actions are less opportunity-dependent than frontstage ones, the Sartre path is superior to the Zola path in the U.S.

This is not to say that the Zola/Ginsberg path lacks any viability in the U.S. Literary/political activity takes place at the intersection of multiple fields, therefore it is

part of an open system, one in which outside disturbances are the norm and not the exception. The presence of a multitude of causal mechanisms that this study does not take into consideration, then, is not just possible but quite plausible. Therefore the Zola and Sartre effects may be “crowded out” by countervailing forces—in that sense, perhaps one should distinguish between effect and path. These findings merely indicate that the Sartre/Lowell effect is more likely than the Zola/Ginsberg one to lead to successful political interventions by intellectuals to the extent that the context under study resembles the one this paper focuses on.

Nor do I claim that the Zola and Sartre paths are exhaustive. Intellectuals, like all humans, have simple needs—acceptance and recognition according to the field approach—but the ways in which these needs are met or fail to be met are numerous. I focused on the Zola and Sartre paths for two reasons: First, these two are relatively clear, distinct, and significant in Bourdieu’s oeuvre, which I consider the most exciting in the sociology of literature and intellectuals today. Second, these two paths seem to go a long way toward explaining the empirical case at hand—the contrast between the two most famous U.S. poets’ paths to politicization during a defining and traumatic episode in U.S. history that continues to haunt the world. Other historically significant cases, like those of Gary Snyder and Denise Levertov that I used in showing the shortcomings of class- and network-based solutions to the problem I examined, merit their own explanations—explanations that should refer to mechanisms different from the ones I focused on here.

These limitations notwithstanding, my findings are significant for sociological theory—they show the need to rethink some implications of Bourdieu’s work on French fields of cultural production while affirming the strength of his conceptual framework.

Regarding the questions of this article, it is not always clear whether Bourdieu's dependent variable is the mere disposition to take up political causes or to do it effectively. This is not a problem in the French context because of the relationship between intellectuals and political elites in that country. The main tool French political elites used in transforming their medieval kingdom to a nation-state was linguistic (Brubaker 1992; also see Weber 1976): The sphere of influence of the Parisian dialect constantly made gains at the expense of local languages during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, cohering peasant multitudes into a mobilizable force.

This process endowed French writers with a disproportionate amount of leverage over political elites, making their willingness to collectively intervene in public issues sufficient for the success of those interventions. In other contexts, including the U.S., where the imagination of the nation relies less on intellectuals' boundary work, such influence cannot be taken for granted. "French language was a powerful instrument in creating a French nation," writes one scholar, while "Americans had to build their nation without such aid" (Clark 1987:34):

Every country, every literature, has politically committed writers, but only France has a tradition of writers who transmute those commitments into an encompassing identification with country. Only France has a literary culture that elects the writer as spokesman and invests literature with such powers (Clark 1987:4).

Outside France, then, revisions to Bourdieu's work are necessary—but these revisions do not require the invention of brand new sociological concepts. In the case of U.S. poets' politicization, the concept of field trajectory makes Bourdieusian thought compatible with eventful historical sociology, provided that scholars distinguish between

different kinds of strategic action. The accidents that shaped the early phases of Allen Ginsberg and Robert Lowell's careers are indispensable in explaining why the outcomes of their political practices in both registers of literary/political activity, similar in the 1960s, diverged when the political opportunity structure changed in the 1970s.

One last point. How historically specific are the dynamics this study analyzes? After all, Zola and Sartre effects work on a small subset of an already tiny population. There are few writers who have the kind of accident that befell Zola, and even fewer are those who can reasonably claim to be on the brink of reaching the uppermost level of the intellectual hierarchy.

All this is true. And yet, because of the organizing principles of literary and artistic fields, both kinds of writers appear in almost every contentious episode, and they inherit the action repertoires of their predecessors, causing history to repeat itself almost perfectly. In the run-up to the invasion of Iraq – nearly forty years after Lowell's letter to President Johnson – First Lady Laura Bush had to cancel a White House symposium on poetry because the poet Sam Hamill planned to protest the imminent invasion from the stage. Hamill had been involved with the peace movement in the 1960s.

## CHAPTER 5

### DYNAMICS OF BACKSTAGE ACTIVITY: BUDDHISM AND THE POETRY FIELD

#### 5.1. Introduction

To recap the previous chapter, the key to individual success in literary/political activity is balancing frontstage and backstage activity. Frontstage activity – the more visible, “offensive” acts of resistance to political elites – requires backstage support if it is to be effective, and the amount of backstage support needed to sustain the same level of frontstage activity rises under adverse political circumstances.

Understanding the dynamics of backstage activity, then, is crucial for the U.S. case. Unlike in France, where the dependence of political elites on writers for the imagination of the nation made electoral outcomes largely irrelevant to writers’ literary/political strategies, each new generation of U.S. poetry had to find out its own ratio of backstage to frontstage activity—that is, the absolute minimum of scarce resources to be devoted to the hard work necessary to make precision strikes like Robert Lowell’s LBJ letter possible.

At the individual level, constraints on backstage activity are relatively easy to see. The contrast between Robert Lowell and Allen Ginsberg shows that the amounts of cultural and social capital one is endowed with go a long way toward explaining how judiciously one apportions his/her time between frontstage and backstage work. A poet’s

field trajectory is shaped, to some degree, by these nonliterary resources that one inherits from his/her family or acquires in the early years of schooling.

At the collective level too, the answer seems obvious—the more discursive resources available to a group of cultural producers, the better. This is for two reasons: First, poetic discourses rely on their shock value to destabilize privileged knowledges of the world produced by the dominant actors of the field of power, and shock value always declines. When one resource is “used up,” another needs to be available. Second, some discourses may turn out to never have any shock value to begin with. In that case, the absence of a B-plan means failure.

Therefore it is not surprising that twentieth-century poets were relatively successful in resisting political elites. For one, their art was increasingly open to other poetics, giving it a growing number of poetic forms and techniques to keep its challenge to political reason fresh<sup>90</sup> (Apter 1987; Huang 2001; Stalling 2005). For another, postwar U.S. poets were conversant in a number of religious and philosophical discourses that they could use to challenge means-ends rationality. These included existentialism, neopaganism, radical Catholicism, and Buddhism. Poets’ appropriations of these traditions exemplified what Turner (1969) calls *communitas*—they were radically egalitarian, challenged some basic assumptions of mainstream U.S. culture, and defied means/ends rationality, the ultimate “other” of poetry.

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<sup>90</sup> From the rise of modernism to the 1980s, U.S. poets translated from the Chinese, French, German, Greek (classical and modern), Italian, Japanese, Latin, Provençal, Russian, and Spanish, among other languages. Some midcentury poets even owed part of their fame to translation—Robert Bly introduced Austrian, Norwegian, and Latin American poets; Jerome Rothenberg translated from the Navajo as well as from the French, German, and Spanish; Paul Blackburn from the Provençal.

There is one puzzling aspect of this picture, however, and making sense of it is the specific task of this chapter. From the early 1950s to the end of the Vietnam period, one of these philosophical/religious traditions, Buddhism, came to overshadow all others. While the others did not entirely disappear, and some, like neopaganism, may have flourished in absolute terms, Zen and Tibetan Buddhism eclipsed them in relative significance. As a result, the remarkable variety of discursive resources that U.S. poets initially had available for backstage activity gave way to a near-uniformity of expression. From the theoretical framework I have been developing, this was dangerous—it made little sense for poets to put all their eggs in the same basket. But if poets had really wanted to preserve the multiplicity of their forms of backstage activity, the diversely competitive structure of the poetry field would probably have allowed them to do so. The question, then, is why it was preferable to have one tool instead of many.

For three reasons, the fact that Buddhism and not another religion or philosophy came to be dominant is even more puzzling. First, radical Catholicism or a liberal Protestantism could cohere poets into a unified front just as well as Buddhism did without alienating them from the predominantly Christian lay population as much. Neither of these options was utopian given the cultural atmosphere of the time—in the 1930s and 40s, dissenting poets were familiar with radical Catholicism and in the postwar period a blend of liberal Protestantism and existentialism, associated with Paul Tillich, was gaining ground in U.S. theology. Throughout the Vietnam period radical Catholicism and liberal Protestantism dominated the religious wing of the antiwar movement (Allen 2008; Anderson and Ernst 2007; DeBenedetti and Chatfield 1990; Small and Hoover 1992), but

U.S. poets ignored Tillich and some of radical Catholic ones explored Buddhism in the run-up to the war. Why?

Second, unlike radical Catholicism, liberal Protestantism, or existentialism, the “American Buddhism”<sup>91</sup> of the poets presumed and reproduced the East/West binary. As such, it was an example of orientalism (Said 1979, 1993), and it could be expected to be either unmistakably detrimental to the peoples of the periphery (Said 1979; also see Lee 2005; Lopez 1998; Wendland 2007) or so multivocal and ambiguous as to have no consistent political effect (Lardinois 2006; Steinmetz 2007). The longer history of U.S. appropriations of Buddhism from the mid-nineteenth century on reveals a multivocal character, but during the Vietnam period, their effect on the Asian victims of U.S. military intervention has been, without exception, rather benign<sup>92</sup>. Even though pro-war readings of Buddhist texts were possible in principle, this possibility was foregone as U.S. poets built an oppositional language using Buddhism after 1945. How did that happen?

Third, it is not obvious at the outset that the Buddhism/poetry nexus could be developed without jeopardizing poetry’s autonomy in the eyes of some poets. Unlike existentialism and neopaganism, Buddhism had resident experts in the U.S. from the 1930s on—Buddhist clergy. In the postwar period those poets who became interested in Buddhism often found that they had to become their disciples, losing some of their

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<sup>91</sup> I put the couplet “American Buddhism” in quotes to highlight and criticize the tendency of white middle-class Buddhists to speak for the entire phenomenon of Buddhism in North America. The movements that such sympathizers and converts established in the U.S. do indeed constitute the most visible Buddhist presence in the U.S., but there were flesh-and-blood Buddhists in the U.S. long before them. If these Asian communities remained silent and invisible, the reason should be sought in racism and xenophobia.

<sup>92</sup> This is not to say that U.S. middle classes’ “dialogue” with Buddhism did not have a negative impact on other disadvantaged groups within the U.S. or outside it. As Masatsugu (2008) and Lopez (1998) show, white Americans’ interest in Buddhism consistently worked against Japanese Americans and Tibetans, respectively. My argument only pertains to Vietnam, which was, unlike Japanese Americans or Tibetans, the target of direct U.S. military aggression in this period.

cherished independence. It is not clear, then, why any poet would build his/her public personae out of materials imported from a spiritual tradition control over which he/she had no control.

Furthermore, my research reveals that the Buddhist clergy U.S poets took as masters were not very interested in radical politics. Concerned with securing a toehold in a competitive emerging market of salvation goods, they emphasized the aspects of their teachings that they saw as strictly personal and nonpolitical. Among others, these included the denunciation of worldly things, the illusive nature of empirical reality, and the natural pervasiveness of suffering in the world. Another seemingly extraordinary aspect of this story, then, is the ease with which poets hijacked a religion from its own specialists. How did that happen?

Unique as it may appear, the emergence of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism as *the* poetic response to the Vietnam War from a crowded field of plausible candidates illustrates the general problem for the sociology of backstage literary/political activity. The question in all similar situations is: What are the dynamics that shape the process of the conversion of presumably nonpolitical discourses to political resources? In other words, how do intellectuals choose which discourses to convert to political tools and what factors determine the success of the conversion? In any particular case, it stands to reason that some frames are “better” than others because of the particularities of the historical context in question—for instance, Hasidic thought is probably not as good a choice in challenging political elites in contemporary Turkey as the modern language of human rights. But then, would it be a better idea to justify human rights on the basis of

the tenets of orthodox Sunni Islam, heterodox Sufi Islam, or secular cosmopolitanism in that country?

This, then, is the question of this chapter: What dynamics shape the conversion of nonpolitical discourses to political resources in semi-autonomous fields of cultural production? I answer it as follows: First, I provide a detailed overview of the relationship between U.S. poets and religious/philosophical resources of backstage activity. After showing that simple explanations that identify international relations, class position and discursive frames as key factors provide useful but incomplete leads into the “Americanization” of Buddhism at the hands of poets, I develop an explanation by merging insights from social movements scholarship with the field approach.

The first stage of the research in this chapter, then, is the identification of the relative weights of Buddhism, radical Catholicism, liberal Protestantism, and neopaganism as resources of backstage activity. For this, I consulted literary histories of the twentieth-century U.S. (Davidson 1989; Fredman 2005; French 1991; Gatta 2004; Lehman 1998; Munroe 2009; Perkins 1987; Skerl 2004; Smith 1995; Stein 1996), collections of interviews with twentieth-century U.S. poets (Bellamy 1984; Bly 1980; Ginsberg 2001; Kinnell 1978; Lowell 1988; Meltzer 2001; Snyder 1980), studies of Vietnam-era U.S. poetry (Bibby 1996; Chattarji 2001; Mersmann 1974), literary criticism (Altieri 2006; Breslin 1983; Brunner 2001; Cherkovski 1999; von Hallberg 1985), and anthologies of American Buddhist literature (Johnson and Paulenich 1991; Tonkinson 1995). When possible, I read the assertions in these works against the archival and biographical data I collected. I also used archival and biographical resources to fill the gaps in these works. From all these sources I derived a list of twentieth-century U.S.

poets with primary and secondary interests in these religions and philosophies. When possible, I identified the level of interest also in absolute terms (i.e. high or low) and traced it over time.

The second phase, the construction of an explanation of the diverging fortunes of Buddhism and other religious/philosophical resources of backstage activity, relies on a) the history of the poetry field that I developed earlier, b) the history of the modernization of Asian Buddhism, and c) a close examination of the lives of three men who emerge as the architects of the Buddhism/poetry/protest nexus from the secondary sources listed in the previous paragraph and my extensive study of the history of Buddhism in the U.S. These three men are the Japanese Zen master Shunryu Suzuki, the founding abbot of the first Zen Buddhist monastery outside Asia and the largest Zen Buddhist community in the U.S.; the Tibetan lama Chögyam Trungpa, who founded the first accredited Buddhist university in the U.S.; and the poet Allen Ginsberg, who had close ties to both Suzuki and Trungpa. The interactions among these three men, I argue, reveal the most fundamental dynamics of the appropriation of cultural resources in semi-autonomous intellectual fields. I conclude that the large-scale changes that the poetry field underwent after 1945, Asian religious personnel's cultural dispositions and lack of material resources relative to poets, and the course of evolution of poetry's field *problematic* (Bourdieu 1991) are all parts of the explanation. That is, an unlikely convergence of three vectors was necessary to turn Buddhism into an asset for the poets of the antiwar movement.

Since poets had little control over these disparate processes, the account I develop may seem to offer little to the study of intellectuals' politics in other times and places.

However, U.S. poets had room for maneuver in one area: Guru<sup>93</sup> choice. The Asian clergy that came to the U.S. in the postwar period had little economic or social capital, and they were in competition with one another for a limited attention space. Furthermore, their own cultural dispositions severely limited the attention space they were competing for in such a way that gave poets leverage over them. Poets like Allen Ginsberg could put their considerable social capital in gurus' service in an implicit exchange for their approval of the Buddhism/protest nexus, and prevent or subvert the development of a separate pool of resources in gurus' hands. As a result, they were able to have Buddhist masters who were either willing to tolerate their fusion of spirituality and politics or unable to prevent it.

And that was the distinguishing characteristic of the emerging “American Buddhism” vis-à-vis other discourses of *communitas* available to midcentury poets—none of the others had a group of experts with enough legitimacy to justify poets' appropriations to the lay public and dependent on the poets for their status. Liberal Protestantism and radical Catholicism did have resident experts in the U.S., of course, but these experts had their own resource bases and their legitimacy in the eyes of their target audience did not depend on what poets could do for them. French existentialism and neopaganism, on the other hand, did not have that critical mass of publicly visible specialists with incontestable authority in their area of expertise in the eyes of the lay public (table 5.1).

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<sup>93</sup> Throughout this paper, I use the term “guru” broadly – and therefore somewhat inaccurately – to denote all the specialists of Eastern religions and the “spiritual” movements that grew out of them in postwar North America. The relationship of a religious/spiritual practitioner to his/her “guru” is a personal one, a relationship of master and disciple. This difference distinguishes these “spiritual” movements from the most common North American forms of religious practice. The loss in terminological accuracy, I hope, is balanced by a gain in overall readability.

The evidence I present in this chapter comes from a single case study. But in the absence of much theorizing in a new area, theory making and not theory testing should be the immediate concern, and close analysis of one site is a good place to start. In this case, the analysis of the poetry/Buddhism nexus reveals that something as old and basic as resource mobilization theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977) has significant potential to enrich the sociology of intellectuals. In order for dissenting metropolitan intellectuals to wrest non-western cultures from non-western elites, it turns out, they need to have more resources at their disposal.

Table 5.1. Philosophical/religious resources of backstage activity in the poetry field after 1945.

	Resident and visible experts	Dependence of experts on poets
Existentialism	No	N/a
Neopaganism	No	N/a
<b>Buddhism</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Radical Catholicism	Yes	No
Liberal Protestantism	Yes	No

This is not to say that material resources are the only thing that matters—I will also argue below that neither poets nor gurus were fully aware of the conflict and that the cultural dispositions of the gurus were responsible for their dependence on certain material resources. Nor is this chapter an attempt to turn back the clock to 1977—resource mobilization is not the solution to all the problems of the sociological study of

cultural production. What all this does mean, as in the case of the previous chapter, is that a conversation between the sociology of intellectuals and social movements scholarship is long overdue.

## 5.2. The Research Problem

*Buddhism among Vietnam-era poets and its significance.* A surprisingly large number of the poets who were active in the Vietnam-era peace movement were also involved with an ongoing cultural innovation, the “Americanization” of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism. Table 5.2 shows that of the 12 poets who were most active in the antiwar movement (those in table 3.3 in chapter 3), 6 of them were involved in this process to some degree. Given that the number of Buddhists among the U.S. population was negligible at the time, this is quite remarkable.

Table 5.2. Buddhism and the poets of the Vietnam peace movement.

	Level of interest in Zen and/or Tibetan Buddhism
Robert Bly	High
Robert Duncan	None
Lawrence Ferlinghetti	Some
Allen Ginsberg	High
Galway Kinnell	Some
Denise Levertov	None
Robert Lowell	None
W. S. Merwin	Some

Adrienne Rich	None
Muriel Rukeyser	None
Gary Snyder	High
William Stafford	None

Recall from chapter 3 that this table gathers together poets who played leadership roles in the antiwar movement and those whose commitment was consistent over time. It includes, first of all, the five organizers of the nationwide antiwar poetry readings of 1969—Robert Bly, Allen Ginsberg, Galway Kinnell, Denise Levertov, and Adrienne Rich. Secondly, it includes Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Robert Lowell, and Muriel Rukeyser, whose participation in the movement were as consistent as the organizers’ according to my research on newspaper reports. Participation in highly reportable activities was not the only way in which poets could challenge the war, however. Thirdly, therefore, the table includes three poets whose political practices stand out in the historical and critical literature—Gary Snyder, Robert Duncan, W. S. Merwin, and William Stafford.

The multiplicity of the criteria I used in preparing this list does not have a direct impact on the findings. If the list is limited to the surest criterion, that is, organizing the nationwide poetry readings, the ratio of poets with interest in Buddhism is three out of five. One of the three poets I added in stage two and two of the four I added in stage three had some interest in Buddhism. Therefore poets with interest in Buddhism appear at every stage, and the contrast between a population with a negligible number of Buddhists and a group of intellectuals with significant interest in Buddhism defines each stage.

That this was not an accident becomes clear when one examines table 5.3. Table 5.3 lists all the poets of the postwar period whose public personae were tied up in any way with religious or philosophical movements according to the secondary sources listed in the introduction section of this chapter, excluding those with primary reputations in other fields and those whose involvement with these traditions began after the Vietnam period. Therefore it does not include John Cage, a musician who also wrote poetry, or Robert Kelly, who became interested in Buddhism in the 1980s. It also distinguishes between primary and secondary interest. Although some poets also had what could be termed tertiary interests, these were very few in number. To some extent, these are simplifications of a complex reality; the line between primary and secondary interest is fuzzy in practice and some of the poets in this list would deny the distinction. But discourse and practice may diverge, and even the most eclectic poets relied on some religious and philosophical sources more than they did on others in crafting their public personae. Finally, changes in primary or secondary interest that occurred after 1975 are also left out, so Michael McClure's involvement in Zen Buddhism, which began in the 1990s, does not appear here.

Buddhism has a surprising presence in table 5.3 as well. More poets were associated with Buddhism than other philosophical/religious discourses that poets could have used: 14 of the 30 poets in table 5.3 have a primary interest in Buddhism, while the same number is 6 for neopaganism in all its forms, 4 for Catholicism (radical or not), 3 for other forms of Christianity, and 2 for existentialism. Furthermore, of the 16 poets who do not have a primary interest in Buddhism, 7 have a secondary interest in it.

Table 5.3. U.S. poets and religious and philosophical traditions in the postwar period.

	Primary interest	Secondary interest
W. H. Auden <sup>94</sup>	Anglicanism	N/a
Amiri Baraka/Leroi Jones	Nation of Islam	Buddhism
Robert Bly	Buddhism	Neopaganism
Gregory Corso	Catholicism	N/a
Diane di Prima	Buddhism	Neopaganism
Robert Duncan	Neopaganism	N/a
T. S. Eliot	Anglicanism	Neopaganism
William Everson/Brother Antoninus	Catholicism	Buddhism
Lawrence Ferlinghetti	Existentialism	Buddhism/Hinduism
Allen Ginsberg	Buddhism	Neopaganism
H. D. [Hilda Doolittle]	Neopaganism	N/a
Lenore Kandel	Buddhism	Neopaganism
Bob Kaufman	Buddhism	N/a
Jack Kerouac	Catholicism	Buddhism
Galway Kinnell	Buddhism	N/a
Joanne Kyger	Buddhism	Neopaganism
Denise Levertov	Christianity (nondenominational)	Neopaganism
Robert Lowell	Catholicism	N/a

<sup>94</sup> Auden was born and raised in Britain, and initially came to fame there. But from 1939 to his death in 1973 he lived in New York, becoming a U.S. citizen in 1946.

Jackson Mac Low	Buddhism	N/a
Michael McClure	Existentialism	Neopaganism
W. S. Merwin	Buddhism	N/a
Harold Norse	Neopaganism	Buddhism/Hinduism
Charles Olson	Neopaganism	Buddhism <sup>95</sup>
Ezra Pound	Neopaganism	Buddhism/Hinduism
Kenneth Rexroth	Buddhism	Catholicism
Gary Snyder	Buddhism	Neopaganism
Jack Spicer	Neopaganism	N/a
Anne Waldman	Buddhism	N/a
Lew Welch	Buddhism	N/a
Philip Whalen	Buddhism	Neopaganism

Buddhism informed the action repertoire of the politically active poets of the Vietnam period who became involved in its “Americanization.” For instance, during the Stop the Draft Week of 1967, a group of protesters that included the poets Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen protested the war by doing Buddhist meditation on the railroad tracks leading to the Army Induction Center in Oakland, California. Earlier that year, Snyder had chanted Buddhist sutras in the San Francisco Human Be-In, an antiwar event aiming to join the hippie counterculture with the New Left, with fellow poet Allen Ginsberg after leading a Buddhist purification ritual of the event site.

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<sup>95</sup> Personal communication of the author with Diane di Prima, April 10, 2007.

But it was primarily as written word that Buddhism played its role. In an essay entitled “Buddhism and the Coming Revolution,” originally written in 1961 and revised several times over the 1960s, Snyder invoked Buddhist dogma to denounce the Vietnam War and other developments he saw as forming an organic totality with the war:

The national polities of the modern world maintain their existence by deliberately fostering craving and fear: monstrous protection rackets. The “free world” has become economically dependent on a fantastic stimulation of greed which cannot be fulfilled, sexual desire which cannot be satiated and hatred which has no outlet except against oneself, the persons one is supposed to love, or the revolutionary aspirations of pitiful, poverty-stricken marginal societies like Cuba or Vietnam. The conditions of the Cold War have turned all modern societies—Communist included—into vicious distorters of man’s true potential. They create populations of “preta”—hungry ghosts, with giant appetites and throats no bigger than needles. (Snyder 1995:177-178)

The antagonist in Snyder’s narrative is first and foremost a state of mind characterized by craving, fear, greed, and hatred—words which may carry no particular meaning for an outsider but which are, in the cultural universe Snyder inhabited, basic religious terms whose importance follows directly from his view of the cosmos. This view took as central the Buddhist notions of no-self (*anattā*), emptiness (*sūnyatā*), and interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*). According to the first of these, there is no fixed essence of human subjectivity and therefore humans are capable of unbounded self-transformation—therefore fear of the unknown is misplaced. The second extends this creative impermanence to inanimate beings, which leads to the denunciation of the attachment to them—since all things are constantly changing, the desire to conquer, tame, and use them is pointless. Therefore craving and greed are bound to lead to suffering. According to the third, all impermanent beings, living or not, depend on one another for

their well-being and so zero-sum views of economic and political life like the “us versus them” language of the cold war are fundamentally wrong and the hatred they produce of the other is counterproductive.

From Snyder’s Buddhist diagnosis followed a Buddhist prognosis:

The joyous and voluntary poverty of Buddhism becomes a positive force. The traditional harmlessness and refusal to take life in any form [in Buddhism] has nation-shaking implications. The practice of [Buddhist] meditation, for which one needs only “the ground beneath one’s feet,” wipes out mountains of junk being pumped into the mind by the mass media and supermarket universities. (*ibid.*, p. 178)

Snyder’s reading of Buddhist texts was just one among many possible interpretations—Buddhism has a staggering internal variety in terms of dogma, practice, and articulation with other social institutions as a result of its long history, immense geographical spread, and lack of a central overarching hierarchy (Coleman 2001; Fields 1992; Lopez 1998, 2004; Snodgrass 2003). Given the personal, social, and artistic differences Snyder had with the other two famous advocates of Buddhism in U.S. poetry, Robert Bly and Allen Ginsberg<sup>96</sup>, then, it would not have been very surprising if each had taken a different version of Buddhism from Asia. But their Buddhisms were remarkably similar—they were all based in the ontology I outlined above and they all emphasized meditation, traditionally only one of the practices leading to enlightenment in Asian

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<sup>96</sup> The social backgrounds of the three poets had subtle but important differences —Bly was the son of prosperous Norwegian American farmers in Minnesota, Ginsberg’s parents were lower-middle class Jews in urban New Jersey, and Gary Snyder came from a working-class family in the Pacific Northwest. Ginsberg and Snyder were literary allies from the moment they met and they were both part of the original antiacademic coalition, but their poetries had very different styles—Ginsberg was a verbose romantic while Snyder used as few words as possible to convey a calm, almost Teutonic sensibility. Bly, on the other hand, entered poetry in the antiacademic camp and frequently attacked Ginsberg in his journal, *The Fifties*, before they became friends in the 1960s.

Buddhism. In an interview that appeared in *Minnesota Daily* on March 28, 1969, for instance, Robert Bly suggested that the Vietnam War was a direct result of the U.S. failure to grasp the Buddhist lesson of interdependence:

Q: Do you believe in God?

A: In the last 10 years, I've learned most from the Buddhists. If you go to a Buddhist teacher and say "Do you believe in God?" he'll say, "Let's not use these long words, these words are too long!"

There is a skin between our selves and our inner being. Freud said there's a sea inside of us and inside that sea is your inner life, your spiritual life, your sexual desires. Then there's the outer world made of streetcars and everything.

These two worlds can't rub against each other, it's too painful. So you develop a skin, just like a cow develops a hide—you wouldn't want her guts to rub against a barn!

In America this skin gets very thick. You spend the first 20 years of your life making this skin thicker. The problem is to get through the skin.

Q: Why is it so important to get inside the skin?

A: The odd thing is that not only inside yourself is your spiritual life and your sensual desires but also other people. That's what's mysterious! We cannot see the Vietnamese because we can't see anything inside ourselves. The Vietnamese are inside there in some mysterious way.

And here is Bly's view of meditation's relationship to war:

Human beings all believe that they have one brain and that it can unify their life. This is the primary error. In evolution, when we changed from a fish to a mammal we changed the body, altered it, but in the brain, that did not happen. What happened was addition. The reptile brain is absolutely intact, at the base of the skull. (...) Then when we became a mammal, the huge mammal brain was folded around the reptile brain. (...) Now these two brains have separate nervous organizations. In late mammal times, the third brain was added. Some people apparently get trapped in one of the brains: a cold war militarist may be trapped in the reptile brain. (...) I suspect that meditation is a way to transfer energy from the reptile brain to the mammal brain, then from the mammal brain to the new brain (Bly 1980:41-43).

As for Allen Ginsberg, here is an example of how the Buddhist notion of no-self informed his literary/political activity:

Four days after the Kennedy assassination, Allen was interviewed by Leland S. Meyerzova of *The Burning Bush*, a nationally distributed Jewish periodical. Kennedy had been a strong supporter of the civil rights movement, and the magazine was interested in Allen's views on the relationship between Jews and blacks, as well as the relationship between American and Israeli Jews. Allen, still agitated by Kennedy's death and the possibility of an anti-Communist backlash that would undermine his hopes for world brotherhood, issued a pointed, strongly worded statement that was brutal in its honesty. His own family, which considered itself liberal, did not have any Negro friends and would have been upset if any of their daughters married a Negro or non-Jew, Allen said (...) "In other words, Jewish race consciousness is built upon the same stuff that killed President Kennedy, to the extent that it excludes other human images as clan to its family consciousness." (...) "Astonishing mirror image resemblance between Nazi theory of racial superiority and Jewish hang-up as chosen race. They didn't desire it—any of them. Any fixed static categorized image of the Self is a big goof." (Schumacher 1992:402-403)

And here is a Ginsberg poem that "explains" why he meditates, with many references to literary/political events from contemporary U.S. and elsewhere:

I sit<sup>97</sup> because the Dadaists screamed on Mirror Street  
I sit because the Surrealists ate angry pillows  
I sit because the Imagists breathed calmly in Rutherford and Manhattan  
I sit because 2400 years  
I sit in America because Buddha saw a Corpse in Lumbini  
I sit because the Yippies whooped up Chicago's teargas skies once  
I sit because No because  
I sit because I was unable to trace the Unborn back to the womb  
I sit because it's easy  
I sit because I get angry if I don't  
I sit because they told me to  
I sit because I read about it in the Funny Papers  
I sit because I had a vision also dropped LSD  
I sit because I don't know what else to do like Peter Orlovsky

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<sup>97</sup> In American Buddhist parlance of the time, sitting meant doing sitting meditation.

I sit because after Lunacharsky got fired and Stalin gave Zhdanov a special tennis  
court I became a rootless cosmopolitan  
I sit inside the shell of the old Me  
I sit for world revolution  
(Allen Ginsberg, "Why I Meditate")

The notions of no-self, emptiness, and interdependence point to a register of experience akin to the Lacanian real with its lack of social differentiation, what Turner (1969, 1974) calls *communitas*. In *communitas*, distinctions crucial to the maintenance of social structure – high and low, rich and poor, male and female, self and other, in-group and out-group, means and ends – are suspended, challenged, and sometimes altered. Turner explicitly refers to postwar U.S. poets and their interest in Buddhism as a latter-day manifestation of *communitas* (1969:112-113).

*Communitas* is significant for two reasons. First, the challenge it poses to cultural fundamentals may bring about drastic social change. All great revolutionary upheavals are episodes of *communitas* – French revolution with its ideal of universal brotherhood, Russian revolution with its denial of all class distinctions, African revolutions with their rejection of the colonial rule of difference. Second, even when it is not strong enough to produce change, it increases the solidarity of dominated actors, preserving their ability to act together when circumstances are more favorable. For these two reasons, there is a close relationship between backstage literary/political activity and *communitas*.

*Communitas* has two inherent weaknesses, however. First, the lack of differentiation it ushers undermines order of any kind, so revolutionary groups leave *communitas* as soon as they acquire some sort of power. Second, since *communitas* denies distinctions like self and other that make language possible, it can only be approached by way of metaphor and analogy. As a result, it is impossible to build a

thorough political program based on it. To the extent that backstage activity is related to *communitas*, then, its specific forms cannot but eventually lose their initial power—and that confirms the theorization of backstage activity in the previous chapter.

*The longer history of Buddhism in the U.S.* *Communitas* refers to a spontaneous eruption of natural energies, but the sheer variety of Buddhism means that its transformation into an outlet of *communitas* in the U.S. was an eminently historical process. White Americans' encounter with Buddhism goes back to the mid-nineteenth century (Fields 1992; Snodgrass 2003; Verhoeven 1997) and writers were part of this history from its beginning (Kern 1996; Lopez 1995, 1998; Morgan 2004; Munroe 2009; Prothero 1996). The politics of this encounter was, however, rather ambiguous prior to the Vietnam period: Victorian middle-class enthusiasts of Buddhism found in it the elements of a liberal political culture (Prothero 1996; Tweed 1992); the poet Ezra Pound used his knowledge of Buddhism to advance fascism; avant-garde literary movements of the San Francisco Bay Area fused it with anarchism in the 1930s and 40s (Davidson 1989; French 1991; Schwartz 1998; Smith 1995); and upper-class women who became advocates of Buddhism saw it as a strictly personal path to salvation (Stirling 2006). Focusing on different aspects of an already diverse collection of texts and practices, in short, U.S. sympathizers produced strikingly different Buddhisms (Gregory 2001; Prebish 1999; Seager 1999).

After 1945, several factors accelerated the diffusion of Buddhism into middle-class U.S. culture. The defeat of Japan opened it to U.S. citizens, some of whom started receiving Zen Buddhist training there. Conversely, Japanese Zen Buddhist clergy started

moving stateside to make up for the ground they had lost to Shinto since the Meiji Restoration (Bechert and Gombrich 1984; Collcutt 1986; Ketelaar 1990; Sharf 1995). The partial decommodification of youth following the postwar education boom increased the number of visitors to South and East Asia, where U.S. travelers in search of authentic wisdom found enough fragments to allow the imagination of a Buddhist golden age. In 1959, the Chinese invasion of Tibet forced the Buddhist clergy who ruled that country to seek refuge and students in Western Europe and North America. Finally, the democratization of immigration to the U.S. in 1965 allowed a significant number of Asian religious personnel to try their luck in the emerging “spiritual marketplace” (Roof 1999).

At first, postwar appropriations of Buddhism seemed to continue along lines established earlier. Apolitical upper-class women were still a dominant feature of the American Buddhist landscape, for instance, and it was the young decommodified artists who felt out of place in Japanese Zen monasteries. As late as 1958, one of these young artists wrote to Gary Snyder that Zen monasteries were “catering to [American] society gals” and “old biddies” as much as to “odd balls” like himself:

One tall miss Allen is in your Rinko-in spot, with the Butsudan Butsuzo out and picture postcards in, yet she sits, and also studies shimai at the same No stage and is an expensive darling lalapping around. Lots of girlish grandmothers around as always. Yampo<sup>98</sup> is having a maid when he sets up with frau Takeda—wonder if respectability is prerequisite to *zazen*. How’d I get onto all this jabber?<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Philip Yampolsky, another young Bohemian who was receiving Zen training in the same monastery as Petersen and Snyder.

<sup>99</sup> Will Petersen letter to Gary Snyder, June 11, 1958. Gary Snyder papers.

With the rise of Beat writers and poets to fame in the late 1950s, the balance of power in “American Buddhism” shifted toward young artists like Petersen and Snyder. The scandal-born success of Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl and Other Poems*, described in detail in the previous chapter, gave his close friend Jack Kerouac the opportunity to publish two novels that became instant hits, *On the Road* and *Dharma Bums*. Ginsberg’s poems in *Howl* frequently made surface references to Buddhism, but it was *Dharma Bums* that established “Beat” – that is, the state of being beat down by “the system” but also beatific like free mystics – and Zen as one and the same thing in U.S. public discourse. *Dharma Bums* chronicled Kerouac’s travels and exploits with Gary Snyder in and around San Francisco just before Snyder, whom it depicts as already quite knowledgeable about Zen, left for Japan to receive formal Zen training. Its portrayal of Snyder as a wild, eccentric, adventurous, sexually attractive, but also wise and enlightened man was the first in a flurry of writings that celebrated unconditional freedom, rejected the “fifties way of life,” and saw culture, including the realm of “spirituality,” to be the first site of resistance. These writings were to have a lasting impact on the young activists of the New Left in the 1960s (Anderson 1996; Breines 1989; Chalmers 1996; Ellwood 1994; Gitlin 1993; Jamison and Eyerman 1994).

With *Howl*, *On the Road*, and *Dharma Bums*, the Beats were transformed from a fringe literary movement to a major media phenomenon and their Buddhism received much attention—in 1958, for instance, the daily *New York Post* had a 12-installment series about the Beat Generation, an unheard-of attention to a literary group in the newspaper’s history, and one of the installments was specifically about “Beat Buddhism.” The “old biddies” and “society gals” in Petersen’s narrative slowly lost

control of “American Buddhism,” which has been a rather liberal cultural milieu since then (Coleman 2001; Prebish 1999; Queen 2000; Tipton 1982).

*Opponents of the Buddhism/poetry nexus.* The use of Buddhist themes and imagery in the arts was not without its opponents in the West. Before 1945, Theodor Adorno warned Western intellectuals against Zen Buddhism, whose emphasis on direct experience and devaluation of scripture he saw as anti-intellectualism among intellectuals, and postwar U.S. writers like Arthur Koestler and Norman Podhoretz took him seriously. Within poetry, however, these voices were weak, owing to modernist poets’ preoccupation with balancing intellection, Adorno’s chief concern, with imagination, and they equated Buddhism with the imagination. During the Vietnam period, U.S. poets who felt that imagination was beginning to trump the intellect occasionally challenged their peers’ interest in things Asian in the name of the fundamental values of poetry, as Cid Corman did in the following excerpt from a 1958 letter to Gary Snyder:

I think No drama is the best thing that Japan has to offer past or present, tho [*sic*] naturally performances vary, etc. I am not at all convinced that its power has any vital connection with Zen (Renondeau’s book puts very little connection on it): I think Buddhism in Japan came with aristocratic ties and there is that, a sense, if you like, of naked elegance. The spirit of it? Why, man, the spirit of it is art, theatre, or, in other words, care and the communication of it, of life caring for life. (I’m dead set against any sectarian labels or any religious business—which doesn’t mean I won’t admit what obviously exists, but it does mean I won’t encourage it. Don’t mistake me. This is not challenging individual belief or spiritual feeling, not at all, but I do stand against any organization of what seems to me creatively must be kept individual.)<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Cid Corman letter to Gary Snyder, August 4, 1958. Gary Snyder papers.

But even though poets like Corman had a powerful argument on their side – namely, that Buddhism was unpoetic, that it could compromise poets’ autonomy – their voices did not cohere into a full-blown agenda. This was at least partly because these poets were themselves not fully convinced that the threat Buddhism posed was worth much attention at the moment. For example, the poet, publisher, and essayist Lawrence Ferlinghetti was concerned that his close friend and countercultural icon Allen Ginsberg’s Buddhist practice led to quietism and complicity among younger poets<sup>101</sup>. But he also had some interest in eastern religions, and once described his political vision as “Buddhist socialism” (Meltzer 2001:76-77). Other poets of similar stature usually kept their misgivings about Buddhism to themselves: Robert Lowell, the giant of postwar poetry, often belittled the anti-intellectual tendencies of his contemporaries, but he never aimed at Buddhism in his many interviews or essays. Robert Duncan, whose rivalry with Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg was well known, chose to express his concerns about Buddhism only to close friends in face-to-face interaction<sup>102</sup>. That these people could be vicious in their attacks when they decided to attack something or somebody shows that, although they were concerned about this issue, they saw no urgent need to pursue it. Buddhism was, in their eyes, a potential threat to poetry, but not an actual one.

This is probably because they saw the actual benefits of the encounter with Buddhism to exceed its rather nebulous costs. During the 1950s and 60s, it was clear that the audience of poetry was increasing without a devaluation of its position in the artistic and cultural hierarchy. Recall from chapters 2 and 3 that San Francisco and New York saw a boom in poetry production after 1945 due to new technologies like the mimeograph

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<sup>101</sup> Interview with Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *Virginia Country*, September/October 1984, p.95. Lawrence Ferlinghetti papers.

<sup>102</sup> Personal communication of the author with poet Diane di Prima, April 2, 2007.

machine and paperback publishing, and for reasons I will investigate below, many of the young, avant-garde poets who took advantage of these developments were interested in Buddhism. Following the publication of *Dharma Bums* and *Howl*, these young poets became liaisons between their field poetry and U.S. youth, who were becoming reliable consumers of poetry after the postwar college boom.

The deflation of the cultural value of poetry following such democratization was probably a matter of time, but this end result was repeatedly deferred in the 1960s and 70s. U.S. poetry managed to protect its experimental edge at a time of political upheaval, and the institutionalization of the poetry-Buddhism nexus in places like Naropa Institute, the first accredited Buddhist university in the U.S., prevented the collapse of the encounter under its own weight. Furthermore, Buddhism preserved its status in the emerging field of spirituality as a result of its firstcomer status:

What you have in the 70s is all these spinoff groups which have institutionalized the revolution in consciousness that happened in the 60s. In the first round it was the popularity of people like Krishnamurti who is a genuine seer and who rejected the mantle of the “chosen one” which had been placed on him at an early age. He didn’t want to play the role. Then you had the early institutions like the [San Francisco] Zen Center which is also genuine. But very quickly you get into the Gurdjieff [*sic*] groups, Arica, and EST—which is a third or fourth generation spinoff when it reaches the middle-class—and get further and further away from true mysticism, the true visionary experience, the true mystical states.<sup>103</sup>

*Other discourses of communitas.* Recall from table 5.3 shows that, prior to the Vietnam period, at least three more philosophical or religious discourses had a significant presence in the cultural universe of poetic communitas—existentialism, neopaganism, and radical Catholicism.

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<sup>103</sup> “Ferlinghetti: An Interview.” *City Miner*, Summer 1976. Lawrence Ferlinghetti papers.

The secular existentialism of Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre emerged as a prestigious intellectual tradition from World War II. Sartre, the most visible of its advocates, was *the* intellectual hero of his generation, and he owed his fame partly to his courageous political activity. After 1945, he made clear that his philosophical activity was not separate from his politics. In a number of essays he argued that existentialism was first and foremost an instrument of individual and social liberation from the authoritarian tendencies inherent in modernity. The modern individual started from a position of isolation, Sartre argued, but he/she was capable of building genuine ties of communion with others. In this, he followed the Martin Buber, whose formulation of personal I-Thou relationships as a necessary corrective to modernity's impersonal I-It transactions inspired Turner's formulation of *communitas* (Turner 1969:132).

American literary circles, especially the modernists who formed the core of various literary fields including poetry, were proudly internationalist, so these ideas became household items in the postwar period<sup>104</sup>. On February 18, 1956, for instance, *The Nation* published an article by Albert Levi that discussed existentialism. Levi wrote that loss of religious faith had undermined confidence in cosmic values, making existentialism's isolated individual the last stand of a desperate humanism. Also, he argued, the postwar emergence of mass culture as the greatest threat to authentic selfhood gave the existentialist ideal of self-determination "a holiness hitherto accorded only to prayer"—even though Sartre's existentialism was secular, it competed for the religious attention space.

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<sup>104</sup> Personal communication of the author with poet Ron Loewinsohn, March 28, 2007.

In his private notebooks, the poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti took extensive notes on this article, and asked:

Why should Existentialism seem anti-poetic in nature to so many people & poets? Mainly, perhaps, because they are really ignorant of existential bases, or at least they have almost a total misconception of Existentialism?<sup>105</sup>

Ferlinghetti led an existentialist minority within the antiacademic camp. For other antiacademics, existentialism was a worthy rival to their own brand of backstage activity. A letter from Philip Whalen, one of the leading advocates of Zen Buddhism, to Gary Snyder shows the rivalry between Buddhism and existentialism:

Big ego-building session Friday night. Thos. Parkinson had me to dinner & then had his writing class in after dinner to lionize me a little & I roared a little & read a couple poems, but to what effect I couldn't tell. But the kids were interested & a few did listen & a few are not entirely square (...) 6 or 7 of the liveliest are trying to equate Zen & Existentialism – they being sure there is really nothing left but Existentialism, or the Logical Positivism none of them approve. One said, “You *have* to be either an Existentialist or a Neo Conservative,” & I tried to explain there were a couple hundred other persuasions in our culture—but I doubt I convinced anybody.<sup>106</sup>

In an earlier letter, Whalen had scolded Snyder for letting existentialism creep into his thoughts:

Letter from Allen [Ginsberg] in Alaska all about travel in environs of Seattle, Tacoma, semi-climb semicomma on Mt Rainier, the real dope of the midnight sun &c. Reading the lives of S. Francis, S. Philip Neri and S. Theresa, he has, like you, been worried in the mind about religion vs. sexual continence &c. Now goddamit, two of you on my hands with this damned Manichee twaddle is too

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<sup>105</sup> Journal entry, Lawrence Ferlinghetti papers. Box 26, folder 6.

<sup>106</sup> Philip Whalen letter to Gary Snyder, January 6, 1957. Gary Snyder papers. Emphasis in the original.

much. Pretty soon you'll be coming on about "metaphysical guilt," "angst," and the whole Barthian line<sup>107</sup> right in the middle of the *Partisan Review*.<sup>108</sup>

Why did Whalen dislike existentialism? The remainder of this letter leads me to believe that this is because he saw no kernel of *communitas* in it but a reinforcement of the dominant traditions of Western thought:

I wrote [to Ginsberg] and I repeat, at less length, to you: Don't it depend on your view of what a man is? I mean, are you going to buy the Judaeo-xtian-cum-platonist view of the split man; the bright spirit in dull gross filthy clay routine, with all its implications about sex—that it is a degradation of the soul via the agency of the body (which is a sin) that can only be wiped out by confession, repentance and baptism & the grace of Christ & the Holy Ghost and everybody? Or is the nature of man something else, to-wit, the product of his own karma and of his own mind, with the possibility of busting into something else?

Whalen's understanding of existentialism was flawed—his defense of the whole person as opposed to the "Judaeo-xtian-cum-platonist" mind/body split did not necessitate a rejection of existentialism; nor was the Buddhist notion of *karma* incompatible, at least in the way he understood it, with existentialism. But Whalen was *the* theoretical mind of the antiacademic camp, so his attack on existentialism convinced all his friends except Ferlinghetti, who did not have to rely on Whalen's interpretation as he spoke French fluently and had a Ph.D. from the Sorbonne. From this point on, no more mention of existentialist ideas appears in Snyder's diaries or in the correspondence between Snyder and Whalen. Ginsberg, who tended to acquire his knowledge at least as much from his friends as from books and first-hand experience, followed suit.

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<sup>107</sup> Karl Barth (1886-1968) was a major existentialist philosopher and theologian. "Metaphysical guilt" and "angst" are existentialist terms.

<sup>108</sup> Philip Whalen letter to Gary Snyder, August 4, 1956. Gary Snyder papers.

The story of neopaganism is directly tied up with the emergence of the poetry field as a semi-autonomous entity in the 1910s. Ezra Pound, one of the field's founders, conceived of poetry as a mystery cult with sole access to an esoteric knowledge (Fredman 2005:194, Tryphonopoulos 1992), distinguishing and elevating it over the mundane world of economic and political power. He began the construction of a "neo-pagan piety that is polytheistic, fleshly, erotic and ecstatic rather than a Christian or Jewish piety that is monotheistic, otherworldly, ascetic and revealed" (Surette and Tryphonopoulos 1996:xvii). To underscore the poetic nature of this knowledge, he invented a tradition of "illuminated poets" running from Ovid and Apuleius to himself via the troubadours of Provence and Dante.

Interest in the poetic/religious tradition Pound invented flourished among modernist poets as Pound became a central figure of the U.S. literary canon. As a result, a number of midcentury U.S. poets followed Pound's example and researched heterodox European religions like the Orphic and Pythagorean cults of ancient Greece, pagan and Christian Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Catharism, alchemy, Kabbalah, Hermeticism, and Rosicrucianism and movements like Swedenborgianism and Theosophy that attempted to revive these traditions (Fredman 2005:196). From the 1930s on, the many varieties of American Indian religion, all of them refracted through the imagination of U.S. poets, joined this list.

Poets cast these religions as manifestations of *communitas* regardless of their actual histories. Consider, for instance, the following statement poet David Wagoner made in a 1972 interview:

I'm deeply interested in the culture of the American Indian, particularly in the wisdom he used in dealing with his surroundings, in his profound understanding of the human psyche as evidenced by his art, rituals, and mythology. I feel we badly need to know what he knew; the often-ridiculed idea of the Noble Savage isn't as ridiculous as it once seemed, even a short time ago, though of course it needs some revision. The Indian's whole drive was toward mastering his life instead of presuming mastery over *his environment in which he saw himself literally as a member, an organic part of an immense brotherhood among all living and dead matter, among all physical and spiritual phenomena* (quoted in Bellamy 1984:270, emphasis mine).

However, Wagoner's statement also betrays a feeling of lack of mastery, a difficulty in asserting the legitimacy of his knowledge of American Indian history with his admission that he does not know what "the Indian" knew. This lack of knowledge led Wagoner to exercising caution, while others simply assumed that their lack of knowledge indicated a lack of an object to know. In an interview conducted over 1969 and 1970, for instance, Gary Snyder said that his early interest in American Indian culture died away as he failed to find authoritative sources confirming its richness. As a result, Snyder started his study of Buddhism, for which he could rely on a massive scholarship, Western and Eastern:

Doug Flaherty: When you began writing poetry, what was it that made you turn to Oriental philosophy instead of sticking to the American Indian legends of your own environment?

Snyder: For one thing, I don't think that I understood the richness and complexity of traditional primitive cultures. For another thing, traditional Hinduism and Buddhism have added a great deal onto basic shamanistic and primitive ritualistic ceremonial practices and life styles. That is a great value. There is nothing in primitive cultures that is at all equivalent to Mahayana philosophy or logic. There is a science and true sophistication of certain states of mind and power that can come through shamanism but the shaman himself doesn't understand the power. Buddhism and yoga have been gradually emerging as a true science of the mind (Snyder 1980:15).

Looking back, Snyder found that his decision was based on faulty premises:

The Buddhist and Hindu traditions, although they specialized in and progressed greatly in the realms of philosophy, yoga, and extraordinary meditative techniques, also lost something which the primitives did have, and that was a total integrated life style. (...) Certain primitive cultures that are functioning on a high level actually amount to what would be considered *a spiritual training path in which everyone in the culture is involved and there are no separations between the priest and layman or between the men who become enlightened and those who can't*. What we need to do now is to take the great intellectual achievement of the Mahayana Buddhists and bring it back to a community style of life which is not necessarily monastic (Snyder 1980: 15-16, emphasis mine).

By the time of this interview, however, he had accumulated an immense knowledge of Zen Buddhism in Japan, and this was fateful—the war in Vietnam was going at full speed, the Republicans had captured the presidency, and there was not enough time to do as thorough a study of American Indian culture as he would like. Through the end of the war, his backstage activity relied more on Buddhism than anything else. Whether similar dynamics played out in other poets' decisions is hard to know, but table 5.4, which lists all poets associated with neopaganism in the secondary sources listed in the introduction section of this chapter, shows that Buddhism overshadowed neopaganism in the 1960s and 1970s: Of the five poets in the table alive in 1975 – those whose names are in bold – three had a primary interest in Buddhism.

Table 5.4. Neopaganism in the poetry field.

	Primary interest	Secondary interest
Ezra Pound (1885-1972)	Neopaganism (European)	Buddhism/Hinduism
H.D. (Hilda Doolittle)	Neopaganism (European)	N/a

(1886-1961)		
T. S. Eliot (1888-1965)	Christianity (Anglican)	Neopaganism
Charles Olson (1910-1970)	Neopaganism (European and American)	Buddhism
<b>Harold Norse (1916-2009)</b>	<b>Neopaganism (European)</b>	<b>Buddhism/Hinduism</b>
<b>Robert Duncan (1919-1988)</b>	<b>Neopaganism (European)</b>	<b>N/a</b>
Jack Spicer (1925-1965)	Neopaganism (European)	N/a
<b>Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997)</b>	<b>Buddhism</b>	<b>Neopaganism (European)</b>
<b>Gary Snyder (1930-)</b>	<b>Buddhism</b>	<b>Neopaganism (American)</b>
<b>Diane di Prima (1934-)</b>	<b>Buddhism</b>	<b>Neopaganism (European)</b>

The radical Catholicism associated with the journal *Catholic Worker* was the third resource available to postwar poets. In the 1930s and 40s, it had become a powerful expression of U.S. pacifism (Farrell 1997; Hellman 1981; Klejment and Roberts 1996; McNeal 1992; Roberts 1984). Californian poets Kenneth Rexroth and William Everton, who laid the groundwork for the Beat and San Francisco Renaissance movements of the 1950s, were converts to radical Catholicism; Robert Lowell was an East Coast sympathizer. Radical Catholic ideas underlay Everton and Lowell's conscientious

objection to U.S. participation in World War II and Rexroth's pacifist masterpiece, *The Phoenix and the Tortoise* (1944).

Radical Catholicism was also a gesture toward *communitas*. Dorothy Day, the editor of *Catholic Worker*, wrote that her solidarity with workers and the poor followed from and reinforced her belief in "the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ whereby we are members of one another"<sup>109</sup>—that is, radical Catholicism denied the self-other distinction. It also denied the means-ends dichotomy: Peter Maurin, a leading contributor to the *Worker*, called for "pure means," that is, means to effect social change that "embody as far as possible the ends which are sought"<sup>110</sup>.

But as a discourse among dissident poets, radical Catholicism declined from the 1950s to the 1970s. Table 5.5 shows all twentieth-century U.S. poets whose literary/political personae were shaped by Catholicism according to the secondary sources listed in the introduction section of this chapter. The first significant finding here is that converts occur earlier, showing that the organic relationship between widespread discourses based in Catholicism and the values of the poetry field is weakening. Second, among the converts, two of the three have declining association with Catholicism, showing the difficulties involved in maintaining the poetry/Catholicism nexus: Robert Lowell left the church and William Everson left the order he was a lay brother in. Third, two of the three of the converts also became interested in Buddhism later in life. Lastly, among those who were born into Catholicism, two of the four are known to also be part of the Buddhism/poetry nexus. Overall, four of the seven developed some interest in Buddhism as their careers advanced.

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<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Farrell (1997:24).

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Farrell (1997:26).

Table 5.5. Leading Catholic poets of the postwar period.

	Convert?	Declining association with Catholicism?	Later interest in Buddhism?
Kenneth Rexroth (1905-1982)	Yes	No	Yes
William Everson/Brother Antoninus (1912-1994)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Robert Lowell (1917-1977)	Yes	Yes	No
Lawrence Ferlinghetti (1919-)	No	Yes	Yes
Jack Kerouac (1922-1969)	No	No	Yes
Philip Lamantia (1927-2005)	No	No	No
Gregory Corso (1930-2001)	No	No	No

### 5.3. Opportunity, Class, Discourse: Reviewing Possible Explanations of the Buddhism Nexus

To summarize the previous section: A certain interpretation of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism emerged as the poetic response to the Vietnam War from a multiplicity of religious and philosophical resources, all of which functioned as pointers to *communitas*. This interpretation was not the only one available to U.S. advocates of Buddhism—the longer history of Buddhism in the U.S. reveals a sheer multivocality. But in the postwar period, right-wing and apolitical sympathizers of Buddhism in the U.S. lost ground to the anarchic version advocated by artists and writers of all kinds, especially poets of the antiacademic camp.

How did all this happen? Simple explanations that focus on international relations, poets' class backgrounds, and discursive frames seem to have great promise. However, they leave out more than they explain, underscoring the need to develop a richer story.

*International relations and cultural opportunity.* From the international relations perspective, it is understandable that U.S. dissidents would take an interest in the religion of the country that their government was waging a war in. The puppet governments of South Vietnam persecuted not just Vietcong sympathizers but also the Buddhists of the country.

This perspective is not necessarily alien to sociology. Scholars who advance the concept of cultural opportunity structure (Ferree 2002; Halgrimsdottir and Benoit 2007; King 2003; Koopmans and Statham 1999) would point out that U.S. writers have had a longstanding fascination with eastern religions, but it took a U.S.-prosecuted war in a Buddhist country to make it politically significant. The increasing commercialization and depoliticization of "American Buddhism" after 1980 corroborates this view (Coleman 2001; Urban 2000; York 2001).

There are two problems with this view, however: First, it says nothing about the long history of the Buddhist encounter among U.S. intellectuals. Second, and more importantly, it does not explain why the politicization of Buddhist discourse in the U.S. happened primarily at the hands of poets and not other kinds of intellectuals. Therefore, it also doesn't account for the full potency of this discourse: Buddhism was important as an element of protest at least partially because of its long history of association with poets,

who were, as a group, at the apex of their political effectiveness during the Vietnam period as a result of their diversely competitive institutional setup.

*Class.* There is a proven link between class and politicization from the last chapter, so class-bound theories of intellectuals provide a logical starting point for the analysis of the Buddhism/poetry nexus. Table 5. 6 presents the class backgrounds of all the poets in table 5.3 with a primary interest in Buddhism. Poets whose family belonged to the working class were marked as having low economic capital; those whose parents were in low-level white collar occupations were marked as having low-medium economic capital; sons and daughters of the middle class – e.g. college professors – were marked as having medium economic capital. None of those mentioned belonged to wealthier strata. In contrast, some had a family history of higher education in respectable institutions and they were marked as having high educational credentials, but those are few in number (see appendix 1 for details on individual poets). The picture that emerges shows clearly that the postwar construction of the poetry/Buddhism nexus was a predominantly lower-class affair.

Table 5.6. Social class and the leading U.S. poets of the Buddhism nexus.

	Economic capital, as indicated by father's occupation	Family's educational credentials	Family history of left-wing politics
Robert Bly	Medium	Low	Yes
Diane di Prima	Low	Low	Yes

Lawrence Ferlinghetti	Medium	High	No
Allen Ginsberg	Low-medium	Medium	Yes
Lenore Kandel	Low-medium	Medium	No
Bob Kaufman	Low	Low	Yes
Jack Kerouac	Low	Low	No
Galway Kinnell	Low	Low	Yes
Joanne Kyger	Medium	Medium	No
Jackson Mac Low	Low	Low	No
W. S. Merwin	Low-medium	Low	Yes
Kenneth Rexroth	Low	High	No
Gary Snyder	Low	Low	Yes
Anne Waldman	Medium	High	No
Lew Welch	Low	Low	No
Philip Whalen	Low	Low	Yes

But there are two problems here. First, like the international relations perspective, the class-bound view cannot explain why it was poets who led the process. Second, it is not clear why lower-class people from politically engaged families would take an interest in this foreign religion, since the previous generation that conducted the cultural transfer consisted mostly of people with aristocratic dispositions and right-wing politics. As these poets were growing up, the primary advocate of Buddhism in the U.S. was D. T. Suzuki, the Japanese scholar whose support for Japanese fascism is well known (Harootunian

2009; Sharf 1995). Second in rank to Suzuki were Ruth Fuller-Sasaki and Nancy Wilson Ross, two upper-class women who emphasized the strictly personal aspects of Buddhism. They also faced the example of Ezra Pound, whose wartime support for Mussolini and anti-Semitism were sources of embarrassment. Given all this, perhaps Buddhism should have been the last place for these poets to look for a progressive worldview.

*Discursive frames.* Recent scholarship on U.S. poets states that they challenged the Vietnam War primarily in the name of a left-libertarian version of American individualism (Farrell 1997; Smith 1995), supporting extant scholarship on the antiwar movement (Cavallo 1999; DeBenedetti and Chatfield 1990; Rossinow 1998). “The individual” seems to have been the nodal point (Laclau and Mouffe 2000) that cohered the various constituencies of the movement, the primary frame (Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994) they used against the Johnson and Nixon governments. From this perspective, Buddhism must have been important insofar as it could be used to highlight the sacred value of the individual.

As Bellah et al. (1996) note, however, the place of individualism in U.S. dissent cannot be taken for granted in the presence of other established traditions such as civic and biblical republicanism. In support of this view, my content analysis reveals that individualism was but one of the resources that antiwar poets relied on, and their discourse on Buddhism has a strong communitarian streak as well. Consider, for instance, the following exchange between Buddhist poet Gary Snyder and an interviewer:

Geneson: Some people would say to a young poet, “Poetry is self-expression. Sit down and write what you can whenever you can. Would you say that?”

Snyder: No, I wouldn't say that. I don't think that's true. I think that poetry is a social and traditional art that is linked to its past and particularly its language (...) And that the expression of self, although it's a nice kind of energy to start with, would not make any expression of poetry *per se*. (...) A great poet does not express his or her self, he expresses all of our selves. And to express all of ourselves you have to go beyond your own self. Like Dogen, the Zen master, said, "We study the self to forget the self. And when you forget the self, you become one with all things." And that's why poetry's not self-expression in those small self terms (Snyder 1980:65).

#### **5.4. Toward an Explanation**

Summarizing previous sections, answering the following questions is necessary: First, why did U.S. poetry have this close relationship with Buddhism? Second, why did Buddhism become the exclusive property of lower-class leftist poets in the post-1945 period in spite of its past history? And third, why were Asian clergy unable to curb the politicization of their discourse at the hands of the U.S. poets who became their students in the 1960s and 70s? Now I address these questions separately.

*U.S. poetry and Buddhism.* The convergence of a certain interpretation of Buddhist concepts and themes with U.S. poetry is a contingent by-product of the processes that shaped the poetry field's autonomy in the twentieth century.

Following Bourdieu, the autonomization of poetry involves the separation of poetry's rules of evaluation from the logics of the market and the state. But because poetry is a linguistic art form, it also means the delineation of a niche for the kind of knowledge only poets can produce. During the course of autonomization, poets attempt to separate poetic knowledge from other kinds – scientific, religious, and other literary.

This is an institutional process with identifiable actors: Recall, from chapter 2 and 3, that U.S. poetry was produced mainly in separate poetry journals from 1910 on (Anderson and Kinzie 1978; McMillan 2005). This forced poets, especially those who edited poetry journals, to seriously ask what, after all, poetry is. Poetry journals increased the tempo of production and gave poets freedom from addressing public morality in an accessible style, leading to a proliferation of poetic styles and content in a short amount of time. This resulted in increased reflexivity with regard to the “essence” of poetry. From a sociological perspective, from this point on there is no essence of poetry and the meaning of words like “poetry” and “poetic” is contested—after modernism, the production of poetry and the production of poems are two different things and the second relies on the first (Harrington 2002). However, the admission of this truth would destroy the very fabric of the field, so the lack of an inherent essence of “the poetic” leads to stronger attempts to create such an essence while calling this creation discovery.

One historical way to do this was to claim that poetry “specializes” in questioning rules of logic, grammar and syntax in order to produce alternatives to established, taken-for-granted meanings (Barthes 1967). This line of practice, a key element of the modernist revolution, produced poems that look and sound very different from traditional forms that emphasize rhyme, meter, symmetry, and ornamentation:

twi-  
    is -Light bird  
ful  
-ly dar  
kness eats

a distance a  
c(h)luck  
(l)ing of just bells (touch)ing

?mind  
(moon begins The  
)  
now,est hills er dream;new  
.oh if

when:  
&  
a  
nd O impercept i bl.

(e. e. cummings, quoted in Perkins 1987:43-44)

Modernist poetry's questioning of logic brought it closer to continental language philosophy, which had adopted a similar "enterprise" since French structuralism. Buddhism, on the other hand, had been entering western cultures as a philosophy. Upon "discovering" Buddhism in the mid-nineteenth century, European scholars could not decide whether to think of it as a religion or as a philosophy – the two categories of Western thought with greatest potential of subsuming Buddhism – since they found in it no claim to be divinely revealed and no easily identifiable equivalents of western religious notions like heaven and hell. When intellectuals in various Asian countries identified modernization as their incontestable national goal and accepted the orientalist premise that Asian religions produced stagnant societies, they took advantage of this confusion (King 1999). Japanese intellectuals, the most "successful" Asian modernizers, reinterpreted Japanese Zen Buddhism as a radical empiricist epistemology compatible with science (Snodgrass 2003; Tweed 1992; Verhoeven 1997).

If deflecting the charges of unscientificity was the immediate goal of Asian Buddhist intellectuals, their long term goal was to affirm in Buddhism a greater power than science could aspire to. Therefore, soon a mystic strand of this New Buddhism

emerged, coupling empiricist epistemology with a transcendentalist ontology. In this view, intensive and disciplined attention to ordinary things could free the mind from the limits imposed on it by ordinary reason, showing it the hidden interconnectedness of all things. This line emphasized supposedly nonritualistic practices, most importantly the study of irrational riddles (called *koans*) and sitting meditation (*zazen*). According to the dominant interpretation, both of these practices lead to sudden breakthroughs in intuition, the first by forcing the mind outside logic and the second by focusing attention on the here-and-now, alerting the mind to the pervasiveness of preconceptions and received ideas. It repudiated, like the hegemonic line, devotional practices that characterized various forms of folk Buddhism, legitimating urban intellectuals' symbolic domination over the peasant masses. Also, while the scientific line declared the compatibility of an imagined Japanese national essence with modernity, this second one closed it to non-Japanese peoples by underscoring the inherent inability of Westerners and corrupt Asian peoples to practice *zazen* (Sharf 1995).

At the hands of European and North American poets, however, these notions served a different purpose, and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese intellectuals had little control over the circulation of their ideas beyond Japan. As modern poetry came to specialize in questioning means/ends rationality, the mystic strand in Japanese Zen started to sound more and more like the justification of the poetic enterprise. In the 1920s and 30s, European surrealist poets like Tzara used it in their symbolic struggles with actors rich in economic and political capital. The idea of the hidden interconnected of things, closed off to minds totally given to ordinary logic and reason, became a powerful asset in declaring the independence of poetic knowledge from scientific knowledge—and

the superiority of the former over the latter. Poetry became, in a sense, a meditation technique, and poets its experts.

Since modern literature is an international phenomenon (Casanova 2004), U.S. poets quickly copied these themes. Consider, for instance, the following statement Gary Snyder made in 1973 in the *New York Quarterly's* Craft Interview, a series devoted entirely to the technical aspect of poetry:

As anyone who has done much meditation knows, what you aim at is never what you hit. What you consciously aim at is never what you get. Your conscious mind can't do it for you. So you do have to practice a kind of detached and careful but really relaxed inattention, which lets the unconscious do its own thing of rising and manifesting itself. But the moment you reach out—it's like peripheral vision, almost—the moment you reach out to grab it, it slips back. It's like hunting—it's like still hunting. Still hunting is when you take a stand in the brush or some place and then become motionless, and then things begin to become alive, and pretty soon you begin to see the squirrels and sparrows and raccoons and rabbits that were there all the time but just, you know, duck out of the way when you look at them too closely. Meditation is like that. You sit down and shut up and don't move, and then the things in your mind begin to come out of their holes and start doing their running around and singing and so forth, and if you let that happen, you make contact with it (Snyder 1980:34).

As poets distanced their practice from science, however, they also had to prevent its being completely reducible to other techniques of access to hidden truth. As Gary Snyder put it, the true poem “must walk that edge between what can be said and that which cannot be said. That's the real razor's edge. The poem that falls all the way over into what can be said can still be very exciting, but the farther it is from the razor's edge the less it has of the real magic” (1980:21). In other words, poets had to go as close to transcendental truth without actually dwelling in it—words were, ultimately, unable to

convey this truth, and poets had to stay with words. Where exactly to stop, and how to decide where to stop, became perennial problems.

This became the poetry field's *problematic* (Bourdieu 1991) – an inherently insoluble problem that defined the cutting edge of the field's game – and two alternative solutions developed. On one hand, an urbane “poetry of the intellect” influenced by Freud's thought and shaped by the traumatic experience of World War I, saw the ultimate truth of the human condition as uncontrollable chaos, warned against the bohemian attitude of embracing it unconditionally, and emphasized the role of intelligence in identifying the limits of the poetic encounter with this ultimate reality. The task of poetry became the taming of this destructive reality—the creation of a civilized fortress, built out of linguistic means, primarily symbols. On the other, a “poetry of the imagination<sup>111</sup>,” preferring Jungian psychology over Freud, saw ultimate truth as the fact of being always-already undifferentiated from a benevolent Nature, taking the encounter with this force as far as words could carry. It warned of the tendency of symbols to devolve to clichés and asserted the possibility – however remote – of accessing the “thing in itself,” echoing orientalist Japanese intellectuals' version of Buddhism.

Over the course of the twentieth century, these camps were to clash repeatedly over the issue of symbolism, the importance of which is indicated in the following exchange between the poet Galway Kinnell, who belonged to the second group, and an interviewer:

Interviewer: You don't use the simile, for example, much at all. What is it about it that you mistrust or distrust, that makes you eschew it?

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<sup>111</sup> The terms are from T. S. Eliot's groundbreaking formulation.

Kinnell: I don't think things are often really like other things. At some level all things are each other, but before that point they are separate entities. Also, although they are common, as you say, in surrealist poetry, similes perhaps have the effect of keeping the irrational world under rational supervision. Perhaps the words "like" and "as if" draw a line through reality and say in effect, "Here we are no longer speaking of the real world" (Kinnell 1978:52).

*Class dynamics in U.S. poetry.* Toward mid-century, the solutions to the problem of symbolism became associated with rival poetry networks. More importantly, changes in the field of education aligned these networks' reproduction process partially with social classes. In the process, Buddhism became the "property" of lower-class, leftist poets.

Recall from chapter 2 and 3 that modernist poets like William Carlos Williams attempted to address the pressing social issues the Great Depression raised with the new styles they had been experimenting with for two decades. In reaction, the coalition of a group of southern conservatives and anticommunist liberals, both sympathizing with the "poetry of the intellect" as opposed to Williams's "poetry of the imagination," successfully institutionalized poetry in universities (Breslin 1983; Brunner 2001; Filreis 2008; Graff 2007; Perkins 1987; von Hallberg 1985). As the U.S. government cracked down on left-wing activity and as the number of university students skyrocketed after 1945, the southern-liberal coalition seemed to be the clear winner of this struggle. But their success soon undermined itself as it produced a stronger opposition to their hegemony. In the 1950s, faced with too many students with poetic aspirations, the southern-liberal coalition alienated many young poets like Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder by ignoring them at the expense of students from wealthier families they had

become used to. Left outside the institution they got a taste of, these young upstarts eventually allied with the aging modernists outside the university establishment.

Among other things, these upstarts traced their mentors’ opposition to symbolism to the Zen Buddhism that the modernizing Japanese intellectuals had produced. Consider, for instance, the following statement Ginsberg made in a 1971 interview:

Now the Zen practice was paying complete absorbed attention to the immediate teapot and teacup in front of you and pouring the tea with complete absorption and intention, with the mind focused there, observing every wavelet and droplet coming out of the spout into the teacup and then serving it with complete presence to the person in front of you. Blake’s proposition was that “concrete particulars” were the essence of poetry and consciousness observation to see eternity, uh, no, “to seek all Heaven in a grain of sand, and eternity in an hour.” Williams’s proposition from American roots was: “so much depends/upon/a red wheel/barrow/glazed with rain/water/beside the white/chickens.” When Williams said “so much depends,” he means all human consciousness depends on direct observation of what’s in front of you. (Ginsberg 2001:271)

Table 5.7 shows that those who built the Buddhism/poetry nexus in the postwar period were all affiliated with the antiacademic revolt—the overwhelming majority were part of the original antiacademic camp, the rest joining it following the publication of *The New American Poetry* in 1960<sup>112</sup>.

Table 5.7. Poets of the Buddhism nexus and the academicism debate.

	Poetic affiliation before 1960	Poetic affiliation after 1960
Kenneth Rexroth	Antiacademic	Antiacademic
Lawrence Ferlinghetti	Antiacademic	Antiacademic

<sup>112</sup> Anne Waldman was left out of this table because she was only 15 years old in 1960.

Jack Kerouac	Antiacademic	Antiacademic
Philip Whalen	Antiacademic	Antiacademic
Bob Kaufman	Antiacademic	Antiacademic
Robert Bly	Academic	Antiacademic
Allen Ginsberg	Antiacademic	Antiacademic
Lew Welch	Antiacademic	Antiacademic
Galway Kinnell	Academic	Antiacademic
W. S. Merwin	Academic	Antiacademic
Gary Snyder	Antiacademic	Antiacademic
Lenore Kandel	Antiacademic	Antiacademic
Diane di Prima	Antiacademic	Antiacademic
Joanne Kyger	Antiacademic	Antiacademic

As a result, it was not possible to develop a credible criticism of Buddhism as a source of heteronomy from within the antiacademic camp—hence the weakness of poets like Cid Corman, Robert Duncan, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s opposition to Buddhism. The buzzwords of “American Buddhism” suffused antiacademic poets’ cultural universe so fully that even the non-Buddhists came to “sound” rather Buddhist. Consider the following letter Lew Welch sent to his mother in 1950, where he describes how he finished his undergraduate thesis. At the time, Welch had no knowledge of Zen whatsoever, but his discourse echoed the notion of no-self:

I did not discipline myself to do it, because most of us are only cowed when we think we are disciplined and I am definitely not going to let anyone in this fucked

up world, either an individual or an institution, cow me. I am using institution in the double sense of culturally accepted pattern of behavior, and an established organization with its own rules. I did not, then, discipline myself, instead I assumed a condition that is beyond the realm of discipline, I simply began. If you are doing something with concentration there is no possibility of being disciplined because if you are concentrated in doing you are only doing what you are doing—“I am not any longer when I see.” There is no recognition of the “self,” there is only the doing.<sup>113</sup> (11)

An even better example is William Everson’s discourse. Recall that Everson was a devout Catholic, a Dominican lay brother; therefore the fact that he is compelled to refer to Zen for his “poetry talk” is significant:

What you can communicate maintains the point of contact, but it isn’t the essence of your total effect, which is witness. By witness, I mean a personal confrontation, a personal encounter, a psychic crisis deliberately precipitated to produce a change in attitude, a new center of gravity, a displacement of consciousness from cognition to faith. I don’t mean faith in the Catholic sense. I never proselytize. I mean faith in the sense of commitment to life and to living. To live my faith, rather than by the mental thing that our education inculcates. To enter via the ideational world, yes, but to move through it. To be able to field the questions as they come to you and at the same time to throw back into the questioner a different principle of life. We are familiar with this from the example of the Zen masters, but my point of orientation is not Zen (quoted in Meltzer 2001:48).

*Gurus and Poets.* Asian Buddhist clergy who came to the U.S. after 1945 were unable to depoliticize the reception of their discourse for two reasons. First, their cultural dispositions, shaped largely by their predecessors’ preoccupation with modernization, narrowed their options. Second, initially they had few material resources at their disposal.

There were Asian Buddhist clergy in the U.S. all throughout the twentieth century, but they mostly catered to the needs of Asian-American communities before

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<sup>113</sup> Lew Welch letter to Dorothy Brownsfield, May 20, 1950. Reproduced in Welch (1982:11).

1945 (Fields 1992; Goldberg 1999; Morgan 2004; Prebish and Baumann 2002; Wuthnow and Cadge 2004). Because Asians faced widespread racial hostility in the U.S., their temples doubled as community associations, with the primary purpose of maintaining within-group solidarity. Understandably, they emphasized collective ritual at the expense of Asian intellectuals' modernizing impulse. As a result, when white middle-class Americans became interested in Buddhism, they rarely visited the Buddhist temples in their own country. Instead, they communicated with the modernizing intellectuals of Japan, read their books, and attended their lectures when they visited.

The Buddhists that white Americans communicated with were not representative of the actually existing Buddhisms of Japan either (Sharf 1995). Their attempts at reform bore little fruit at home as their elitism failed to excite the masses, who did not approach Buddhism with orientalist lenses and therefore saw no problem with ritual. Therefore, from early twentieth-century on, there was a small but constant source of energetic, evangelizing "New Buddhist" clergy willing to take opportunities outside Japan. After 1945, those among them who could prove that they had not endorsed Japanese militarism could come to the U.S., where, they imagined, modern society would welcome their wisdom. They were given an additional incentive when the occupying forces stripped Buddhist monasteries of their land, freeing their former tenants from their obligations to the monasteries (Chadwick 1999:124). Once in the U.S., when possible, these clergy invested their time and efforts in the white middle class at the expense of the Asian-American communities that initially financed them.

While this strategy gave their ambitious agenda a fighting chance, it also compromised their bargaining power with groups, like poets, that came to Buddhism with

their own vested symbolic interests and their own resource pools. Because they had little material resources early on, Japanese Zen masters found that they needed the poets on their side to make their case to wealthy liberal patrons, their ideal target audience because of the dispositions they acquired from the history of New Buddhism. Tibetan clergy, who arrived in the U.S. with even fewer material resources than the Japanese, followed the same path. Partly since they had to adjust quickly to their challenging new conditions and partly because of their familiarity with the Japanese experience, they adopted the Japanese strategy with few modifications.

This is not to say that U.S. poets had the upper hand in their relationship with Japanese and Tibetan gurus—to the contrary. Once there were resident Buddhist clergy in the U.S. intent on gaining followers from the dominant racial group, poets were no longer the ultimate authority in their translations of Buddhism—they needed these gurus' stamp of approval. But there was competition among Asian clergy for poet students, and that gave the poets significant bargaining power. So when these clergy wanted to depoliticize their use of Buddhism, poets were not entirely helpless. They could not openly rebuff their gurus, but they could respond with what Scott (1985) calls the weapons of the weak: Feigning ignorance or lack of understanding, over-the-top respectfulness, sabotaging gurus' projects elsewhere, failing to respond, dragging their feet. And the arrival of Tibetan gurus after 1959 tilted the power balance further toward the poets, making these strategies more effective.

Throughout the rest of the section, I will illustrate how these dynamics shaped the relationships with poets of the two most successful Asian proponents of Buddhism in postwar United States: Japanese Zen master Shunryu Suzuki, the founding abbot of the

oldest Zen monastery the U.S., and Tibetan guru Chögyam Trungpa, the founder of the first accredited U.S. Buddhist university. Both institutions are still alive and well today.

*Shunryu Suzuki*<sup>114</sup>. Born in 1904, Shunryu Suzuki entered his father's profession and took up Zen study in the root monasteries of the Soto school, one of the two main branches of Japanese Zen. But like other modernizing clergy, he also graduated from a secular university and learned English—making him twice unique among Japanese Zen personnel. Also like other modernizing clergy, he found the Buddhist practice of his country lacking in vigor and spirit. He emphasized sitting meditation (*zazen*) over the devotional practices that dominated folk Buddhism and was frustrated with having to devote most of his time to the services his congregation expected of him.

Convinced that starting from scratch in a new context would give Japanese Zen – and presumably his standing in it – a good boost, he turned his eyes to the U.S. as early as 1929. But his superiors did not approve of his plans to do missionary work in the U.S., and Suzuki was only a junior priest at the time. A compromise was eventually reached, allowing Suzuki to try his brand of Zen in occupied Manchuria—even though he did not support the war.

From the beginning, then, Suzuki was a textbook example of an upstart: His global ambitions far exceeded his peripheral status in Japanese Zen. The nickname his master gave him, “crooked cucumber,” shows that he was not expected to rise to the top of the Japanese Zen hierarchy. Decades later, therefore, the American students he sent to

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<sup>114</sup> To reconstruct Suzuki's life, I rely on Chadwick (1999, 2001); Downing (2001); and Fields (1992). The writers of all of these books are, with the partial exception of Downing, sympathetic to Suzuki, therefore I read them against their intentions. I sought subtle admissions and rationalizations of the Suzuki's failures, pettiness, and predatory behavior.

Japan for further training were to find, to their surprise but to no one else's, that their master had no Japanese followers other than his eldest son. Like other historical upstarts, Suzuki had to change the rules of the game he was playing. Gaining a foothold for Zen in America was especially appealing for this, given the close relationship between Japan and the U.S. after 1945.

In the 1950s, Suzuki was old enough to be an independent Zen master, so he could now try his luck in the U.S. When the Japanese American community of San Francisco offered him the abbotship of the Sokoji temple in 1959, therefore, he did not hesitate even though the job had few perks, material or symbolic. In the U.S., Suzuki effortlessly gained a following among young and disaffected whites who idealized Zen but had no real knowledge of it. He accepted them even when they showed little promise, although he paid more attention to the ones he could be more confident about sending to Japan for further training.

Just two years after his arrival, these followers incorporated the San Francisco Zen Center, with Suzuki as its permanent master. Local artists and poets gathered around him when they learned about his approach to Zen and of his quirky but warm personality, all of which confirmed longstanding tropes of Eastern wisdom. It is not clear to what extent Suzuki consciously played into these preconceptions, but it is quite certain that his behavior in the U.S. was markedly different from his behavior in Japan. For one thing, he was now much more eclectic in his approach. Whereas he had been a notorious purist in Japan, in the U.S. he accommodated his students' whims to a far greater degree, showing that his first priority was now to adapt to his context, not to resist it.

There were other Japanese Zen masters who had come to the U.S. in the postwar period with the same purpose, primarily in Los Angeles and New York, but today none of them is remembered the way Suzuki is. This is partially because, unlike them, Suzuki was willing to accommodate his students' political activities during the Vietnam period. When San Francisco-based poets like Diane di Prima, Lenore Kandel, and Joanne Kyger became his students, he did not try to dissuade them from their political commitments. He appeared in the famous San Francisco Human Be-In of January 1967, an attempt to harness the counterculture to the antiwar cause, alongside his student Kandel and the more famous Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder—though it is worth noting that his participation involved just smiling at the participants from the stage for a brief moment.

In his ordinary politics, Suzuki was not a radical, or a conservative, but an indecipherable, sphinx-like opportunist:

A number of Zen students had applied for status as conscientious objectors to military service. Some were doing alternative service in the fire department at Tassajara. As a result, two FBI agents showed up at Sokoji one day and interviewed Suzuki. He didn't speak about war and peace in the clear-cut terms that they were used to hearing from Quakers and other pacifist Christians (...) When they asked what he thought about the Vietnam War, he startled them by saying off-handedly, "Oh yes, I have a son in Vietnam. He's a barber and a mechanic in the U.S. army. He enlisted. My wife's worried about him, but I think he needed to get out and do something." He showed them a letter he'd just received from [his son]. The agents finally gave up trying to understand his position (Chadwick 1999:316).

In an implicit *quid pro quo*, Ginsberg and Snyder helped Zen Center's fundraising effort later that year to buy a springs resort in the woods of Carmel Valley and to turn it to a Zen Buddhist monastery, a first outside Asia. Opening in 1969, this monastery put Suzuki ahead of other, more politically conservative Japanese gurus who had arrived in

the U.S. earlier. In recognition of his accomplishment, some of the most prestigious Zen masters of Japan joined an international crowd of Buddhist dignitaries in its first intensive practice session.

Seeing that Suzuki did not mind his brand of politics, Allen Ginsberg, the most famous and the most politically active of the Beat poets, developed stronger ties with him than he had done with other Buddhist and Hindu gurus. In the early 1960s, Ginsberg had travelled extensively in India, Indochina, and Japan, avowedly looking for a master to develop a strong personal relationship with, but he never really made a commitment to any he met. Back in the U.S., he “studied” chanting with Suzuki even though he was clearly not the kind of person Suzuki would normally pay much attention to—he was noncommittal, loud, often away on one errand or another, had too many awkward questions, and did not meet Suzuki’s meticulous standards of personal hygiene. After this “training,” Ginsberg asked Suzuki’s permission to use Suzuki’s version of the Heart Sutra – a key Buddhist text – in his poetry readings. Suzuki gladly agreed, even though chanting texts was not something he emphasized in Buddhist practice.

The relationship was mutually beneficial. Observers noted that in his frequent visits to university campuses in the late 1960s and early 70s, Ginsberg would be treated not so much as a poet or political figure – though he certainly had a claim to being both – but primarily as a spiritual leader in his own right<sup>115</sup>. Since his credentials in this area were actually quite slim, he needed the support – or at least the cooperative silence – of career gurus. In his high-profile public appearances, Ginsberg attempted to pass as a

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<sup>115</sup> On March 3, 1967, Ginsberg gave an interview to Bob Elliott of *Missouri Freelance*, on the campus of Washington University in St. Louis. Elliott’s first question was this: “In anticipating your coming here, the reaction of many people was not so much to you as the poet, but rather as a spiritual leader. How do you react to this?” (Ginsberg 2001:67)

spiritual expert to gain credibility. During the 1969 trial of the Chicago Seven, for instance, he was called to the witness stand and he used the occasion, among other things, to flaunt his knowledge of Buddhism, explicitly invoking his “studies” with Suzuki (Ginsberg 2001:203)

Suzuki’s intense activity to spread his sphere of influence among whites met increasing hostility from his Japanese American congregation. The association of their religion with anti-Americanism in conservative newspapers reminded them of the days of internment during the Second World War, the constant presence of young whites in their temple led to friction, and Suzuki’s disregard for devotional practices made them unhappy. Soon after Zen Center acquired its rural monastery, the leaders of the Japanese American community of San Francisco asked Suzuki to choose between them and his white students. Suzuki quickly chose Zen Center and left the community that had brought him to the U.S.

*Chögyam Trungpa*<sup>116</sup>. Born in 1939 in rural Tibet, Trungpa was recognized as the reincarnation of an important *lama* who had recently died and he was raised in his predecessor’s monasteries with the intention that he would, upon reaching adulthood, take them over. This upbringing gave him aristocratic dispositions and immense self-confidence in dealing with people. After the Chinese invasion, Trungpa fled first to India (1960) and then to Britain (1963), where he quickly acquired a British accent that he cherished for all his life and jealously preserved after moving to the U.S. in 1970.

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<sup>116</sup> To reconstruct Trungpa’s life, I rely on Clark (1980); Hayward (2008); Midal (2004); and Paine (2004). Clark is hostile to Trungpa, therefore I read him with an eye on admissions of Trungpa’s talents and intelligence. The others are sympathetic, so like in the Suzuki biographies, I sought in them the subtle admissions of Trungpa’s many imperfections.

The Chinese invasion shaped Trungpa decisively. First, it forced him to further develop his already strong human skills, first in India and then in Britain. Therefore, by the time he arrived in the U.S., he was highly efficient in winning people from foreign cultural backgrounds, and there was no way for his U.S. students to know that these skills were not inherent but learned in trial and error fashion. Second, the invasion gave him an excuse to violate the constraints that came with high spiritual office. His superiors, without the land they had owned for centuries, were not able to sanction Trungpa when he dressed in Western clothes, drank alcohol, and had sex with his students. Throughout his life, Trungpa legitimated these actions as the manifestation of a “crazy wisdom” befitting crazy times—and in such times of turmoil for the Tibetan community, his actions were arguably as appropriate as anybody else’s. Forced outside the country they ruled, Tibetan gurus needed to develop new coping mechanisms, and who was to say with certainty what would work in the West?

Because a widespread discourse presented Buddhism as a corrective to ordinary logic and reason, Trungpa’s experiments paid off. Not surprisingly, many of the people who were drawn to him were artists and poets. Among these was Allen Ginsberg, whom he met in New York in 1970. Ginsberg had also built a public persona on scandalous behavior, so the two developed rapport very quickly and Ginsberg became Trungpa’s student. In 1974, he put his sprawling network at the service of his guru in setting up Naropa Institute (later Naropa University), the first accredited Buddhist university in the U.S. He became, with his protégé Anne Waldman, the director of Naropa’s writing department, the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, named after Ginsberg’s late friend and literary ally.

Naropa soon became a Mecca of counterculturalists, artists and writers. It was a stunning achievement by any set of standards: It attracted a very large number of students to Boulder, Colorado, and its faculty list read like a who's who of American dissent. Moreover, it brought a steady supply of young people to Tibetan Buddhism, which became an unofficial but integral part of the curriculum<sup>117</sup>. As such, it put Trungpa ahead of other incarnate lamas that used to be above him in the Tibetan hierarchy. Like Suzuki, Trungpa had invented a new kind of capital to shore up his position in the field of Tibetan gurus—adaptation to “the West.”

Trungpa's approach to Buddhism also changed drastically following his flight from Tibet. In the west, he followed the modernizing Japanese intellectuals' lead and started emphasizing sitting meditation more and more. His quick transition was conditioned by the difficulty of Tibetan gurus everywhere: Unlike the Japanese, Tibetan gurus that came to the West had no Tibetan American community ready to support their livelihood. Therefore, from the beginning of their time in the U.S., Tibetan gurus sought ways of winning over converts from the dominant racial group, who had come to know Buddhism and meditation as one and the same thing. It also required breaking the old rules every now and then, and Trungpa was already a master of that.

Collaboration with Trungpa gave a much-needed push to Ginsberg's career. Naropa gave him a steady supply of poetry students as well as a position from which to apply leverage over other poets, who now had to deal not only with Ginsberg the poet but

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<sup>117</sup> A Kerouac School brochure read: “Though not all the poet teachers are Buddhist, nor is it required of the teachers and students in this secular school to hollow any specific meditative path, it is the happy accident of this century's poetic history – especially since Gertrude Stein – that the quality of mind and mindfulness probed by U.S. poetry is related to quality of mind probed by Buddhist practice. There being no party line but mindfulness of thought and language itself, no conflict need rise between “religion” and “poetry”” (Naropa Institute early planning material, Anne Waldman papers).

also with Ginsberg the distributor of administrative favors. Also, Trungpa quickly identified the strengths and weaknesses of Ginsberg's public persona and helped him improve it. He urged Ginsberg to stop the chanting, which was becoming stale, artificial, and predictable, and encouraged him to improvise more in his readings. He became part of Ginsberg's attempt to transform himself from countercultural naïf to tie-wearing elder statesman of U.S. poetry.

And yet, throughout the 1970s, Ginsberg and Trungpa had profound political differences—Trungpa lived the bohemian life, but he was no political radical. He frequently spoke against the political streak of the counterculture, and he was unapologetically antidemocratic. He spoke out against Ginsberg's activism, making it clear that his favorite student did not have his support when it came to politics:

Whatever occurs in your life—environmental problems, political problems, or psychological problems—should be transformed into a part of your wakefulness, or *bodhi*... You do not blame the environment or the world political situation. Certain people are inspired to write poetry and act in such a way that they would sacrifice their lives for a social cause. We can quite safely say that the Vietnam War produced a lot of poets and philosophers, but their work is not in keeping with this Mahayana principle. They were purely reacting against the world being filled with evil; they were not able to transform mishaps into the path of *bodhi* (quoted in Midal 2004:395-396).

Knowing well that publicly dismissing his guru would not be expedient, Ginsberg nonetheless kept doing politics his own way. When Trungpa told him to shave his trademark beard because he was “too attached” to it, Ginsberg did not hesitate to comply. When Trungpa instructed him to give up his political commitments, on the other hand, for the most part he remained silent. He occasionally paid lip service to his guru's advice, but his political practices changed little in the 1970s. After the end of the Vietnam War,

he lent his support to gay liberation, antinuclear protest, and green radicalism, and the overall level of his activism as well as its reliance on Buddhism remained very much the same. In 1976, after noting that Ginsberg's Buddhism "seems not to have interfered with the acute political concern, for the CIA and other issues, which [he] continue[s] to display in recent poems," an interviewer asked him how his work with Trungpa changed his approach to politics. Ginsberg's answer combines paying lip service to Trungpa with presenting his own politics as Trungpa's:

[Trungpa]'s been pushing me to improvise, to divest myself of ego eventually, kidding me about "Ginsberg resentment" as a national hippie characteristic (...) He's also made me more aware of the elements of resentment, aggression, and dead-end anger in my earlier poetry and behavior, which is useful to know and be mindful of. (...) Trungpa's basic attitude toward that kind of political outrage is that things like gay liberation, women's liberation, peace mobilization, have an element—as seed—of value in them; but it depends on the attitude of mind of the participant as to whether it's a negative feedback and a karmic drug or a clear healthy, wholesome action (...) [Trungpa] has changed [my politics] somewhat from a negative fix on the "fall of America" as a dead-end issue—the creation of my resentment—into an appreciation of the fatal karmic flaws in myself and the nation (Ginsberg 2001:381-383).

*Trungpa vs. Suzuki.* Given enough time, it is certain that the gurus would have eventually grown out of their dependence on the poets. But the historical accident that is the Chinese invasion of Tibet made another accident quite unavoidable: the Japanese had to focus their efforts on their competition with the Tibetans, and this gave the poets a break. Upon meeting Trungpa in 1970, Suzuki quickly realized his potential and introduced him to his students as his spiritual "son." This actually shows the rivalry between the two—in Buddhism, explicit denunciations of other gurus were inadmissible, especially when they were at a similar level of spiritual accomplishment. In Japanese Zen, furthermore, saying

one thing and meaning another was a sign of competence. The exact words Suzuki used to introduce Trungpa are also significant—he joked that, once his students knew Trungpa, they might all leave Suzuki to study with the Tibetan. That Ginsberg quickly switched from his loose affiliation with Suzuki to Trungpa shows that the rivalry was real even if was not acknowledged, to others or to oneself.

### **5.5. Discussion: A Political Marriage of Poets and Gurus**

What do these stories tell us? The politicization of “American Buddhism” at the hands of poets occurred under such unique circumstances that one is tempted to dismiss its general significance. The end result is intriguing, but its explanation only requires a combination of historical narratives that, one by one, seem to have little to add to a theory of intellectuals’ politicization. After all, much of the process was beyond the control of poets. The evolution of poetry’s field problematic had an impact, but only indirectly and in the very long term, making it almost completely unpredictable. Buddhism became the property of younger, poorer and more radical poets and expanded their audience only because of large-scale changes in U.S. education. The changes in Asian Buddhism and the arrival of Japanese and Tibetan clergy in the U.S. are only one causal step removed from the legacy of European colonialism and the vicissitudes of international conflict.

However, the poets controlled one important element—the choice of which guru to follow. Ignoring the gurus altogether was not an option since their credentials were incontestable—they had decades of Buddhist training and displayed all signs of authenticity and competence. These gave them the formal upper hand in their dealings with poets, such that, once in a master-student relationship, they had some veto power

over poets' interpretation of Buddhist texts. Furthermore, without the help of the gurus, the dilettantism of the poets would have been very easy to see through. But poets were not ordinary students. Many of them had access to mass media, wealthy liberal donors, lecture circuit organizers, publishing houses, and even some political elites—all the constituencies the gurus felt they needed in this new environment. As a result, there was some competition among the gurus for poets' loyalty, making it possible for the latter to play them against one another in search of a better "bargain." They could delay the moment of more or less exclusive submission to one guru by flirting with as many as possible for as long as possible. They could seek out masters over whom they had leverage, masters who would not – or could not – limit their political activity.

The relationship between poets and gurus was, then, similar to a political marriage, one in which the gurus were the groom and the poets the bride. Like female dynastic heirs, poets had their own cultural and material resource base, to which gurus – like male suitors of reigning queens – had little to add. But to the extent that their reputations relied on appropriations of Buddhism and to the extent that they did not have significant Buddhist credentials, poets needed the gurus.

Also like female dynastic heirs, poets could limit the loss of autonomy that results from marriage by finding partners rich in symbolic capital – recognition from other gurus – but poor in economic and social capital. Counterintuitively, then, gurus with authoritarian tendencies were better candidates than "nicer" ones with a similar stock of material resources, as capricious and unstable behavior was taken to be a sign of spiritual accomplishment. Ginsberg's shifting devotion from the warm-hearted Suzuki to the volatile and abusive Trungpa, then, was a smart move.

Poets would also benefit from preventing the accumulation of material resources in gurus' hands. The most effective way of doing this was simultaneously advancing and subverting institutionalization by maintaining intermediary status, like Ginsberg's assumption of administrative duties at Naropa Institute. They could benefit from the routinization of the American Buddhist enterprise, provided that charismatic but impractical figureheads like Trungpa remained at its top.

In contrast, it was quite impossible to maintain this kind of leverage over the specialists of other religious and philosophical discourses and benefit from the process. In the case of radical Catholicism and liberal Protestantism, these specialists – priests, pastors, and theologians – were too strong—they had their own resource bases in the donors to their congregations; a well-established place in mainstream culture; and direct access to the lay population. As such, there was very little that poets could do for them. When poets like William Everson went too far in turning Catholicism to a celebration of poetry's values, therefore, the church could easily censure them and remain in complete control of the situation. Perhaps for that reason, poets never even tried their luck with liberal Protestantism, which was much more entrenched.

In the case of existentialism and neopaganism, these experts were too weak. Language philosophy and logical positivism dominated U.S. philosophy departments in the postwar period and existentialism remained outside the university establishment. If a significant number of publicly visible existentialist philosophers had been around when Philip Whalen was making his case against existentialism, one wonders what the outcome would have been. But they were not, and as a result existentialism could not be defended against one particularly well-read poet. How, then, could it be defended against

the onslaught conservative media and political elites could easily unleash? The situation was the same for the most compelling form of neopaganism, American Indian religion. Indigenous communities had their shamans and seers, of course, and like existentialist philosophers, their cultural capital stock could benefit from an alliance with the poets. But they had so few resources at their disposal that they were almost entirely invisible to the lay public. As such, poets knew that they could not rely on their help in convincing the public that this was serious business. That, I believe, is why David Wagoner's discourse of the noble savage lacked confidence, and why the young Gary Snyder decided to explore a religious tradition whose specialists could be of some real help.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

Recall that the main question guiding this chapter is: Given how important chapter 4 revealed backstage literary/political activity to be, what are its dynamics? I argued that discourses that point toward what Turner (1969, 1974) calls *communitas* are crucial, and in the case I examined these discourses were derived from religious or philosophical traditions U.S. poets appropriated from their specialists. Then I asked: How do poets in particular, and intellectuals in general, decide what to appropriate, and what determines the success of their conversion?

My research reveals that answering both questions requires examining the material resources of the appropriators and the current owners. When the cultural resource to be appropriated has resident experts who have some visibility but lack the material resources that they feel are indispensable for their goals, the appropriators can take advantage of this situation if they can convince the experts that they can help them.

That describes the situation of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, and explains why U.S. poets displayed such enthusiasm for it. When these resident experts are not sufficiently visible, or if they do not exist, appropriators may feel that they cannot achieve the task by themselves and look for other avenues. That seems to have been the case with French existentialism and neopaganism. When the experts have all the things they believe they need, they have no reason to share the ownership of their tradition with outsiders. That, I believe, was the case with radical Catholicism and liberal Protestantism.

The most important sociological lesson here, then, is that the insights of social movements scholarship, even those of something as old and basic as the resource mobilization approach (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Oberschall 1973), apply quite well to intellectuals' politicization. According to the theoretical framework of literary/political activity established in chapters 2 and 4, intellectuals need to regularly convert cultural resources to political ones—otherwise they are at a definitive disadvantage in their dealings with the actors of politics proper. The evidence in this chapter leads me to believe that systematic orientalism may provide metropolitan intellectuals with such resources by allowing them to project their political fantasies on to “wiser” societies. Political elites often know as little about these exotic cultures as intellectuals do and imagination is the strong suit of artists and writers. But in order to convert these cultural resources successfully, writers need to wrest them from their current owners. A requisite of this, it turns out, is a bigger purse or more functional networks.

Insights of the resource mobilization approach have applicability to the case I studied, but if resource mobilization to be useful to the sociology of intellectuals, it must be given a culturalist and historicist bent very different from the materialism and

scientism of its early advocates. For current owners of cultural resources to be dependent on would-be appropriators in fields of cultural production, they must feel that what the appropriators have is indispensable—what counts as “material resource” is not self-evident and its constitution as desirable object presumes certain dispositions toward the world that are products of fateful historical developments. Recall that Shunryu Suzuki and Chögyam Trungpa were dependent on U.S. poets because their target audience was the educated upper middle class of Western societies, and this disposition was the product of the history of New Buddhism in Asia. If Buddhist modernizers in nineteenth-century Japan had not adopted the worldview of Western intellectuals, people like Shunryu Suzuki would not have found Japanese American religiosity misguided and the poets would have been superfluous to his goals. If that had been the case, leaders of Tibetan Buddhism like Trungpa would have had no ready-made adaptation strategy for their new situation, and an alliance with the poets could have been unnecessary.

On poets’ end too, the material dimension is built on and presumes dynamics that are cultural in nature. Unlike in classical resource mobilization, and unlike in Scott’s account of the weapons of the weak that I referred to in the previous section, poets may or may not have been aware that their “Americanization” of Buddhism was had a material dimension. In fact, given the insights of dispositional thinking, actors in similar circumstances might be better off if they are fully aware of what they are doing: Sincerity is charming and disarming. Allen Ginsberg seems to have given his all to Chögyam Trungpa, and he seems to have cut his relationships with other gurus not as a result of conscious calculation, but out of boredom or as a result of his fast-paced life. But the question is why he was bored, and why his life was fast-paced. And these bring us right

back to the competitive environments he lived in – most importantly, the poetry field with its adjusting effect on the habitus – and the location he occupied in that field – young upstart committed to the autonomy of the field endowed with too much renown and too much money in his hands for commitment and his aspirations.

The point regarding resource mobilization is that if something as old and basic as it has something to add to the study of intellectuals' political practices, a dialogue with social movements scholarship is long overdue in the sociology of intellectuals. Since the advent of resource mobilization, scholars of contentious politics have developed an impressive array of competing ideas and research techniques, emphasizing a whole range of factors from organizational forms and political climate to culture and emotion. In the process, an intensive and sustained dialogue developed between scholars who study social movements and those who have since revolutionized organizational theory, from which both sides eventually benefited.

In the meanwhile, the study of intellectuals has become a fringe specialty in U.S. sociology. Of course, there is something to be said about the general inability of intellectuals to bring about social change in ways that satisfy their own ideals, but the arguments I laid out in chapter 1 and the past thirty years of social movements scholarship show that this is not the entire story—much of the success of social movements scholarship is due to its ability to point out exactly why social movements are not always consequential. In other words, the decline of the sociology of intellectuals is at least partially a result of its own inability to refresh itself with new ideas, whether produced within the subfield or imported. If it is to move forward, social movements scholarship provides a number of such ideas now.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.1. Introduction

This dissertation is, in many ways, an extended dialogue with *The Rules of Art*, and so it is only fitting that it should follow Bourdieu's example in that book and end with a normative stand. In what follows, I will draw the implications of the preceding chapters for what I see as the most important normative statements on intellectuals – those of Bourdieu, Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, and Jean-Paul Sartre. The now-hidden, now-open conversation among these four giants revolves around two points of contention; differentiation of interest and specialization of activity. Regarding the first, Bourdieu's ideal intellectual, in contrast to Gramsci, Sartre, and Foucault's, pursues his/her own interests, which should be seen as separate from those of other social groups. Regarding the second, Foucault and Bourdieu agree on the necessity for intellectuals to specialize in certain kinds of intellectual practice while Sartre rejects this.

The evidence in the substantive chapters vindicates Bourdieu's rejection of organicism while showing that there is not one but three dimensions of the specialization of intellectuals—intellectual activity, political activity, and capital accumulation. The latter finding leads to two points. First, in places like the U.S. specialization in political as well as intellectual activity may be superior to specialization in intellectual activity alone, which is Bourdieu and Foucault's position. Second, in capital accumulation, Bourdieu

defends specialization while my evidence points in the other direction. In implicit agreement with Foucault and Sartre, Bourdieu argues that the only benefit that dissenting intellectuals should pursue is the approval of their peers—symbolic capital specific to the fields of cultural production. For politically active U.S. poets, in contrast, the accumulation of social capital was just as important—ties to a wide variety of people outside the intellectual world significantly increased their capacity to get things done.

Third, and perhaps more importantly, my evidence leads me to question the figure of the intellectual as an ethical purist, which Bourdieu, Foucault and Sartre all have in mind. Intellectuals may be practitioners of a “*Realpolitik* of reason,” Bourdieu argues, but the means by which they pursue their symbolic interests must be subordinated to a number of absolute ethical principles; otherwise intellectuals cannot preserve their unity and their respectability. In contrast, the case I examined suggests that the pursuit of the moral high ground may, in places like the U.S., undermine the very goals that intellectuals pursue in politics and so loyalty to absolute ethical principles should be balanced by flexibility.

The figure that emerges from all this is a pragmatic intellectual. In settings like the one I examined, my research leads me to believe, the intellectuals who contribute most to democratic struggles are those who keep their options open and make the best of the opportunities that present themselves, occasionally at the cost of artistic excellence and moral integrity.

The ideas that I summarize with the notion of the pragmatic intellectual are useful sociologically to the extent that they are helpful outside their context of discovery. There are a number of directions that future research can be oriented towards, and I finish by

outlining them briefly. These are the studies of a) intellectuals in other places that could be considered clear examples of the two poles of the republican-federalist continuum, b) intellectuals in places where the political opportunity structure is consistently and hopelessly unfavorable, c) intellectuals outside the core countries of the capitalist world system, and d) other groups that fit the description “dominated among the dominant.”

## **6.2. Four Views of the Intellectual**

*The “corporatism of the universal” vs. the ideal of organicism.* Probably the most striking argument Bourdieu made regarding intellectuals is his claim that intellectuals should pursue their own goals. This is because he sees an older view of the intellectual, Gramsci’s notion of organic intellectual, as a dangerous myth that either fails to bring about the lofty democratic goals intellectuals like Gramsci adhere to, or masks a heinous self-centeredness. Intellectuals are either traditional or organic, Gramsci argues, and for genuinely democratic polities to be possible the traditional intellectual must be replaced with the organic. The traditional intellectual sees himself/herself as autonomous from politics and aims to preserve that status, but for Gramsci autonomy from the class structure is simply not possible. Traditional intellectuals, then, are either manipulative allies of the ruling class or misguided naïves who fail to understand that their interests are those of the revolutionary class. Organic intellectuals come about when a dominated class produces thinkers who see this state of affairs for what it is and explicitly declare themselves the servants of the cause of this class.

This is a myth for Bourdieu because his ontology of the social differs from Gramsci’s. For Gramsci class struggle constitutes the immediate ground of all social

practice while for Bourdieu the structure of fields mediates all struggles, altering their dynamics in the process. The conflict between classes takes place amidst the conflict between fields and the conflicts within fields, and the reality of these latter conflicts cannot be derived solely from class inequality. Therefore writers, artists, and scientists are not and cannot be the agents of a class; they have distinct symbolic and material interests as writers, artists, and scientists. Any alliance they may build with a class, then, is bound to be temporary.

But this is not such a bad thing for emancipatory politics, Bourdieu argues. Because writers, artists, and scientists are the dominated among the dominant, intellectual fields have come into being around ethical values that challenge the unrestrained growth of the power of money and the reason of the state – the two forces that Bourdieu sees as most dangerous once the hold of clergy over politics is broken. As such, when intellectuals defend their own symbolic and material interests, they are necessarily defending the rights of the downtrodden – the defense of truth and beauty, made possible by the chivalrous rejection of the power to be gained from an exchange with the temporal powers, forces intellectuals to side with individuals and groups that capitalism and bureaucratic nationalism dispossess and marginalize. Hence the politics of a genuinely democratic intellectual is the “corporatism of the universal” (1996:348)—it is corporatism in that the intellectual is primarily the defender of his/her own symbolic interests, it is universal in that the values that intellectuals that defend in the process are based on pure ethical principles with universal applicability.

*Total vs. collective intellectual.* The intellectual who, for Bourdieu, defends the forces of democracy while defending his or her own interests, must be part of a collective subject (1996:348). This is because the forces of heteronomy are too tempting and too powerful to deal with individually. To resist the temptation of joining forces with the temporal powers, the intellectual must derive his or her dispositions from a collective that requires writers and artists to take up political causes by regulating their schemas of taste and morality.

The collective intellectual is Bourdieu's response to Sartre's "total intellectual," the antithesis of specialization in intellectual and political activity (1988). The antinomy between Sartre's and Bourdieu's formulations are easy to see—*The Rules of Art* is a direct attack on Sartre's formulation of the intellectual. First, Bourdieu's key linguistic apparatus in *Rules of Art*, the distinction between position taking and position, is a direct challenge to Sartre's language. According to Sartre, the intellectual must take a position in political matters, and the decisions by which these positions are taken are purely personal, existential ones. But these position takings, Bourdieu argues, correspond to positions that intellectuals occupy in the fields of cultural production—that is, the decision to take up the defense of truth and beauty does not take place in a vacuum but is shaped by the structure of intellectual fields.

Second, the book's focus on Flaubert challenges Sartre's work on that writer. Sartre's biography of Flaubert identified the secret of his success in his personal genius and the dynamics of his family relationships. Bourdieu does not deny the importance of family relationships but considers them in their historical context, in the strategy of diversification ordinary bourgeois families use for increasing their capital stock—

Flaubert's interest in literature as the youngest son of a physician did not develop in isolation, Bourdieu argues, but with the very encouragement of a father whose older sons were securely on track for bourgeois careers. Nor does he deny the central import of Flaubert's project, which he sees as the crucial step towards the conquest of autonomy. But he identifies the source of his success as his keen observation of power relationships in the France of his time—Flaubert was a giant, Bourdieu argues, not because he was an isolated, almost antisocial genius, but because he was very well connected to his environment and had a gift for sociological observation.

In the debate about organicism, Sartre's view resembles Gramsci's. The distinction Sartre makes between engaged and autonomous writing is also a distinction between a purely personal, Nietzschean decision to ally oneself with the wronged and a failure to exercise such free choice. The second option leads to remaining within a herd-like social category, so while autonomous intellectuals may constitute an interest group, their function within politics is a regressive one. Engaged intellectuals, on the other hand, are first and foremost individuals; they stand alone in their struggles with power. But precisely because of their sheer individualities, they are able to will themselves into an organic relationship with the marginalized groups they ally with.

Bourdieu's criticism of the total intellectual follows directly from the contrast between his sociological focus and this individualism of Sartre's existentialism. Given the tendency of the fields of cultural production to specialize, Bourdieu reasons, the position of the total intellectual – the writer who can comment on every development, produce in every genre, and maintain credibility in everything he/she does – must increasingly be a rare one. As the games of literature, painting, science, philosophy, and

music diverge, the likelihood that anyone can achieve a commanding presence in all these fields diminishes as time goes on. Sartre's ideal is just the celebration of his own success and the attempt to emulate it will, in most cases, lead to a facile dilettantism that anyone can see through. As such, it is a recipe for failure in political engagements—to the extent that the political flair of the intellectual rests on his/her specific authority in fields of cultural production, the total intellectual stands little chance of being taken seriously.

*The specific intellectual.* Foucault's "specific intellectual" (1984:67-75) is an earlier attack on Sartre's views, so there is much that Foucault shares with Bourdieu. Coming, as Bourdieu does, at the heels of Sartre's astounding success as a writer, philosopher, and public figure, Foucault also rejected the notion of the total intellectual as an illusion, though for a different reason. Foucault's perspective is based on a temporal distinction he makes between the universal intellectual, which is the term he reserves from the tradition that runs from Voltaire to Sartre, and the "specific" intellectual, a new figure that appeared around 1945 (1984:69):

A new mode of the "connection between theory and practice" has been established. Intellectuals have become used to working, not in the modality of the "universal," the "exemplary," the "just-and-true-for-all," but within specific sectors, at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them (housing, the hospital, the asylum, the laboratory, the university, family, and sexual relations). This has undoubtedly given them a much more immediate and concrete awareness of struggles. And they have met here with problems which are specific, "nonuniversal," and often different from those of the proletariat or the masses. (...) This is what I would call the "specific" intellectual as opposed to the "universal" intellectual. (1984:68)

The difference between Foucault’s position and Sartre’s is obvious—the universal intellectual, whose passing Foucault not only documents but also, later in this same essay, celebrates, is an obvious reference to the figure of Sartre. As such, Foucault’s position regarding specialization of activity is the same as Bourdieu’s; if dissenting intellectuals are to be genuine forces of democracy, they must specialize in certain areas and diligently resist the temptation to overreach.

The passing mention above to the changing relationship of intellectuals to the proletariat may sound like a criticism of Gramsci. But once the historical subject that will subsume dissenting intellectuals is no longer limited to the working class, Foucault’s position with regard to the differentiation of interest is closer to Gramsci’s than to Bourdieu’s. The various struggles of the contemporary period are mutually irreducible and the paradigm of the intellectual is no longer the great writer but the expert (1984:70). And Foucault offers no conceptual language, like Bourdieu’s discussion of fields of cultural production, with which to theorize the solidarity of intellectuals. With Foucault, then, the “intellectual” is no longer a unified social category; as such, one cannot talk about the interests of the intellectuals as opposed to the interests of classes or ethnically, racially, or sexually defined minorities.

Table 6.1. Four views of the intellectual.

	Organic intellectual (Gramsci)	Total intellectual (Sartre)	Specific intellectual (Foucault)	Collective intellectual (Bourdieu)
Differentiation	No	No	No	Yes

of interest				
Specialization of activity	n/a	No	Yes	Yes

### 6.3. Toward a New Figure: The Pragmatic Intellectual

*Differentiation of interest.* Regarding the choice between a corporatism of the universal and Gramsci, Sartre and Foucault’s ideal of organicism, the findings in chapters two and three are certainly on Bourdieu’s side. Not only do the dynamics of the production of U.S. poetry seem sufficiently “field-like,” but it is also clear that the “world apart” that three generations of poets attempted to build separated their symbolic and material interests from those of any class or class fraction. And this differentiation of poetic interest turned the milieus of U.S. poetry to sites of democratic politics—the poetic celebration of complexity and individuality gained them a toehold in higher education, allowed them to contest the conservative ideal of citizenship that dominated the early cold war period, and turned them to fiery – and somewhat effective – opponents of the Vietnam War. In all this, the regulation of poets’ dispositions by a collective was indispensable—poets vied with one another to take the defense of complexity and individuality further not because they saw themselves as the agents of the dispossessed but because they identified with the imagined community of poets that, as a result of their actions, became more real by the day. Remember the quote from Robert Creeley in chapter two:

There is a *company*, a kind of leaderless Robin Hood’s band, which I dearly love. I’m sure there is even a horn to summon us all. There is no company dearer, more

phenomenal, closer to my heart. (...) Whether learned by intuition or by act, one comes to respect and to love that company of artists for whom poetry is, in Bob Rose's phrase, 'active transformation,' not a purpose, not discretion, not even craftsmanship – but *revelation*, initial and eternal, whatever that last word can mean to one whose life is finite. Consequently I both identify with and support – and hope I might be permitted the company of – any man or woman whose experience of writing transcends some sense of its value as money in the bank, or edifying addition to one's identity, etc. (Creeley 1972:113)

*Political vs. intellectual specialization.* The situation is complicated with regard to specialization of activity. In the discussion above, I focused on specialization in *intellectual* activity because Sartre, Foucault and Bourdieu all agree on rejecting specialization in political activity and embracing specialization in capital accumulation. Regarding political activity, Bourdieu's collective intellectual matches Sartre's zeal in making statements about a multitude of political issues because both thinkers see the necessity to maintain a united front against various forms of oppression. Foucault's celebration of multiplicity could have led him to theorize the specific intellectual as also specializing in certain struggles, but this is not the case:

The specific intellectual encounters certain obstacles and faces certain dangers. The danger of remaining at the level of conjunctural struggles, pressing demands restricted to particular sectors. The risk of letting himself be manipulated by the political parties or trade union apparatuses which control these local struggles. Above all, the risk of being unable to develop these struggles for lack of a global strategy or outside support; the risk, too, of not being followed, or only by very limited groups. (1984:71)

Evidence from chapter four, however, challenges Bourdieu, Foucault and Sartre's position in the case of U.S. poets. The contrast between Robert Lowell and Allen Ginsberg is also a contrast between someone who deliberately limited his political engagements to a few selectively chosen initiatives and someone who rejected such self-

imposed boundaries. The peace movement was just one of Ginsberg's many commitments in the political realm, whereas for Lowell it was the only one. And the diverging outcomes of these two men leads me to believe that specialization in both intellectual and political activity is a viable option in places where favorable and unfavorable conjunctures routinely succeed one another. Unless the conjuncture happens to be very favorable, intellectuals need to focus their political activity on a limited number of struggles, since they need to avoid being perceived as dilettantes. And very favorable conjunctures are, as a simple matter of probability, very fleeting and therefore unreliable. Consequently, the ideal intellectual in places like the U.S. is one who resists the temptation to make statements about every political issue.

It may be argued that the figure of the *intellectuel* is constituted by the rejection of any specialization in politics—from Zola to Sartre, the political interventions of writers are deliberate transgressions of the code of professionalism that increasingly dominates the political field in modernity. This is true, but my call for specialization in political activity is not a call for removing intellectuals from politics; it regards not the entire category of would-be public intellectuals but particular members of that group precisely in order that in the collective level such impossible choices will not have to be made. This follows from the distinction between republican and federalist discursive formations—in the latter, unlike in the former, only the division of political labor can ensure that all potential political issues are covered at the collective level.

*Specialization in capital accumulation.* Recall from chapter five that one reason why Asian Buddhist masters tolerated the politicization of their religious tradition at the hands

of the poets was the implicit exchange between the two parties. Shunryu Suzuki and Chögyam Trungpa approved Buddhism/protest nexus because poets provided them with access to a far-reaching network of sympathizers and donors that these gurus felt to be indispensable in their ambitious projects—the full-fledged Zen monastery in Carmel Valley in the case of Suzuki and Naropa Institute, the Buddhist university in Colorado, in the case of Trungpa. Poets like Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder were able to make such a bargain because they convinced Trungpa and Suzuki that they could help in such projects, and this was not an entirely false proposition. Ginsberg, in particular, had made acquaintance with an immense number of people from a wide variety of backgrounds over the course of his literary/political activities, and these were instrumental in raising funds.

In contrast, while there are some hints in *Rules of Art* that the reputation of a writer can provide a movement with numbers, Bourdieu does not have much to say about the ability of intellectuals to raise funds, via their contacts or directly. Given his emphasis on Baudelaire and Flaubert's rejection of money and the continuity he sees from them to the Zola generation, I believe that this is not mere omission. Bourdieu's ideal intellectual is precisely someone who is unable to do those things; the pursuit of artistic or scientific excellence takes place at their expense. This is both an objective requirement and a subjective disposition: Cutting-edge literary experimentation leaves little time to make connections outside the republic of letters, and one can devote himself/herself fully to formal experimentation only if one frowns upon bourgeois considerations. The intellectual, in short, specializes in the pursuit of symbolic capital, foregoing all other kinds of capital. Sartre and Foucault's writings, while not motivated by this sharp

distinction between intellectual and nonintellectual activities to the same degree, display a similar lack of attention to economic and social capital.

Bourdieu's argument is valid where the simultaneous accumulation of symbolic and social capital is not possible. This is the case when the internal cohesion of intellectuals is the only thing that allows them to withstand the attacks of hostile powers working in concert. Their internal cohesion is embodied and protected by the rise of a very sharp distinction between intellectual and nonintellectual principles of hierarchization, that is, a very sharp distinction between symbolic capital and other kinds of capital. But recall from chapter three that temporal powers do not necessarily work in concert against intellectuals in federalist discursive formations like the United States, so such an absolute antinomy between symbolic and other kinds of capital may not exist there. This was indeed the case—recall from chapter two that even the purists of the poetry field did not refrain from putting a price tag on poetry and that their relationship to political power was not always one of rejection. Specialization in capital accumulation, therefore, is to be rejected in them.

*Ethical purity.* Finally, my findings lead me to believe that the emphasis Bourdieu, Foucault and Sartre all placed on uncontested, absolute ethical principles over the dictates of means/ends rationality may sometimes mislead intellectuals.

Sartre's position follows from the Nietzschean roots of his philosophy. The decision of the total intellectual to commit himself/herself to political causes, being a purely individual leap of faith, has its ground not in means/ends rationality – though it may well be related to value rationality – but in the will. Foucault's, I believe, is the

result of an omission—his anti-essentialist theorization of power could have led to the renunciation of the moral stand of the universal intellectual, but his account of the rise of the specific intellectual bypasses this issue. Bourdieu's position, the most developed, follows from his view of the structure of the fields of cultural production. First, during their autonomization, these fields cohere more and more around a number of values like truth and beauty. Second, the opposition between autonomous and heteronomous actors in the field means that the temporal powers can always subvert the challenge these values pose to them by supporting the heteronomous pole. As a result, the struggle between dissenting intellectuals and temporal powers turns to a showdown between the means/ends rationality of the state and of the market on one hand and the pure ethics of the autonomous intellectual on the other—autonomous intellectuals need to defend their own interests, but in the process they must respect the ethical principles that embody their field values. Otherwise the distinction between them and heteronomous intellectuals cannot be made, and that leads to a loss of internal cohesion and credibility vis-à-vis the lay public.

But this emphasis on ethical purity cannot account for the literary/political outcomes of twentieth-century U.S. poets. Recall the main arguments of chapter three—one needs to make a clear distinction between republican and federalist discursive formations and federalist discursive formations call for a strategy of constantly negotiating one's relationship to various kinds of power. And these negotiations, as implicit give-and-takes between hegemonic actors and intellectuals, require intellectuals to routinely violate any ethical principle stated independently of time and place. Recall that the long-term success of U.S. poets was due primarily to the timely deals they struck

with popular taste and with universities. If the dominant movements in U.S. poetry had always followed the ethics of purity Bourdieu advocates, they would have remained outside universities in the 1940s and rejected the watering down of their language that enabled them to come into contact with the masses in the 1950s.

The evidence from chapter four also challenges ethical purism. During the Vietnam period, the ethics of purity would have forced Robert Lowell to keep attacking the Nixon administration in the exact same way he attacked the Johnson administration, resulting in frustration, artistic discredit, and the loss of control over the narrative of the war in the public sphere to the spin-doctors of the administration. Even before that, the shrewd strategy Lowell used to embarrass Johnson in 1965 – initially accepting the president’s invitation, allowing him to advertise this acceptance, and only then writing an open letter to national newspapers – would have been impermissible. If pure ethics ruled the day, the White House Festival of the Arts would not have been an embarrassment for the authorities but a fortunately averted disaster that never made its way to historical accounts of the war.

It could be argued that the rejection of means/ends rationality and the celebration of absolute values, individuality and complexity, were part of the constitution of the poetry field, so violations of ethical purity automatically disqualified one, in the eyes of his/her peers, from membership in the poetry field. These values, however, were vague enough to admit multiple interpretations and poets did not have to advertise the true logic of their literary/political practices—in some cases, this would have been impossible because their motives were not transparent to themselves, let alone to others. Some interpretations of individuality and complexity became dominant in each period, but as

cultural and political conjuncture shifted the dominant interpretations also changed. The multivocality of these values allowed poets of all kinds to look like they were putting timeless principles ahead of the means by which these principles would be realized, while choosing the option that best served the needs of the moment. Therefore it is true, with Bourdieu, that the intellectual could not be credible in the public sphere if he/she did not maintain a veneer of ethical purity, but appearances and reality were not the same. True, sometimes it was difficult to project oneself as a pure ethicist, and even the best players of this game lost credibility in some quarters—in hindsight, it is easy to see that Robert Lowell was manipulating his public image to embarrass political elites, for example. But this was a risk that the poets needed to take.

Bourdieu has one more argument in favor of ethical purity that should be considered. If intellectuals do not remain loyal to their own values and principles, he argues, temporal powers can divide them by supporting the actors who occupy the heteronomous pole. But as I argued in chapter three, the poets did not have to face all the temporal powers at once; it is intellectuals who can divide their opponents in federalist discursive formations. Provided that the institutional setup of intellectual practice is diversely competitive, the fragmentation of intellectuals is not a liability but an asset in such contexts as it reflects the fragmentation of the powers and allows multiple autonomy programs to vie for dominance. In other words, division does not necessarily make intellectuals weak, it can also make them, as a whole, more perceptive to fateful changes in the political conjuncture.

*The pragmatic intellectual.* Table 6.2 summarizes the findings that emerge from these theoretical contrasts. Literary/political success in the U.S. poetry field required a configuration that cannot be captured in terms of the four canonical views of the dissenting intellectual. Contra Gramsci, Sartre, and Foucault, it required the differentiation of interest. Contra Sartre, it required specialization in intellectual activity. Contra Sartre, Foucault, and Bourdieu, it also required specialization in political activity, diversification in capital accumulation strategies, and the rejection of ethical purity.

Table 6.2. Cases of literary/political success in twentieth-century U.S. poetry vs. organic, total, specific, and collective intellectual.

	Organic intellectual	Total intellectual	Specific intellectual	Collective intellectual	Cases of literary/political success in U.S. poetry
Differentiation of interest	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Specialization in intellectual activity	n/a	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Specialization in political activity	n/a	No	No	No	Yes
Specialization in capital	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

accumulation					
Ethical purity	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

The name I propose for the last column of table 6.2 is *pragmatic intellectual*. Unlike total, specific, and collective intellectuals, people like Robert Lowell had to discriminate between and adapt to the succession of periods characterized by wide differences in terms of the openness of the political and cultural opportunity structure. They also had to learn to distinguish between adversaries that posed different amounts of danger and make temporary deals with less threatening ones. Because the prevailing image of the public intellectual was imported from continental Europe, they had the further task of convincing their audiences, including themselves, that they were constitutionally unable to entertain such polluting considerations. In short, they had to make maximum use of opportunities when they were available, even if this meant acting in ways that contradicted the noble veneer they had to maintain; and to find long-term strategies of making sure that they could help bring such opportunities about and recognize them for what they are. They also had to be able to hold out for extended periods of time that offered no clear opportunities—Lowell’s relative silence about political issues between 1943 and 1965, for instance.

### **6.5. Future Research**

The most obvious application of the framework I developed is to places that are closer to the U.S. than to France in terms of the centralization of temporal powers. As such, if the arguments I advanced here do not survive encounters with evidence from

Canada, Britain, and the Netherlands, they need to be revised drastically. On the other hand, if intellectuals in Wilhelmine Germany, which should be grouped together with France in this regard, benefited from the strategies I described, that also indicates the need for revision.

Likewise, to the extent that some major contenders for political office are significantly more dependent on intellectuals than their rivals, the backstage/frontstage distinction should become salient, and that could be tested against comparative evidence. But even more exciting would be a focus on places where the political opportunity structure is consistently hostile to dissenting intellectuals, such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union under Stalin. If the soundest strategy in those places is the one Bourdieu described for France, it should be clear once and for all that what matters is not the degree of repression but the relative unity of the powers.

Beyond contexts with direct implications for my theories, it is important to see how these concepts fare outside the west. My arguments are based on a study of a western country and the comparisons I draw are to another western country. Outside the capitalist core, and particularly in the Middle East, the political, economic, cultural, and epistemological weights of orientalism and colonialism are to be reckoned with. I would expect the encounter with the east to destabilize and historicize the concepts I advance, but I cannot predict in what ways this would happen. But I suspect that a comparison between early republican Turkey and postcolonial India would be most fruitful, as these countries would be clear examples of republican and federalist discursive formations respectively.

Finally, this dissertation has implications beyond the sociology of intellectuals. The core distinction I made between federalist and republican discursive formations, for instance, is predicated on intellectuals' access to the field of power, the arena where the relative values of various kinds of capital are established. Without such access, intellectuals cannot make temporary alliances with some foes, pitting them against one another in search of ever better bargains. And intellectuals are not the only group who do not have much political or economic power but have access to the field of power—that is, they are not the only category that occupies a dominated position among the dominant actors of a society. In liberal democracies, the leaders of legally recognized ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities have a similar situation. Therefore their safety and dignity may hinge on their ability to tell whether they inhabit a republican or federalist discursive formation. Similarly, these groups need to judge whether the political and cultural opportunity structure they inhabit is more or less stable; if my arguments have validity this difference should translate to a difference in strategy—the less stable the context, the greater the relative importance of activities that target potential sympathizers vis-à-vis those that target potential adversaries.

## APPENDIX

### GUIDE TO U.S. POETS AND POETRY MOVEMENTS MENTIONED

ASHBERY, JOHN (1927- ): Born in Rochester, New York to a wealthy family, Ashbery attended the private and elite Deerfield Academy before Harvard University. At Harvard he met Kenneth KOCH and Frank O'HARA, with whom he was then grouped as NEW YORK SCHOOL because after graduation all three poets moved to New York, where they became part of the city's art scene. In 1975, Ashbery won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for poetry with *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*. He may be regarded as the greatest living U.S. poet.

AUDEN, W. H. (1907-1973): Auden achieved fame as a great poet in his native Britain, but from 1939 on he lived in New York and became a U.S. citizen in 1946. In his early career he exemplified the figure of the committed writer, being involved with the Communist Party. After the outbreak of World War II, however, he concluded, famously, that poetry "makes nothing happen." He was equally at home in modernist exploration and traditional forms; his style went back and forth between them over the course of his long career. Auden was the referee and editor of the Yale Younger Poets Series at its height; to a great extent it was his presence that made this award so prestigious.

BARAKA, AMIRI (1934- ): Born in Newark, New Jersey to a working-class African American family, Baraka's given name was LeRoi Jones. He attended several universities around New York but did not graduate. He became part of the Lower East Side poetry scene in the 1950s, and was anthologized in *NEW AMERICAN POETRY*. In the 1960s, he also became involved in the Black Arts Movement; after the murder of Malcolm X he became a black nationalist, converting to the Nation of Islam and changing his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka. Prior to this, he had maintained interest in Zen Buddhism, corresponding with Allen GINSBERG and Gary SNYDER about it. In the middle 1970s, he renounced black nationalism and became a Marxist.

BEAT POETRY: The name given to the poetry of Allen GINSBERG, Jack KEROUAC and Gregory CORSO. The Beats were included in *NEW AMERICAN POETRY*. Distinguishing characteristics are free verse, accessibility, colloquialism, celebration of free sex and mind-altering drugs. The Beats became the subject of a media frenzy after Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* (1956) was charged with obscenity and acquitted.

BELL, MARVIN (1937- ): A first-generation Jewish American, Bell was born in New York. After graduating from Alfred University, Bell got an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, joining the second generation of New Criticism. From 1965 to 2005, he was on the faculty of the Workshop.

BERRIGAN, TED (1934-1983): Associated with the second generation of *NEW YORK SCHOOL*, Berrigan graduated from the University of Oklahoma after serving in the U.S.

Army for three years. He was an active member of the lower east side poetry scene in New York.

BERRY, WENDELL (1934- ): Berry was born in Kentucky; his father was a lawyer and tobacco farmer. After graduating from the University of Kentucky, he studied creative writing at Stanford. His early poetry carries New Critical influences, but he wasn't anthologized in *New Poets of England and America*. During the sixties, he became more and more involved in the antiacademic camp and in the Vietnam peace movement. From 1965 on, he has lived in a farm in Kentucky, which influenced his writing; like Galway KINNELL and Gary SNYDER, Berry is regarded as a poet of nature.

BERRYMAN, JOHN (1914-1972): After graduating from Columbia University in 1936, Berryman became one of the leading MIDDLE GENERATION POETS. He became a student of the New Critics and a first-class poetry critic, until in the late 1950s he broke ranks and became a leader of CONFESSIONAL poetry—although he never accepted the label himself. He was on the faculty of the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, the oldest and most prestigious of its kind. He died by suicide.

BISHOP, ELIZABETH (1911-1979): Born to a wealthy family in Worcester, Massachusetts, Bishop graduated from Vassar College, where she met Marianne MOORE. Under her influence, she became a modernist poet; but the wealth she inherited allowed her to live without employment in Brazil. This enabled Bishop to chart a unique

trajectory—she never became involved with New Criticism or with the antiacademic reaction to it.

BLACK MOUNTAIN SCHOOL: The movement led by Charles OLSON, Robert CREELEY, Denise LEVERTOV, and Robert DUNCAN. John WIENERS, Larry Eigner, Joel Oppenheimer, Jonathan Williams, and Paul CARROLL are among its second generation followers. It was part of the antiacademic coalition. It derives its name from Black Mountain College, the alternative higher education institution of which Olson was the last rector. Olson, Creeley, Duncan and Levertov agreed that the form of a poem cannot be determined in advance, it follows from its content and forms in an open process. In practice, this meant free verse.

BLY, ROBERT (1926- ): Born in Minnesota to a Norwegian farming family, Bly served in the U.S. Navy from 1944 to 1946 and then attended Harvard, where he met Donald Hall, Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, and other major figures of U.S. poetry. His early poems were New Critical, and he was anthologized in *New Poets of England and America*. From the mid-1950s on, however, he became a sharp critic of New Criticism, and started writing free verse. He edited *The Fifties*, which later became *The Sixties*. He was highly active in the Vietnam peace movement; he co-founded *Writers Against the War* and co-organized nationwide poetry readings. He was interested in Buddhism and, to a lesser degree, neopaganism.

BROOKS, CLEANTH (1906-1994): Brooks's father was a Methodist minister in Kentucky. After attending a private academy, he went to Vanderbilt University. After spending time in Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, he joined the faculty of Louisiana State University. He then wrote two books of poetry criticism that defined the New Criticism, *Understanding Poetry* (1938) and *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947). From 1947 to 1974, he taught at Yale.

CARROLL, PAUL (1925-1996): Minor Black Mountain poet. With Irving Rosenthal, he was editor of University of Chicago's *Chicago Review*, where his publication of Beat writers caused a controversy. He resigned as a result from *Review* in 1958, founding *Big Table*. *Table* kept publishing the Beats and became the subject of an obscenity trial, which Carroll won in the appeals court.

CONFESSIONAL POETRY: Confessional poetry's subject matter is the details of the emotional and mental life of its author; these details are often embarrassing. Confessional poetry started with Robert LOWELL's *Life Studies* (1959), and its other leading figures are, like Lowell, renegades from NEW CRITICISM: John BERRYMAN, Sylvia PLATH, Anne SEXTON, W. D. SNODGRASS. Allen GINSBERG is also sometimes considered a confessional poet. Most of these poets expressed discomfort with the label at some point in their careers.

CORMAN, CID (1924-2004): Corman was born in Boston to Ukrainian immigrants. After graduating from Tufts University, he did graduate work in the University of

Michigan but dropped out and, after travelling around the U.S., started a radio program about poetry. In 1951, he launched *Origin*, which became an outlet of BLACK MOUNTAIN poetry. He spent most of the 1960s and 70s in Europe and Japan.

CORSO, GREGORY (1930-2001): Corso grew up in poverty a working-class neighborhood in New York, and spent most of his adolescence in jail for petty crimes. His fortunes changed when he met Allen GINSBERG, who introduced him to his literary friends, in 1949. From then on, he became a member of the inner circle of BEAT poets and writers.

CRANE, HART (1899-1932): Crane belonged to the first wave of modernist poetry, but his reputation has fallen behind those of T. S. ELIOT, Ezra POUND, and Wallace STEVENS. His father was a successful Ohio businessman, but Crane dropped out of high school to live in New York. His last work, *The Bridge*, is an early example of long modernist poems; the poor reviews it received are partly responsible for his suicide.

CREELEY, ROBERT (1926-2001): One of the four leaders of BLACK MOUNTAIN poetry, Creeley was born to a wealthy New Hampshire family that was about to lose its fortune in the Great Depression. He nevertheless attended Harvard after a private boarding school, but without graduating. He finished his degree at Black Mountain College, where he came into contact with and became the right hand of Charles OLSON. He lived in Spain in the 1950s, where he edited *Black Mountain Review*. He became a faculty member at the State University of New York, Albany, in the 1970s.

CUMMINGS, E. E. (1894-1962): A first-generation modernist whose experiments in poetic form went much further than the best-known modernists T. S. ELIOT and Ezra POUND. He belonged to the cultural elite of the U.S. by birth—his father was a sociology professor at Harvard University. He graduated from Harvard *summa cum laude*. His more traditional work, especially his sonnets, has made him popular among the general population as well.

DI PRIMA, DIANE (1934- ): Born in New York to a left-wing working-class Italian family, di Prima attended Swarthmore College but dropped out, returning to the bohemian life of New York. Her early work is influenced by the BEATS, and her trajectory is similar to theirs: In 1968, she moved to San Francisco to focus on training with Zen master Shunryu Suzuki and on political activity with the anarchist collective Diggers. She was not included in *New American Poetry*, but was included in its second edition, *The Postmoderns*.

DICKEY, JAMES (1923-1997): Dickey was born in Georgia, his lawyer father introduced him to literature. After fighting in the Second World War, he graduated from Vanderbilt University. He was anthologized in *New Poets of England and America*, but like many second generation New Critics he too shifted to a more open verse in the 1960s. Dickey supported the war in Vietnam; and his centrist views brought him many opportunities: He was the Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress in 1966, and he read his poetry in the inauguration ceremony for Jimmy Carter. But he was sharply

criticized among poets for these views; Robert Bly and Denise Levertov broke with him as a result.

DUERDEN, RICHARD (1927- ): Duerden was a minor San Francisco poet; he appeared in Donald Allen's *New American Poetry*.

DUNCAN, ROBERT (1919-1988): Duncan's adoptive parents were upper-middle class and part of a Theosophist circle. He graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, and at this time became part of the group around Kenneth REXROTH, participating in the SAN FRANCISCO RENAISSANCE. He eventually became the assistant director of San Francisco Poetry Center. He also developed ties to what would become the BLACK MOUNTAIN school. He was suspicious of Donald Allen's motives and the BEATS' fame-seeking behavior, but finally agreed to contribute to *New American Poetry*. During the Vietnam period, Duncan wrote some of the best antiwar poetry, but he disagreed strongly with the activism of his close friend Denise LEVERTOV, feeling that Levertov was putting activism first and doing a disservice to art.

DWORKIN, ANDREA (1946-2005): Known primarily as a feminist theorist and activist, Andrea Dworkin also had a claim to being a poet. She was highly influenced by the BEATS, but she was too young to have been included in *New American Poetry*. From her time at Bennington College on, however, her poetry fell behind her activism and prose writing.

EBERHART, RICHARD (1904-2005): Eberhart is best classified with MIDDLE GENERATION POETS; he forms a bridge between the high modernism of ELIOT and POUND on one hand and sixties poets like LOWELL and GINSBERG. He grew up in a large estate in rural Minnesota, graduated from Dartmouth College, and did graduate work at Harvard. He won a Pulitzer Prize in 1966 and a National Book Award in 1977.

ELIOT, T. S. (1888-1965): Eliot is the giant of modernism, and of twentieth-century poetry in general. He was born to a Boston Brahmin family and educated at Harvard, after which he moved to England, where he met Ezra POUND. Pound advocated his work, getting it published in the leading poetry journals of the time. Eliot eventually grew dissatisfied with the United States, calling it a failed experiment whose fate should be gathered back into that of Britain and becoming a British citizen himself. His conservative politics, Anglophilia, and formalism shaped the NEW CRITICISM, though he often wrote free verse. For that reason, the antiacademic opposition to the New Criticism demonized Eliot in the 1950s and 60s.

FERLINGHETTI, LAWRENCE (1917- ): Orphaned at an early age, Ferlinghetti was adopted at age 7 by a wealthy family whose wealth he was later to inherit. After graduating from the University of North Carolina, he served in the U.S. military during World War II, where his experience converted him to pacifism. Using the G.I. bill, he earned a doctorate in literature at the Sorbonne. He eventually settled in San Francisco. With Peter Martin, he opened a paperback-only bookstore, City Lights, which became the

center of the city's literary and artistic life. He participated in the SAN FRANCISCO RENAISSANCE, and was associated with the BEATS. He published Ginsberg's first volume of poems, *Howl and Other Poems*, which was sued for obscenity and acquitted.

FROST, ROBERT (1874-1963): Robert Frost is the exception that proves the rule in U.S. poetry's transition to modernism. While the poetry field was being split between followers of conventional, family-friendly fireside poetry and the modernists who explored European culture, new forms and taboo subjects, Frost wrote a dense, ambiguous poetry that celebrated rural New England in closed forms. This was a position that could be occupied by one person, and Frost filled it well. He was respected by modernists and traditionalists alike—Robert LOWELL held him in high esteem and he became the first poet to read at a presidential inauguration in 1961. Frost was poet-in-residence at various universities; his books still have very high sales.

GINSBERG, ALLEN (1926-1997): Born in New Jersey to leftist Russian Jewish parents, Ginsberg attended Columbia University on a trade union scholarship. At Columbia he met Jack KEROUAC and William S. Burroughs, the writers he collaborated with in launching the BEAT movement. After living a sedentary life on the margins of U.S. society in the early 1950s, Ginsberg became famous when his first book of poems was sued for obscenity and acquitted in a highly publicized trial. He emerged as a spokesperson of the antiacademic coalition that Donald Allen gathered in *The New American Poetry*. In the 1960s and 1970s, he was active in a number of social movements, most importantly the peace movement and the gay liberation movement.

HALL, DONALD (1928- ): Born in 1928 to a wealthy family in New England, Hall attended the prestigious and private Philip Exeter Academy and graduated from Harvard University, where he met Robert Bly, John Ashbery, Adrienne Rich, and other talents. After graduation, he became a tenured professor at the University of Michigan. He developed under the tutelage of the New Criticism, and was one of the three editors of the anthology that featured its second generation, *New Poets of England and America*. In the 1960s, Hall's social environment and his poetry changed gradually: He resigned from his academic job and moved to a farm, befriended some key antiacademics like Gary SNYDER, and started writing in free verse.

HOLLANDER, JOHN (1929- ): Hollander was born in New York City, his father was a wealthy physiologist. He graduated from Columbia University, where he studied with Lionel Trilling, and earned a doctorate at Indiana University. His first book of poems was selected by W. H. Auden for the prestigious Yale Series of Younger Poets, and he was included in *New Poets of England and America*.

JARRELL, RANDALL (1914-1965): Born in Tennessee, Jarrell attended Vanderbilt University, where he met John Crowe RANSOM, and followed him to Kenyon College. He became the best poetry critic of the postwar period, and then earned the reputation of a major poet when he won the 1961 National Book Award for *The Woman at the Washington Zoo*.

JONES, LEROI: See BARAKA, AMIRI.

KANDEL, LENORE (1932-2009): Kandel is sometimes identified as a second-generation BEAT poet; more safely she is a SAN FRANCISCO RENAISSANCE poet. She was not included in *New American Poetry*, but briefly became famous locally when her *Love Book* (1966) was sued for obscenity and acquitted. She participated in the San Francisco Human Be-In.

KEROUAC, JACK (1923-1969): Son of a devoutly Catholic working-class family in Massachusetts, Kerouac met Allen GINSBERG at Columbia University, which he attended on a football scholarship. His poetry and novels are the most famous of the BEAT movement. He was also the driving force behind the popularization of Zen Buddhism in the mid-1950s. Kerouac returned to Catholicism in the 1960s, however, and he also stands out among the Beats with his political conservatism.

KINNELL, GALWAY (1927- ): Kinnell's father was a working-class Scottish immigrant. He attended Princeton University on a scholarship. His early poems were in closed forms and he featured in *New Poets of England and America*, but he quickly switched to the antiacademic camp. He was active in the civil rights movement and in the Vietnam peace movement.

KUNITZ, STANLEY (1905-2006): Over his long career Kunitz won all the major poetry awards, but he is best understood as a MIDDLE GENERATION poet—he is not regarded

as a leading modernist but a good follower of the high modernist tradition. Kunitz was born to Lithuanian Jewish immigrant parents, and he studied at Harvard. He was a conscientious objector to World War II.

KYGER, JOANNE (1934- ): Kyger is associated with the BEATS and with the SAN FRANCISCO RENAISSANCE. She was not included in *New American Poetry*, but her poems appeared in its second edition, *The Postmoderns*. She graduated from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and was a disciple of Shunryu Suzuki, the Master of San Francisco Zen Center.

LAMANTIA, PHILIP (1927-2005): SAN FRANCISCO RENAISSANCE poet Philip Lamantia was born to Sicilian immigrants. His first poems were published when he was 15, and they were praised by Andre Breton, the famous leader of French surrealism. He dropped out of high school to join the surrealist circle in New York, but returned to San Francisco. He was anthologized in *New American Poetry*.

LEVERTOV, DENISE (1923-1997): A major BLACK MOUNTAIN poet, Levertov was born in England to a bookish and politically active middle-class family. She did not have formal educational credentials, but she was homeschooled by her highly literate mother. She moved to the U.S. after marrying the writer Mitch Goodman, and quickly adopted the American idiom, coming under the influence of W. C. WILLIAMS and developing friendships with Robert CREELEY, Robert DUNCAN, and Charles OLSON. She was anthologized in *The New American Poetry*. During the Vietnam period, she was highly

active in the peace movement, but her purism and moralism damaged her relationships with many poets.

LOWELL, ROBERT (1917-1977): Born to a Boston Brahmin family, Lowell attended a private boarding school and was admitted to Harvard, but he transferred to Kenyon College to study with John Crowe RANSOM. He became the leading voice of second generation NEW CRITICISM before switching to a looser style in *Life Studies* (1959) partly as a result of his exposure to BEAT writing. He then became the leader of CONFSSIONAL poetry, advising Anne SEXTON, W. D. SNODGRASS, and Sylvia PLATH, who were his students at Boston University. Lowell was highly active in the peace movement during the Vietnam era and relatively successful in his political interventions.

MASTERS, EDGAR LEE (1868-1950): Masters grew up in Illinois and worked for his father's law practice until his masterpiece, *Spoon River Anthology* (1915) came out. This book heralded a populist streak in modernism, an equivalent of European realism in U.S. verse—it used free verse and everyday language to describe the less glorifiable aspects of life in a small Midwestern town. Masters's later books were not as successful.

MCCLURE, MICHAEL (1932- ): McClure is a poet of the SAN FRANCISCO RENAISSANCE and a fellow traveler of the BEATS. He was born in Kansas and graduated from San Francisco State College, where he met Kenneth REXROTH and Robert DUNCAN, who shaped his poetry. McClure was anthologized in *New American*

*Poetry*. Initially uninterested in politics, he became more radical after a play he wrote and directed, *The Beard*, was raided by the police and sued for obscenity in 1966. He then appeared in the San Francisco Be-In with Gary SNYDER, Allen GINSBERG, and Lenore KANDEL.

MERRILL, JAMES (1926-1995): Merrill's father was a wealthy banker; he co-founded the investment firm Merrill-Lynch. James Merrill received an excellent education, graduating from Amherst College. He was anthologized in *New Poets of England and America*, but his poetry, like many contributors to that volume, partially converged with the antiacademic revolt. Merrill is celebrated as one of the two or three most accomplished poets of the 1970s and 80s, winning every major poetry award.

MERWIN, W. S. (1927- ): Merwin's father was an Episcopalian minister from Pennsylvania, he attended Princeton University on a scholarship. His first volume was included in the prestigious Yale Series of Younger Poets, and he was anthologized in *New Poets of England and America*. In the 1960s, he took a surrealist turn and he befriended many antiacademics in the course of his active participation in the Vietnam peace movement. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1971. From the late 1970s on, interest in Buddhism shaped his poetry.

MICHELINE, JACK (1929-1998): Minor BEAT/SAN FRANCISCO RENAISSANCE poet. Donald Allen left him out of *New American Poetry*, believing his poems to be subpar. Allen GINSBERG and Lawrence FERLINGHETTI were of the same opinion.

MIDDLE GENERATION POETS: Those modernists who were too young to participate in the Modernist Revolution of 1910-1920 and too old to have the critical distance toward it necessary for undertaking a similarly ambitious program. Includes John BERRYMAN, Stanley KUNITZ, Delmore SCHWARTZ, Theodore Roethke, and Anthony Hecht, among others.

MOORE, MARIANNE (1887-1972): Some critics and literary historians include Moore in the canon of the founders of modernism. She graduated from Bryn Mawr College in 1905 and travelled extensively in Europe until World War I, where she met T. S. ELIOT, Ezra POUND, and W. C. WILLIAMS. She served as the editor of the leading journal *The Dial*, and in the postwar period mentored up-and-coming poets like James MERRILL, Allen GINSBERG, and Elizabeth BISHOP. Her *Collected Poems* (1951) won the Pulitzer Prize, the Bollingen Prize, and the National Book Award.

NEW AMERICAN POETRY: *The New American Poetry* is the name of the poetry anthology that Donald Allen edited and published in 1960. It included the BEATS, SAN FRANCISCO RENAISSANCE, BLACK MOUNTAIN POETRY, and the NEW YORK SCHOOL. Allen explicitly attacked the NEW CRITICISM in the preface he wrote, leading to what some commentators called the “Anthology Wars”—in large part, *New American Poetry* was a response to *New Poets of England and America*, which featured the second generation of the New Criticism. A follow-up volume to *New American Poetry* appeared in 1982, entitled *The Postmoderns: The New American Poetry Revised*.

NEW CRITICISM: Coming to prominence in the late 1930s, New Criticism advocated formalism, purism and conservatism in literature. New Critical poems were written in closed forms, dense, intentionally ambiguous, and they made use of an artificial British English. Leaders of the New Criticism – e.g. John Crowe RANSOM, Robert Penn Warren, Allen TATE – were mostly conservative Southern secessionists, but their most prominent students – Robert LOWELL, John BERRYMAN, Richard WILBUR, Randall JARRELL – were from the north and in some cases had leftist sympathies. The greatest achievement of the New Critics was the toehold they gained in universities. They were challenged in the 1950s by the movements that *The New American Poetry* showcased; in the 1960s they lost their dominant position.

NEW YORK SCHOOL OF POETRY: This is the name given to the work of John ASHBERY, Kenneth KOCH, James SCHUYLER, and Frank O’HARA. Ashbery, Koch and O’Hara met at Harvard, and began to write a free verse influenced by the campy gay culture of New York, where they lived after graduation. Initially considered too “uptown” by some Beats, they were eventually included in the antiacademic coalition and featured in *The New American Poetry*.

NORSE, HAROLD (1916-2009): If he had not left the U.S. for Europe in 1954, Norse could have become one of the superstars of the BEAT movement. As a result of his long absence, however, he was not included in either *The New American Poetry* or its successor, *The Postmoderns*. Norse was the son of an unmarried Jewish immigrant from

Lithuania. He was originally part of the inner circle of W. H. AUDEN in New York, but he then switched his poetic allegiance to W. C. WILLIAMS, who singled him out as the best poet of his generation.

O'HARA, FRANK (1926-1966): If John ASHBERRY was the theoretical mind of the NEW YORK SCHOOL, O'Hara was its heart. He grew up in a newly rich family and attended Harvard University. After graduation, he did graduate work at Michigan, earning the Hopwood Prize. Afterwards he lived in New York, working in the Museum of Modern Art and writing art reviews. He died in a car accident.

OLSON, CHARLES (1910-1970): The leader of BLACK MOUNTAIN poetry, Olson was the son of a mailman. He graduated from Wesleyan and entered government service. He was seen as a rising star in the Democratic Party under Roosevelt but could not get along with Truman, which caused him to resign and enter the Ph.D. program in literature at Harvard. He left without defending his dissertation, but he eventually became the last rector of Black Mountain College, where he became the center of the most significant literary and artistic avant-garde of the period.

PADGETT, RON (1942- ): Padgett was a second-generation NEW YORK SCHOOL poet, he also had affinities with the BEATS. In the 1970s, he was a leading figure of the lower east side poetry scene in New York.

PLATH, SYLVIA (1932-1963): Plath became famous partly as a result of her mental breakdowns, her tempestuous marriage to British poet Ted Hughes and her suicide, but her poetry could have easily done it by itself in time. Her father was a professor of biology and German, and his overbearing presence caused Plath's personal doom while also providing her with poetic inspiration. She was a student of Robert LOWELL; her work is considered CONFESSIONAL. She was included in the second selection of *New Poets of England and America*.

POUND, EZRA (1885-1972): Pound was the glue that held the disparate elements of high modernism together. Born to a political family, he graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and lived in Europe, becoming a central figure in the literary scenes of London and Paris. In London he advocated the work of T. S. ELIOT and invented the first few "-ism"s of literary modernism. From the 1930s on, he became an anti-Semite and a sympathizer of Italian fascism; as a result he was tried for treason after World War II. Nevertheless Pound's legacy was indispensable for the antiacademic revolt of the 1960s.

RANSOM, JOHN CROWE (1888-1974): Son of a Methodist minister from Tennessee, Ransom entered Vanderbilt University at age 15 and then became a Rhodes Scholar. He became a faculty member at Vanderbilt after World War I, moving to Kenyon College in 1938. He is regarded as the leader of the NEW CRITICISM, and he was mentor to John BERRYMAN, Allen TATE, Randall JARRELL, and Robert LOWELL, among others. In his politics he was a conservative, but his writings also anticipate modern

environmentalism. He won the Bollingen Prize in 1951 and the National Book Award in 1964.

REXROTH, KENNETH (1905-1982): Rexroth was the undisputed leader of the SAN FRANCISCO RENAISSANCE—the poets and artists of the city came together in the Saturday soiree he hosted in his apartment. He was an immensely well-read autodidact, a pacifist, and an anarchist. He was instrumental in the coming to fame of the BEATS, but the media attention they drew and their handling of the situation alienated him.

RICH, ADRIENNE (1929- ): Rich is the foremost poet of the feminist movement, to which she has also contributed with influential essays. Like Sylvia PLATH, with whom she is sometimes grouped as a CONFSSIONAL poet, Rich's life was shaped decisively by the overbearing presence of her father, who was a professor at Johns Hopkins University. She graduated from Harvard in 1951, and W. H. AUDEN chose her first book for the Yale Younger Poets Series. Her early work was in the NEW CRITICAL mould – she was included in *New Poets of England and America* – but in the 1960s she sought a more open verse capable of expressing a wider spectrum of human feeling. She was highly active in the Vietnam peace movement.

SANDBURG, CARL (1878-1967): Sandburg was a populist poet like Edgar Lee MASTERS and Vachel Lindsay. He worked in manual jobs after eighth grade, earning the right to receive college tuition after his military service during the Spanish-American War. His “authentic American” persona, expressed in simple free verse, captivated

modernist poets, who learned of his work from 1914 on. After 1936, his work moved away from political subjects and toward nature.

SANDERS, ED (1939- ): Sanders grew up in the suburbs of Kansas City, enrolling in the University of Missouri. He moved to New York to meet Allen GINSBERG, who became his mentor, and he graduated from New York University. He then became a minor BEAT poet and a singer with a rock band. He wasn't anthologized in *New American Poetry*, but was included in its successor volume, *The Postmoderns*.

SAN FRANCISCO RENAISSANCE: The metropolitan area around the city of San Francisco became the center of a distinct avant-garde in the postwar period as its economy and universities grew. The renaissance is the loose name given to the increased poetic and literary activity in the city around 1955; it is a component of the NEW AMERICAN POETRY. As such, it was bohemian in spirit and oriented toward daily American experience and continental European poetic forms as opposed to the NEW CRITICISM's Anglophilia.

SCHWARTZ, DELMORE (1913-1966): Schwartz was born and raised in Brooklyn, and he graduated from New York University. He was a student of the NEW CRITICS and a MIDDLE GENERATION poet. He won the Bollingen Prize in 1951, becoming the youngest poet to achieve that honor. Personal difficulties prevented further success, however, and he died alone of alcoholism in a hotel room.

SEXTON, ANNE (1928-1974): Like Sylvia PLATH, Sexton struggled with severe depression, wrote about it in her poems, and committed suicide. She was also a student of Robert LOWELL and is considered a CONFSSIONAL poet. Her father was the owner of a wool firm; her education was cut when she eloped. She was included in the second selection of *New Poets of England and America*; she received the Pulitzer Prize in 1967.

SIMPSON, LOUIS (1923- ): Simpson was one of the three editors of *New Poets of England and America*; his poems also appeared in that volume. He won the 1964 Pulitzer Prize. His father was a lawyer in Jamaica, and he came to the U.S. at age 17 to attend Columbia University, from which he also got a Ph.D.

SNODGRASS, W. D. (1926-2009): Snodgrass's father was a Pennsylvania accountant. He attended the University of Iowa, eventually getting involved with its Writers' Workshop. Here he became a protégé of Robert LOWELL, with whom he is considered a leading practitioner of CONFSSIONAL POETRY. Snodgrass was included in *New Poets of England and America*.

SNYDER, GARY (1930- ): Snyder was raised in the Pacific Northwest; his parents were homesteaders and anarchists. He graduated from Reed College, where he met Philip WHALEN and Lew WELCH. He then moved to San Francisco and participated in the SAN FRANCISCO RENAISSANCE; he is also sometimes considered a BEAT poet because of his friendship with Allen GINSBERG and Jack KEROUAC. Snyder was one of the first Americans who received Zen training in a Japanese monastery in the postwar

period, and he became an icon of the sixties counterculture. He was active in the Vietnam peace movement.

SPICER, JACK (1925-1965): Spicer was, with Kenneth REXROTH and Robert DUNCAN, the heart of the San Francisco poetry scene before Gary SNYDER, Allen GINSBERG, and Jack KEROUAC arrived. His father was a hotel manager, the family lived comfortably during the Depression. He graduated from the University of California, Berkeley. He was included in *The New American Poetry*.

STAFFORD, WILLIAM (1914-1993): Stafford worked in manual jobs in his teenage years because of the depression, but his family was highly literate. He graduated from the University of Kansas, and was drafted when he was working toward a master's degree. He declared his conscientious objection and spent the period between 1942 and 1946 in a Civilian Public Service camp. He became a literature professor, and started publishing his own poetry only in 1960, but his second collection received the 1963 National Book Award. His style is influenced by the NEW CRITICISM and by CONFSSIONAL POETRY.

STEVENS, WALLACE (1879-1955): Stevens is one of four consecrated founding fathers of modernism, along with T. S. ELIOT, Ezra POUND, and W. C. WILLIAMS. He was the son of a prosperous lawyer, and graduated from New York Law School. He became the vice-president of an insurance company, a job that he kept after achieving fame as a poet. Unlike Pound and Williams, Stevens never left the U.S.

STRAND, MARK (1934- ): Strand was born in Canada and graduated from Antioch College in Ohio. He then went on to a master's degree from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, but by this time the second generation of the NEW CRITICISM had already rebelled and switched to more eclectic modes of writing. Strand's work reflects this—he uses elements from French and Latin American surrealism without entirely rejecting the Anglophilia of the New Critics.

TATE, ALLEN (1899-1979): Tate was the son of a Kentucky businessman. While studying at Vanderbilt University, he met John Crowe RANSOM and Robert Penn Warren; out of their collaboration came the NEW CRITICISM. Tate was a conservative Southern secessionist, but from 1938 to 1966 he was employed in northern schools like Kenyon College, University of Minnesota, and Princeton University.

WAKOSKI, DIANE (1937- ): Wakoski has affinities with the BEATS, the SAN FRANCISCO RENAISSANCE, the Deep Image movement, and CONFSSIONAL POETRY. She grew up in California and graduated from the University of California, Berkeley.

WALDMAN, ANNE (1945- ): Waldman's father was an English professor, she graduated from Bennington College in 1966. She was too young, therefore, to be included in *New American Poetry*, but she soon became the heart of the lower east side poetry scene, where BEAT, NEW YORK SCHOOL, and BLACK MOUNTAIN

influences had merged. Waldman became the director of the key institution of this scene, St. Mark's Poetry Project, and developed close ties to Allen GINSBERG. She was included in *The Postmoderns*, the successor to *New American Poetry*.

WELCH, LEW (1926-1971): Welch's mother came from a privilege, his father was a poor man. He graduated from Reed College, where he met Gary SNYDER and Philip WHALEN. After working in advertising, he became a cabdriver in San Francisco to focus on poetry. He was anthologized in *New American Poetry*.

WHALEN, PHILIP (1923-2002): Whalen grew up in the Pacific Northwest and attended Reed College. Here, he became friends with Gary SNYDER and Lew WELCH, with whom he discussed literature, politics, and Buddhism. Like Snyder, he immediately moved to San Francisco after graduation, working in odd jobs and writing poetry. He was included in *New American Poetry*. In the 1970s, after spending considerable time in Japan, he became a monk in San Francisco Zen Center.

WIENERS, JOHN (1934-2002): John Wieners grew up in a working-class Irish Catholic family in Boston. He graduated from Boston College. With brief intervals at Black Mountain College and in San Francisco, he lived in Boston. His poetry, anthologized in *New American Poetry*, is a good example BLACK MOUNTAIN POETRY, with surface similarities to BEAT writing.

WILBUR, RICHARD (1921- ): Wilbur perfected the NEW CRITICAL poem in the 1950s, which gained him praise then and infamy later. His family was working class, and he was a socialist. He graduated from Amherst College, served in the U.S. Army during World War II, and used his G.I. Bill money to do graduate work at Harvard. He was included in *New Poets of England and America*; he is one of the few students of the New Critics who did not switch to free verse.

WILLIAMS, WILLIAM CARLOS (1883-1963): Williams was one of the canonical modernists. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, where he met Ezra POUND, and became a doctor. After visiting Paris briefly in the 1920s, he lived all his life practicing medicine in suburban New Jersey. His style was, in marked opposition to T. S. ELIOT's, casual and proudly American; he had, unlike Eliot, POUND, and STEVENS, socialist sympathies. As the third generation of modernism reevaluated the value of Eliot's Anglophilia and conservatism, therefore, Williams emerged as an immensely influential figure. He advised almost all of the leaders of the antiacademic revolt.

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