

**“Verbal Opposition . . . Encouraged by the Powerful”:  
Transatlantic Literature and the Cultural Cold War**

BY

GREGOR BASZAK

B.S., Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz, 2013

M.A., Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz, 2015

THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2021

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:

Nicholas Brown, Chair and Advisor  
Jennifer Ashton  
Walter Benn Michaels  
Holger Helbig, University of Rostock  
Joseph Tabbi, University of Bergen

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My wife Katie and our furry cohabitor Lolek were there for almost every second of my working on this dissertation, and with the onset of a certain bumper viral strain—which shall not be mentioned by any of its many names—quite literally so. They were immensely supportive, loving, and patient, but also knew when to rip me away from the computer screen for my well-being’s sake (though in Lolek’s case, it may have also been about informing me of his lust for gross meat patés). My parents, siblings, cousins, uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews, and nearly all my friends live in faraway Germany and Poland. Much more than thanking them for their support, I almost feel the need to apologize for putting this much distance between us. But they always felt close to me in spirit, however separated in space. Through the love of my life Katie, I was also welcomed into a new family which has been as supportive and caring as everyone mentioned so far. A certain “Gruppe” provided me with an amusing running commentary on life on two continents, and of its members one, Michael Peter Hehl, was instrumental in inspiring this research project and kicking it into gear. In fact, most dissertations probably do not begin as exhibitions, but Michael assured that this one would. It was great fun co-curating “Beat und Kalter Krieg. Deutsch-amerikanische Literaturbeziehungen 1958 – 1968” at the Literaturarchiv Sulzbach-Rosenberg. For those who don’t know, Sulzbach is the center of the world. A *Hoibe* to that (of Fuchsbeck or Sperber, I really don’t take sides in that dispute)!

I heartily thank the professors who broadened my horizons (I’m thinking especially of Clemens Spahr here), the archivists who are instrumental in every project involving primary research (Lee Hiltzik at the Rockefeller Archive Center stands out), my all-star thesis committee (Jennifer Ashton, Holger Helbig, Walter Benn Michaels, and Joseph Tabbi), and, of

course, Nicholas Brown, my *Doktorvater*, as the Germans say rather poetically. “It’s a good draft so far,” his advice would usually go. “Before you turn to revisions, how about you read some Shelley?” Huh? “What does that have to do with anything?” I’d think. Days would pass, I’d get through with his recommended readings, and then—well, need I really say how incredibly useful the advice always proved?

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Page</u>
Introduction: The Cultural Cold War and the “Politics of Conviction”	1
Chapter 1: Prometheus Revisited: Gregory Corso’s “Bomb” and the Poetics of the Nuclear Age	35
Chapter 2: “Time to Have Become”: Saul Bellow’s <i>Henderson the Rain King</i> and the Persistence of Liberalism	65
Chapter 3: “What Was Important About Today’s Laugh”: Uwe Johnson’s <i>Anniversaries</i> , Private Philanthropy, and Autonomy	100
Works Cited	131
APPENDIX	145
VITA	149

## SUMMARY

The cultural prestige of the United States received a significant boost thanks to the achievements of its artists and intellectuals after World War II. The Boston Symphony Orchestra triumphantly toured Europe, while Abstract Expressionist paintings shook spectators everywhere. In 1966, revelations in the *New York Times*, *Ramparts*, and elsewhere cast a doubtful light on these accomplishments: Had the CIA secretly funded these artists and organized print-runs and exhibitions to combat anti-American sentiments in a so-called “Cultural Cold War”? What does this say about the claims to autonomy made by these writers and artists? Since the 1970s, scholars of the so-called “revisionist school” of art criticism have argued that the history of postwar American modernism needs to be rewritten in the wake of these machinations. My dissertation stems back against these short-sighted views: The revisionists make too much of the fact *that* this surreptitious support occurred, though rarely if ever *what effect* it may have had on the content and form of the works by the affected artists. Looking at the writings of the novelists Saul Bellow and Uwe Johnson, the poet Gregory Corso, the cinematic work of director Boots Riley, as well as the critical work of Clement Greenberg and Walter Höllerer, I will argue that these individuals—often supported by private foundations deeply aligned with American foreign policy interests—nevertheless held on to their independence as artists and writers. Their work needs to be understood first and foremost on aesthetic grounds, i.e. their aesthetic achievements deserve our full attention and regard. The revisionist school is wrong to question their autonomy, a fact that would have become clear if its adherents had devoted more attention to formal analysis and a thorough understanding of the complicated world of what’s been called the “liberal consensus” of

Western Cold War society. What will emerge is the fact that the revisionist school often simply disagrees with the politics of this consensus and that it casts this political disagreement, misleadingly, in aesthetic terms. Where the revisionists rely often exclusively on archival materials to make their points about the art and literature of the Cultural Cold War, the present study blends archival sources with those sources which matter the most in art and literary history—the works of art themselves.

## Introduction: The Cultural Cold War and the “Politics of Conviction”<sup>1</sup>

With or without COVID-19, the United States and China were headed for a clash. The economic fallout from the pandemic will merely accelerate developments that had already been set in motion with Donald Trump’s election in 2016. Our formerly “most favored nation” trade partner now seems to have become our adversary in a new Cold War (Myers and Mozur).

What will such a new Cold War look like? Surely, we will direct even more resources in our depleted federal budget toward armaments. But the only warfare we will hopefully experience will be psychological. A National Security Council Directive from July 10, 1950, defines “psychological warfare” as “[t]he planned use by a nation of propaganda and activities other than combat which communicate ideas and information intended to influence the opinions, attitudes, emotions and behavior of foreign groups in ways that will support the achievement of national aims” (qtd. in Saunders 4). In the Cold War against the Soviet Union, one instance of psychological warfare took the form of a cultural propaganda campaign in which the American government, via the CIA’s secretive doings, channeled money toward artists and cultural institutions to showcase the richness of American art and literature—often without the knowledge of the same artists and intellectuals who benefitted from the financial windfall. Many western European intellectuals viewed the United States as a cultural

---

<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from this introduction have previously been published in my article “A New Cultural Cold War?” *American Affairs*, vol. IV, no. 4., Winter 2020, pp. 128-48. The author thanks the editors for permission to republish these excerpts.

wasteland, and so the aim of the CIA was to change this perception and make it more favorable toward America. Historians have since called this campaign the “Cultural Cold War.”<sup>2</sup>

Can a Cultural Cold war be waged against China, as well? The conservative film critic Sonny Bunch sure hopes so. In a 2018 op-ed for the *Washington Post*, Bunch suggested that the CIA might help distribute copies of the movie *Sorry to Bother You* by rapper-turned-director Boots Riley in China. The film is meant to spoof American capitalism. Its protagonists attempt to unionize the telemarketing company RegalView which supplies what is essentially slave labor to the Silicon Valley-like megacorporation WorryFree. WorryFree’s hellish working conditions resemble those at Chinese factories well enough that its workers might see themselves in their fictional American counterparts—except that the latter are (theoretically) granted the freedom to assemble and petition for better labor contracts whereas the former are not. And so, watching CIA-produced DVDs of *Sorry to Bother You*, Bunch writes, “might even spur Chinese citizens to take action against the Communist Party-backed businesses that dominate commerce in the state.”

Riley, the anti-capitalist, would not approve; then again neither had the Abstract Expressionist painters whose canvasses toured the world thanks to secret CIA money.

Bunch’s choice was very clever in that sense. The American movie industry has struggled in recent decades to reach its former glories. What it serves its evermore shrinking audiences are often remakes and reboots of decades-old franchises. Walt Disney Pictures has probably perfected the genre by churning out live-action remakes of popular animated

---

<sup>2</sup> For a very early and critical account of the Cultural Cold War, see Lasch. The most famous and widely read study is that by Frances Stonor Saunders, to which we will return frequently in the present study.



movies, such as *The Jungle Book* (2016), *The Lion King* (2019), and, most recently, *Mulan* (2020). The latter has caused an outcry after it was revealed that the movie was partly shot in the Xinjiang region where the Chinese government has interned the Uyghurs, a Muslim minority group, as part of an often brutal reeducation campaign. Soon after these revelations, there were widespread calls to boycott Disney for its collaboration with the Chinese government (Kuo). This has been in keeping with Hollywood's broader accommodation to the demands of Chinese censors. The trailer for *Top Gun: Maverick*, yet another of the many high-budget sequels coming out of Hollywood, stirred controversy because the producers seem to have removed "[t]wo patches on the back of the jacket [of Tom Cruise's character Pete Mitchell] that originally showed the Japanese and Taiwanese flags" (Brzeski). Other staples of the American sports and entertainment industry, like the NBA, have likewise been caught between the sparring superpowers after the league in 2019 forced the then general manager of the Houston Rockets, Daryl Morey, to apologize for offending China after he had tweeted his support for the Hong Kong freedom movement (Yglesias). The Chinese government is, if anything, fighting a Cultural Cold War against the United States—and winning. This isn't hard since the United States has been preoccupied in recent years with internal strife and self-doubts over its historical role, which is evidenced by the fact that the nation's premier newspaper, the *New York Times*, has taken to calling America's founding ideals little more than white supremacist lies in its controversial "1619 Project" (Hannah-Jones).

*Sorry to Bother You* can be said to share this outlook somewhat, although Riley develops a critique of capitalism along the way. The economic world of the movie is one of unrepentant wage slavery whose aim is to squeeze out every last penny from its dejected working class. The business model of the shadowy megacorporation WorryFree is one in which "[w]orkers live in

space efficient dwellings”—literal prison cells—“in the same facilities where production occurs. They make anything and they make everything. Lifetime contracts, so no wages needed.” WorryFree’s ruthless CEO Steve Lift (Armie Hammer) comes up with the diabolic plan of turning his unwitting worker-slaves into actual horsemen—“equisapiens”—who are much stronger than regular humans and can thus stem much tougher workloads. The protagonist Cassius “Cash” Green (Lakeith Stanfield) captures one such equisapien pleading for help on his smartphone and appears on one news show after the next to blow the whistle. But the result is unexpected, to say the least: The stock of Lift’s company WorryFree skyrockets because the market rewards Lift’s labor-intensifying ingenuity. It turns out that the news, placed in the hands of a politically disenfranchised population, had no transformational effect whatsoever.

“They’re turning human beings into monstrosities,” Cash exclaims in despair, “and nobody gives a fuck!” The cunning union organizer Squeeze (Steven Yeun) understands the problem: “Most people that saw you on that screen knew calling their congressman wasn’t gonna do shit. If you get shown a problem, but have no idea how to control it, then you just decide to get used to the problem.” Squeeze’s idea is to take control by organizing a popular strike that successfully unionizes RegalView, which had supplied WorryFree with its slaves. Only this way, the movie’s lesson goes, can we revert back from our supine state of mere spectatorship into active agents that shape the course of history once again. (The equisapiens, however, never get returned to their humanity; they’re now just part of the labor market.) The movie’s preference for union action reveals its somewhat subpolitical nature in that political organization—the work historically done by a labor *party*—is left completely out of the frame. At best, party organizing is shunned because the leaders of both major American parties are in cahoots with WorryFree anyway.

Despite its shortcoming in the political realm, *Sorry to Bother You* stands out as one of the rare works coming out of the American film industry in recent years that showed some marks of original auteurship. In his directorial style, Riley took some clear inspirations from the cinema of the independent directors Spike Jonze and Michel Gondry to produce a modern-day Swiftian satire—the equisapiens are the downtrodden distant relatives of the Houyhnhnms—of contemporary capitalism. Thus, Bunch could've picked no better movie to make his case for a new Cultural Cold War, and he did so precisely for its marked opposition to the American system. “While the Soviets were stuck producing realist works of art dedicated to illustrating the glories of the latest five-year plan,” Bunch writes in reference to the original Cultural Cold War, “American artists were free to pursue whatever vision they chose—even if that vision was denounced by some conservative legislators as ‘anti-American.’ Amusingly, there was no better demonstration of the West’s commitment to freedom than the fact that members of Congress could condemn abstract art as wicked and do nothing to stop its dissemination.” Riley, Bunch’s cynical subtext seems to go, may be “anti-American” in his leftism, but at least he has the freedom to pursue whatever aesthetic and political critiques he’d like—unlike his counterparts in China.

The difference between the original Cold War and its new imagined incarnation, however, is that during the former there was indeed a widely shared allegiance to America and its history, whether you found yourself on the left or the right. The same cannot be said today any longer as the country is disintegrating into irreconcilable camps of avid culture warriors who look at the other side respectively as “the biggest threat to their way of life,” according to a recent YouGov poll (Sanders). How could the United States claim any prestige in the global fight for democracy if it’s gone through two major election cycles in a row now where the

respective losing side didn't accept the outcome and suspected foul play instead?<sup>3</sup> The contrast to the relative contentment with the status quo that many Americans felt after World War II is striking. Today, one reads in disbelief the words of sociologist David Riesman who in 1952 speculated why demagogues of the Huey Long type no longer had a shot at ascending to the presidency. This was so because "Americans possess increasingly competent government, without having to spend much energy getting it" (310-11). This was as good a time as any for liberal internationalists in America's national security establishment to dream of promoting the nation's high cultural achievements abroad.

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the future political orientation of Europe seemed up for grabs. The Soviet Union had expanded its reach deep into the heart of Germany, and close elections in Italy and France threatened Communist takeovers. In these nations, Anti-Americanism ran rampant, causing fears of an impending "coca-colonization" of European high culture by vacuous American materialism (Wagnleitner). That's why the CIA, with generous support from private philanthropic organizations like the Ford and Rockefeller foundations, opened a cultural front in the struggle for the hearts and minds of the Western European intelligentsia. Exhibitions of American avant-garde painting received this surreptitious support, as did the Boston Symphony Orchestra which triumphantly toured the old continent. The Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), an international body of artists, intellectuals, and scientists held together ideologically by anti-Communism, was predominantly funded with CIA money, much to its members' shock when they found out

---

<sup>3</sup> We should not forget that four years before President Trump claimed that his defeat at the polls in 2020 was the result of "fraud," two thirds of Democrats believed that "Russia tampered with vote tallies on Election Day to help the President" in 2016 (Frankovic).

about it in a series of articles published in the *New York Times* and *Ramparts* between 1966 and 67 (see Saunders; Wilford, *Mighty Wurlitzer*).

Yet, many of the CIA's beneficiaries objected more to the secret nature of the project than to the fact that the CIA was involved per se. Michael Polanyi, for example, said that "I would have served the CIA (had I known of its existence) in the years following the war, with pleasure" (qtd. in Saunders 408). Diana Trilling even revealed that she had been aware of some sort of secret government support for the American Committee for Cultural Freedom early on but carried out her duties unperturbed "because I did not believe that to take the support of my government was a dishonorable act" (qtd. in Wilford, *Mighty Wurlitzer* 87). The main adversary was Soviet totalitarianism, after all, and everything one could do to fight it was justified.

This stance was especially prevalent among the famed "New York Intellectuals," to which Diana and her husband, the literary critic Lionel Trilling, belonged. They formed the shock troops of what was popularly called the Non-Communist Left (NCL), from parts of which later still emerged the neoconservative movement. In the 1930s, the New York Intellectuals had gathered around *Partisan Review*, the long-lived quarterly magazine of arts and letters that had initially been established in 1934 to support the activities of the Communist Party-sponsored John Reed Clubs before it broke from the CP to become the locus of American literary Trotskyism. As Marxists and, oftentimes, Jews, the *Partisan Review* writers were doubly confined to the margins of respectable Protestant mainstream culture.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> For excellent studies on the New York Intellectuals see, among other works, Bloom; Wald; and Wilford.

But when the New York Intellectuals came out on the other side of World War II, it felt like things had changed. Their radicalism had been moderated as many of their most prominent members received professorships at prestigious east coast colleges. The editorial statement to the 1952 *Partisan Review* symposium “Our Country and Our Culture” set the tone for this reorientation. Among the former radicals, there was finally “a recognition that the kind of democracy which exists in America has an intrinsic and positive value . . . They now believe that their values, if they are to be realized at all, must be realized in America and in relation to the actuality of American life” (Editorial statement, “Our Country and Our Culture” 284).

But nothing in these words would have appeared exactly outrageous to their younger selves. While today’s left frequently frowns at the United States as a genocidal, “settler colonialist” project for the establishment of white supremacy, the Old Left had a decidedly different take on the nation’s revolutionary history—it claimed it for itself. “Thomas Jefferson would scorn to enter a modern Democratic convention,” Eugene Debs proclaimed when accepting the nomination for president on the Socialist Party ticket in 1904. “He would have as little business there as Abraham Lincoln would have in a latter-day Republican convention. If they were living today they would be delegates to this convention.”

The youth of many a New York Intellectual was spent imitating the mannerisms of Debs on the soapboxes in the Bronx.<sup>5</sup> In college, they felt equally drawn to the writings of Leon Trotsky, who was idolized in the pages of *Partisan Review* in the ‘30s. But Trotsky had great things in mind for the United States. Arrogant Europeans might sneer at “Americanism,” he

---

<sup>5</sup> The story is related by the sociologist Daniel Bell in the documentary *Arguing the World*, directed by Joseph Dorman, 1998.

wrote, but what they were blind to was that this same Americanism “marks the true dividing line between the Middle Ages and the modern world” (“If America”). Elsewhere Trotsky asserted that “all the problems of our planet will be decided upon American soil” (“A Letter”). The American Revolution had set the world on course of the larger bourgeois revolution, which uprooted the ancien régime and promised to peoples around the globe the ideals of “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Its force made imaginable—for the first time in human history—the worldwide end to slavery and serfdom as universal systems of labor relations.

During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union competed over who would carry on the legacy of the bourgeois revolution. While Stalin promised the peoples of the world national self-determination, John F. Kennedy countered during a campaign speech in Harlem in 1960 that the anti-colonial revolts of the Third World were in fact “part of the original American Revolution. When the Indonesians revolted after the end of World War II, they scrawled on the walls, ‘Give me liberty or give me death.’ They scrawled on the walls ‘All men are created equal.’ Not Russian slogans but American slogans.” The Kennedys had earned their anti-Communist bonafides as allies of Senator Joseph McCarthy’s witch hunts. Thus, they were above suspicion of sharing very many views with Eugene Debs and Leon Trotsky. Nevertheless, the heritage of the American Revolution was compelling enough for all sides of the political spectrum, from left to right, to claim its mantle. Naturally, such consensus rubbed off on the art world too.

With Europe lying in ruins, it was time for American culture to shine. There is more than a grain of triumphalism evident in these words by the *Partisan Review* critic Clement Greenberg in an article from 1948:

If artists as great as Picasso, Braque, and Léger have declined so grievously, it can only be because the general social premises that used to guarantee their functioning have disappeared in Europe. And when one sees, on the other hand, how much the level of American art has risen in the last five years, with the emergence of new talents so full of energy and content as Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, David Smith—then the conclusion forces itself, much to our own surprise, that the main premises of Western art have at last migrated to the United States, along with the center of gravity of industrial production and political power. (qtd. in Guilbaut 172)

No other institution played a bigger role in boosting the prestige of these Abstract Expressionists than the Museum of Modern Art under the leadership of Nelson Rockefeller, who during World War II led the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, a propaganda agency that operated in Latin America. In a similar vein, MoMa played an important role in organizing exhibitions of the new American art abroad, often in tight collaboration with CIA fronts which supplied the funding and important personnel connections (Barnhisel 108).

Rockefeller famously saw in the wild, large, and non-representational canvases of the Abstract Expressionists a form of “free enterprise painting,” an aesthetic that stood in sharp contrast to the formulaic, state-imposed socialist realism of the Eastern bloc (qtd. in *ibid.* 65). The view of America as a cultural hinterland was hard to sustain when New York’s galleries had stolen the limelight from the Parisian art scene. There was no better form of propaganda, admitted the diplomat George Kennan during a speech at MoMa, than “to show the outside world both that we have a cultural life and that we care . . . enough about it, in fact, to give it



engagement and support here at home, and to see that it is enriched by acquaintance with similar activity elsewhere” (qtd. in Saunders 272).

The new painterly modernism seemed to serve the cause perfectly. As the historian Hugh Wilford has argued,

there was something peculiarly *American* about abstract expressionism, with its giant canvases, its virile daubings of paint, its foregrounding of the *act* of artistic creation. Pollock—western-born, taciturn, hard-drinking—was the artist as cowboy, shooting paint from the hip, an incontrovertibly American culture hero. (106; italics in the original)

Yet, Wilford also cautions that the CIA’s role in putting Abstract Expressionism on the map has been overblown. In its own ranks, this episode from the agency’s early days serves a redemptive purpose, he claims. After decades spent conducting botched invasions, toppling sovereign governments, and assassinating foreign leaders, the memory of the CIA’s art patronage makes its overall role appear less malignant (112-13).

Overblown by whom? The revelations of CIA support for many national and international cultural institutions have spurred on an entire cottage industry of scholarship scandalizing this nexus. This so-called “revisionist school” of art history has primarily focused its attention on the by now famous case of government support for Abstract Expressionist painting, though a growing body of criticism has also begun looking at the Cold War politics of American literature, which will become the main focus of this study. The art critics Max Kozloff, Eva Cockcroft, David and Cecile Shapiro, and Serge Guilbaut fired the first salvos in the debate, with Cockcroft most pithily labeling Abstract Expressionism a “weapon of the Cold

War.” “CIA and MOMA cultural projects,” she writes, “could provide the well-funded and more persuasive arguments and exhibits needed to sell the rest of the world on the benefits of life and art under capitalism” (129). This marked, the revisionists believe, a decisive break with America’s own artististic traditions rooted in realism which culminated in a concerted response to the Great Depression, primarily in the form of various social realisms that revealed the struggles of everyday working people in the face of capitalist exploitation (Guilbaut 66, 89). Rather than lending themselves “to a Marxist or anti-imperialist narrative the way Diego Riviera’s sweeping murals did,” Joel Whitney has written in one of the most recent books of revisionist Cold War cultural history, the “American expressionism pointed instead to individual freedom in a tacit campaign against social realism” (22). By mobilizing individual critics and powerful cultural institutions to preach the gospel of a modernist aesthetic drained of social consciousness and determinable subject matter, American cold warriors had found the perfect, non-political art to promote instead (Cockcroft 132). So goes the common revisionist account, at least.

Methodologically, the revisionists have made heavy usage of archival sources to dethrone the predominant modernist affections of postwar critics. One must “be willing to undertake extensive work in the archives and to broaden the debate,” Guilbaut claimed in 1983, “by looking at ways of thinking and writing about art other than those that dominated the scene at the time the avant-garde was being shaped” (10). The most famous and widely read assault on the CIA’s secretive doings in the Cultural Cold War came in the form of the 1999 book *Who Paid the Piper?* by Frances Stonor Saunders who scoured archives in America and Europe and interviewed many first-hand witnesses. It is on her work that Bunch based his own wishes for a new anti-Chinese front in the Cultural Cold War. By doing this, Bunch obviously

read Saunders against her own intent because her study was explicitly meant to condemn the NCL's willing collaboration with the CIA. The proof is in the name: the critics and intellectuals associated with the NCL were like the Pied Piper and lured unknowing artists, scientists, and writers at home and abroad to dance to the tune set out by the intelligence agencies. Saunders is adamant that she doesn't permit the usual excuse employed by many people in the orbit of the NCL, CCF, and other beneficiaries of CIA support. Their defense, Saunders sharply notes, "rests on the claim that the CIA's substantial financial investment came with no strings attached." She adds that

Amongst intellectual circles in America and western Europe there persists a readiness to accept as true that the CIA was merely interested in extending the possibilities for free and democratic cultural expression. "We simply helped people to say what they would have said anyway," goes this "blank cheque" line of defence. If the beneficiaries of CIA funds were ignorant of the fact, the argument goes, and if their behavior was consequently unmodified, then their independence as critical thinkers could not have been affected. (4)

The point of the revisionist school is to say that their independence very much was affected and that the dominance of modernism in American arts and letters in the Cold War era is best read as an appendix to a secretive campaign of psychological warfare.

In many ways, the Cold War was more about the psychological element than it was about asserting military might and taking a threatening posture. If there was any doubt about it, the system of mutually assured destruction, or MAD, definitely made it so. After all, once the Soviet Union got hold of nuclear weapons technology, any and all military conflict between

East and West would have meant planetary extinction, which is why the leaders of both sides were more interested in avoiding war than provoking it (the historical starting point for our analysis of Gregory Corso's poem "Bomb" in chapter 1). In the words of the historian Tony Shaw, the Cultural Cold War was "a substitute for guns and bombs" which, in turn, made the "battle for hearts and minds" all the more important (3-4).

The question, however, is what the alternative would have been. What if there hadn't been a massive state apparatus meant to sway the hearts and minds of people via influence networks that extended all the way down to the art world? Would American politics have taken a decidedly different course? Would we live in a socialist paradise but for the deep-seated anti-Communism prevalent among many American intellectuals at the time? Would American arts and letters have taken a more distinctly socially-accusatory tone absent the aestheticism advocated by critics writing in CIA-funded magazines like *Partisan Review* and *Paris Review*?<sup>6</sup> Even Saunders has to acknowledge that the organized opposition to the American mainstream was rather pitiful. "Membership of the Communist Party was some 31,000 in 1950," she reports, "skidding to just a few thousand by 1956, the majority of whom were said to be undercover FBI agents" (191). This was no healthy state in which the American left found itself in after the war, McCarthyism or not.

We are thus forced to circle back to a point made earlier: That the political consensus in American society was broad enough at midcentury to compel the loyalty of artists and critics from left to right. As Hugh Wilfords has put it, "the CIA's state-private network was built to a great extent on shared values and involved a surprising amount of self-assertion on the part of

---

<sup>6</sup> For a revisionist account that hints at this claim, see Whitney, esp. pp. 1-8.

private citizens who belonged to it” (254). The predominance of these shared values also meant that “the Agency was by no means in control of Cold War intellectual discourse” (113). On the whole then the revisionist argument tends to be, in the words of literary scholar Greg Barnhisel, “oversimplified and conspiratorial” (8). It owes its readers “direct evidence” of its assertions and fails to answer to such basic questions as these: “*to what degree* did Clement Greenberg, for instance, take suggestions from CIA figures about how to present abstract expressionism, even if he did accept money from the agency?” Barnhisel’s point is that there is little to any. While “the CIA certainly wanted to call the tune . . . the pipers often refused to comply (9; italics in the original).

The case of Clement Greenberg, New York Intellectual art critic extraordinaire, is in fact instructive. Greenberg is perhaps the arch antagonist in the entire revisionist narrative, since he had allegedly undergone a clean break with his formerly Marxist past to become, in the words of Max Kozloff, “an intellectual Cold Warrior who traveled during the ‘60s under government sponsorship to foreign countries with the good news of color-field’s ascendance” (122). In the process, Serge Guilbaut has written, Greenberg was “renouncing political struggle and sanctioning a conservative mission to rescue bourgeois culture” (35). He was responsible, as Guilbaut adds, for a “de-Marxization of the American intelligentsia” and “laying the theoretical foundation for an ‘elitist’ modernist position (36). Saunders has piled on, claiming that even in 1939, at the height of his Trotskyist commitments, Greenberg presented an “elitist, and anti-Marxist view of modernism” (258). The art historian T.J. Clark draws a finer dividing line, arguing that it was by 1948 rather that Greenberg “eventually abandoned” his former Marxist convictions which included an abandonment of “historical concerns and partisanship.” Clark only hints at why he believed that was so, pointing elliptically to “[t]he

Cold War and McCarthyism” (86). It is Francis Frascina, the editor of the invaluable anthology on the critical debate surrounding Abstract Expressionism titled *Pollock and After*, who believed he had presented the foolproof evidence for this break in Greenberg’s career, and yes, it had very much to do with the “Cold War and McCarthyism.”

Diving into archival sources, Frascina reemerged fully convinced that he had proof that “Greenberg was attached to this [Cold War American] elite by an umbilical cord of gold” (92) — an unsubtle reference to Greenberg’s famous claim from his 1939 essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” that the avant garde relied on the “ruling class” for “a source of stable income” (24). In Greenberg’s personal case, this “umbilical cord,” Frascina reveals, is a \$250 dollar fee he received for a radio lecture on the triumph of American painting which was broadcast in February 1961 by Voice of America (VOA), a subsidiary of the propagandistic United States Information Agency (USIA). As Frascina puts it, “Greenberg prioritised claims for the transcendent aesthetic value of the work of art rather than the historical position of the artist as producer. . . . Greenberg even used an anthropomorphic view of art objects, as though they had autonomous agency and were capable of action and decisions, to disavow the possibility of the politicised *artist*” (92; italics in the original). Frascina doesn’t spend much time otherwise explaining Greenberg’s views. The majority of his essay is devoted instead to explaining how well such views of aesthetic autonomy latched on to the stated policy views of America’s Cold War apparatus. In Frascina’s words, “Greenberg produced for the VOA an account of ‘Modernist Painting’ consistent with streamlined production processes, themselves based on self-criticism in pursuit of the pleasure of profit” (97). With that, Greenberg had sold his soul to the VOA and its State Department sponsors whose stated aim was to “[e]xploit current developments in such a manner as to gain maximum favorable impact for the United States

and maximum unfavorable impact for the Communist countries” (qtd. in *ibid.* 80). Frascina cites as evidence of Greenberg’s corruption by the USIA several—decidedly minor—changes to the essay on Modernist painting which he had undertaken over the years and hints that these might have come about due to “wholesale ideological restructuring” (71). What he doesn’t account for, however, is the fundamental consistency in Greenberg’s outlook over the decades.

In “Modernist Painting” Greenberg builds on his decades-long belief that the ascendancy of this style marked a distinct break from the artistic tendencies that had predominated well into the first half of the 19th century. Since at least 1848, the year of the European “Spring of Nations,” painters prioritized “the ineluctable flatness” of the canvas (87). Where previously an illusionism had prevailed that pretended that the canvas was a window into the real world, modernist artists now prioritized concerns with medium specificity which was accompanied by a steady dissolution of the representation of subject matter in favor of self-conscious and purely painterly applications of pigment on two-dimensional, flat surfaces.

The reference to 1848 itself is made in Greenberg’s 1940 essay “Towards a Newer Laocoon.” The revolutions of 1848 marked the point in history when “Romanticism had exhausted itself,” Greenberg writes there (38). Why 1848 marked the turning point, he doesn’t explain in much detail, but to his Marxist readership in *Partisan Review*, the clue would’ve been clear: Up until that year, the standard Marxist account goes, the bourgeoisie had heroically led humanity’s emergence out of the slumber of the Middle Ages. For various reasons, Greenberg notes, the preferred medium of art for the newly triumphant burghers was literature, which in turn compelled the other arts to imitate its features (36). It wasn’t until 1848 that the gravitational pull of bourgeois heroism dissipated and the arts began to turn away from bourgeois society which was now fully overcome by capitalism. For that reason, the avant-

garde as a novel formation in the art world embarked on “an emigration to a Bohemia which was to be art’s sanctuary from capitalism. It was to be the task of the avant-garde to perform in opposition to bourgeois society the function of finding new and adequate cultural forms for the expression of that same society” (38-39). This opposition, as we know, didn’t express itself in a complete dissolution of bonds with the bourgeoisie, which remained the avant-garde’s “umbilical cord of gold.” Crucial for our purposes is the recognition, however, that to Greenberg, the circumstances of history were the primary impulses to developments within the arts. Rather than abandoning “historical concerns,” they were at the heart of his critical project.

“Modernist Painting” is an updated version of the same argument he had made in “Towards a Newer Laocoon.” It is true that one searches in vain for references to Marx, but it would be an awkward methodological claim to decry this oversight. If anything, the concern by revisionists about the conspicuous absence of Marxist interpretive frameworks from Greenberg’s later writings—which isn’t even true<sup>7</sup>—reveals more about the revisionists’ political priorities than about Greenberg’s. We remember, for example, Whitney’s preference for murals by Diego Rivera because they “lend themselves to a Marxist or anti-imperialist narrative.” Add to that the fact that Greenberg paraded around his views on government-

---

<sup>7</sup> Take, for example, his perhaps greatest essay, titled “The Plight of Our Culture” from 1953, i.e. the highpoint of the McCarthyist witch hunts. References to Marx abound therein as Greenberg seeks to understand how what he calls “industrialism” — another term for capitalism — has brought about the “most radical and comprehensive change in the fundamental scheme of culture and civilization since the Neolithic revolution” (131). Meant as a review of T.S. Eliot’s *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, “The Plight of Our Culture” assaults Eliot’s anti-liberalism and fatalistic cultural pessimism by arguing that he overlooked “the urgent reality of politics” in assessing the evolution of culture at large (123). The essay does at times read like a defense of the postwar affluent society, but only because it’s a realistic assessment that the overall rise in social wealth manifested itself culturally not in a widening of access to the products of high culture, but to those of the middlebrow. That may be fine, he concludes, saying, as he was wont to do throughout his career, that social well being is more important than high culture anyway.



sponsored radio broadcasts and suddenly his critical project seems compromised by ulterior motives. But this is a tenuous connection and much too quick a jump to the most radical conclusion available about the motives of those who were involved in whatever indirect way in America's cultural diplomacy. Hence Barnhisel's judgment that their accounts tend to be "oversimplified and conspiratorial."

This is not to say that the revisionist school hasn't done important work. Studies like Serge Guilbaut's *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* or Eric Bennett's *Workshops of Empire*, for example, are rich in historical background information and have dug up insightful documents from the archives. But what they offer in historical facts, they frequently lack in attention to how the political goings-on during the Cold War era actually played out in artworks—if at all. Guilbaut, for example, spends nearly 300 pages discussing the theoretical views of artists and critics against the backdrop of brewing tensions between the superpowers, but of those nearly 300 pages, exactly two paragraphs are devoted to somewhat close readings of paintings by Jackson Pollock. This is still more than Bennett accomplishes. His research has revealed important institutional entanglements between postwar creative writing schools like the Iowa Writers' Workshop and the CIA, which, as Bennett shows, made a one-time grant of \$7,000 to the Workshop via its most prominent front, the Fairfield Foundation (112-13). And he faults other scholars of the "Program Era" in American letters, Mark McGurl above all, for ignoring these interrelations, only to fail to deliver an alternative account of how the literature of that era ought therefore to be read. While Bennett hints at it in his concluding reflections, he manages to do without a single moment of critically applying his framework through actual literary analysis (see chapter 2 for an attempt to work through his challenge via a close reading of Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*). We can therefore say that the

revisionist school is a framework for reinterpreting Cold War culture via institutional and intellectual histories, though *not* via a fresh appreciation of the artists and intellectuals themselves who are under scrutiny.

What we can say about the aesthetic commitments of a majority of revisionists is that there is a lurking anti-modernism and, inversely, a preference for politically engaged artists (once more chapter 2 will deal with that issue) and perhaps a narrative realism, as well, which is said to have been “sabotaged” by the secretive institutional support for abstraction.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the institutional critique often serves as a smokescreen to voice underlying disagreements in artistic taste. Their beef, if you permit me saying so, is with the modernists’ deference to the autonomy of the work of art as a governing value. We have seen Frascina’s complaints earlier that “Greenberg prioritised claims for the transcendent aesthetic value of the work of art rather than the historical position of the artist as producer.” The view is Benjaminesque and stresses the production process of art as one of laboring over, as he puts it, Greenberg’s “anthropomorphic view of art objects, as though they had autonomous agency and were capable of action and decisions, to disavow the possibility of the politicised *artist*.” Fracina’s formulation is actually a useful description of what the autonomy of the work of art is about. Artworks that stress their autonomy imply that the source of their aura—another Benjaminesque term that he conveniently leaves out—is the artwork itself, as if it emanated its aesthetic appeal purely from within without the need on the side of the audience to know much if anything about the artist’s biography (and without the audience members’ own

---

<sup>8</sup> The latter claim is made by *Arts Magazine* editor Rob Colvin who implies in a 2016 review of an exhibition at the Norman Rockwell Museum that Rockwell’s narrative realism was naturally dominant with American audiences and thus only fell out of favor because the CIA needed to impress foreign audiences of the intellectual savvy of American painters.

biographies affecting that aura either, see chapter 3). Hence, Frascina's qualifier "as though" is useful because autonomous art of course cannot come to be without artistic agency. Someone has to make the artwork (which is why his distinction too easily glosses over the fact that no one can possibly deny that artists "produce" their works). The important distinction, however, is one of politics, i.e. of an extra-artistic factor that Frascina would prefer to see prioritized. Artists, in his account, need to be "politicised" and therefore also promote change. But what if the autonomous artwork manages to do precisely that, minus ham-fisted attempts by the artist to project his views on the world?

In his ekphrastic poem "Archaic Torso of Apollo," Rainer Maria Rilke's speaker describes his impressions of an unidentified ancient Greek sculpture of Apollo. The imagery he chooses is one of radiance and glow. The torso "is still suffused with brilliance from inside, / like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low, / gleams in all its power." This radiance is productive of something new and linked, later on, to procreative powers as the speaker turns our attention to "that dark center [of Apollo's reproductive organ] where procreation flared." This combination of "brilliance from inside" and self-reproducing powers appears to lend the sculpture agency, and because "there is no place [within the sculpture] / that does not see you," the speaker can conclude with the closing epiphany: "You must change your life." No mention of World War I or hyperinflation, none of fascism or Communism, but nonetheless the speaker believes that the sculpture (and the poem by extension) can compel change, or at least ask the beholder (and reader) to contemplate it.

Rilke himself, in turn, merely continued to tread in the footsteps of the modernist tradition according to which artworks seemed capable of following their own "action and decisions." Long before him, Charles Baudelaire had postulated that "[a] picture is nothing but

what it intends to be. There is no way of looking at it except in its own light. Painting has only one point of view; painting is exclusive and despotic, and, in consequence, the painter's message is much more forceful" ("Why Sculpture" 98). But even here an "as though" seems to be implied because, of course, a picture itself cannot intend anything, only the artist. The question is, what is driving the artist to one route over another in a direction that would make his resulting work appear as a self-emanating source of light? Just as Greenberg would argue a century later—and T.S. Eliot had argued in between in "Tradition and the Individual Talent"—Baudelaire would also say that art derives its justification both from its own time and the relationship that the artist draws up to past works.<sup>9</sup> Baudelaire's formula for what makes a successful modern artwork is that it is attuned to "the transient, the fleeting, the contingent" aspects of the age. This makes "one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable" ("Modernity" 403).

In revisionist scholarship, by contrast, the success of an artwork cannot be contemplated outside the institutional setting in which it was created and promoted. If there was anything untoward about this context of production and distribution, the artwork loses its autonomy because it appears to intend things other than it lets on at first. One of the most recent entries in the growing canon of revisionist scholarship, Juliana Spahr's 2018 book *Du Bois's Telegram*, makes that case very explicitly with regard to Cold War literature:

---

<sup>9</sup> Examples where Greenberg makes this case are, for example, his essays "Irrelevance versus Irresponsibility" (esp. pp. 232-33) and "The Necessity of the Old Masters" (esp. p. 249). Eliot wrote that "the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order."

A literature is autonomous when it is free from outside interference, from the market, from the government. Writers do not have autonomy if their work is obstructed by their own government, whether that obstruction take the form of censorship or the form of amplifying certain work over others while acting as if what Casanova calls the world republic of letters is a level playing field. When literature is instrumentalized by the government as the good form of protest and then used to suppress more militant dissent, it is not autonomous. (16)

The definition is very idiosyncratic, but practically applied it excludes some surprising set of writers, above all James Baldwin, who, Spahr explains, saw a large number of his writings between 1947 and 56 appear “in CIA friendly journals such as *Commentary*, the *New Leader*, *Partisan Review*, and *Encounter*.” And since Baldwin took part in programs sponsored by, for example, the USIA, his artistic autonomy is in question. “Baldwin for sure had agency in what he wrote and said when working with the government,” she qualifies. “But still, the Baldwin that we know, we know because his work was amplified by these networks” (89-90). All this, as Spahr acknowledges, despite Baldwin’s persistent and radical critique of the racism that he felt was inherent to American society.

Spahr’s definition of autonomy has all sorts of limitations: If your judgment regarding an artwork’s autonomy rests on your knowledge of the institutional context of its emergence, is a major responsibility of the critic, then, to search for these networks? What if, as in the case of so many players in the Cultural Cold War, the networks remain secret for many years? Does your judgment of the artists change the minute the networks are uncovered? Relatedly, are we always to remain in doubt about our ultimate judgment about an artwork lest revelations come to light that reveal its institutional support by restrictive and politically reactionary

governmental networks? Whatever the answers, Spahr's account seems to have solved the question why so many revisionists fail to perform close readings of works by the artists under investigation: In the search to expose institutional connections, archival evidence takes ever bigger precedent and drowns out the artworks themselves, whether they be paintings as in the case of Serge Guilbaut's book or novels as in Eric Bennett's. Even Greg Barnhisel, whose work is so important in complicating short-sighted assumptions made by the revisionists, is nonetheless primarily interested in institutional history.

It's worthwhile to blend these two seemingly irreconcilable methodologies—institutional and archival research versus close reading—in an attempt to get at what the art historian Michael Fried has called the “politics of conviction” that are inevitably at play in the assessment of each and every artwork. As is typical for a critic writing in the modernist tradition, an artwork “compels conviction” in Fried's eyes, as if almost spontaneously and imperceptibly, by responding to “the vital work of the past” (69). While this past is at first primarily an intra-artistic one—as a reconfiguration of the dominant conventions of its own prehistory—he doesn't exclude broader institutional factors. There are “countless ways,” he acknowledges,

in which a person's deepest beliefs about art and even about the quality of specific works of art have been influenced, sometimes to the point of having been decisively shaped, by institutional factors that, traced to their limits, merge imperceptibly with the culture at large. In a particular instance this may result in the undermining of certain beliefs and their replacement by others (a state of no belief is impossible). But it doesn't follow merely from the recognition of influence, even powerful influence, that the original beliefs are not to be trusted. (71)

Perhaps it is the claim of the revisionist camp that this ostensibly imperceptible merging can actually be brought to the surface and made conscious. If we are particularly attentive, Spahr notes, we'll notice that James Baldwin's rise to fame came at the same time as he was waging "an attack on politically committed literature and [making] an argument that great literature should be free of political content" (89). It would match what Barnhisel has argued about the "growing acceptance of aesthetic autonomy among highbrow and middlebrow audiences in the United States." Where "Modernism historically was confrontational and often offensive . . . making the work 'self-subsistent' and divorcing an artist's biography—and political beliefs and activities—from critical discussion of that artist's work were crucial in making modernism safe for middle-class audiences" (39). But as we have seen, this is just one of a wide range of ways of looking at what autonomy actually means—and it means in no way that the artworks themselves can't just compel conviction but also demand that their readers or beholders may have to change their lives.

In fact, we might flip the script and ask why the defenders of the necessity of artists to foreground their (preferably leftist) politics aren't the ones who are being particularly ideological and subject to institutional forces. The question is rhetorical because it's hard to disentangle these various conflicting tendencies in a definitive way. We are always caught in a particular belief system, but if we're being serious as critics of art and literature, then those works of art and literature ought at least to factor somehow in the claims we make about what deserves our attention and admiration. We study some works over others not because the CIA or the Communist Party surreptitiously made us so, but because we're convinced that these works are worthy of study—because something about them radiates qualities that are both

fleeting and contingent on the one hand and eternal and immovable on the other. We should learn, then, to trust our original beliefs.

The following study is an attempt to bridge the divide between traditional modernist and revisionist criticism, though it shows some obvious sympathies to the former. The Cultural Cold War was international in nature, as was the modernist aesthetic; thus, I will analyze works by both German and American writers (the selection is in a way contingent on the archival materials that I had access to over the years when conducting research). I will take the literary-aesthetic convictions of these writers seriously while reading them against their historical and institutional backdrop as authors who critically engaged with and responded to their time. Their response, as I will show, was always primarily to some “vital work of the past.” In other words, all three works are in conversation with aesthetic and philosophical concerns that long predated the peculiar moment in which the authors lived. At the same time, they were aware of their own moment and responded to it. In all three cases, as we shall see, these three writers crossed paths with Cold War interests. This crossing of paths is revealed in each case via archival evidence. In other words, while their literary works will always stand in the foreground as I try to interpret them on their own terms precisely as literature, I will nonetheless trace institutional factors in assessing whether their integrity as literature has been somehow damaged by this entanglement with the Cold War. In all cases, the answer will be no; or rather, the answer will be that the works remain valuable in their own right because, despite “the recognition of influence, even powerful influence,” the original beliefs about their greatness prevail. Maybe that’s why the revisionists so often stay clear of close reading—perhaps the same could happen to them.



We'll ease our way slowly into the subject in chapter 1 by looking at the poem "Bomb" by the American poet Gregory Corso. As someone who has often been described as part of the "Beat Generation"—a moniker that he rejected—he wasn't exactly on board with notions of American exceptionalism (and that, although many of the Beats benefitted in various ways from institutional support by such entities as the Ford Foundation). But "Bomb" didn't come into full bloom until it was published in the German anthology of recent American poetry titled *Junge amerikanische Lyrik*, which Corso co-edited with the German critic Walter Höllerer who himself had come into close contact with contemporary American literature after attending Henry Kissinger's International Seminar at Harvard, a summer school that was meant to draw European intellectuals closer to America. In Höllerer's case, the mission was accomplished successfully as he took American poetry seriously enough to put out the widely noted anthology, with a prominent fold-out page of "Bomb" at its heart. Against the backdrop of the nuclear arms race, Corso wrote a poem that became ironically a lot more optimistic about human potentiality than Henry Kissinger was, from whom Corso was separated by one degree only when *Junge amerikanische Lyrik* saw the light of day.

Chapter 2 turns to the work of Saul Bellow, especially his 1959 novel *Henderson the Rain King*. In his case, there are no doubts as to his political sympathies. An anti-Communist as many of his fellow writers from the *Partisan Review* milieu, Bellow skipped no opportunity to affirm his loyalties to Western-style freedoms. Lecturing variously in the European equivalent of Kissinger's summer school, the Salzburg Seminar, or on tour with the State Department while seeing his literary work sponsored by the Ford Foundation, he nonetheless attempted to keep a tight shield around the integrity of his literary craft, famously claiming that the "deep reading" of literary works popular in academic circles would always lead the critic away from

what the writer himself intended. What mattered was what was there in the text. My close—but not deep—reading of *Henderson the Rain King* attempts to reveal precisely that by drawing out the novel's underlying philosophical concerns, which respond actively to a core dialectic of modern bourgeois history, just as Bellow is formulating his own critique of an institutionally-led developmentalism that was threatening the survival of cultures far removed from the Western mainstream.

Chapter 3 will turn to *Anniversaries: A Year in the Life of Gesine Cresspahl*, a four-volume novel by the German writer Uwe Johnson. *Anniversaries* appeared in stages between 1970 and 83, i.e. after the revelations of the machinations that financed the Cultural Cold War. Johnson himself wrote the novel based on his first-hand experiences of life in New York in 1967-68, experiences that were enabled by a generous grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. It is my argument that the novel grapples with this support, which is evidenced by the importance that Johnson ascribes to the way in which his compatriot Hans Magnus Enzensberger announced his own renunciation of a fellowship from Wesleyan University in 1968 due to America's continued war in Vietnam. Was Johnson too cold-hearted by not following suit? *Anniversaries*, I argue, links two important ways in which autonomy is often understood—as personal and aesthetic independence—and presents them as two sides of the same coin. How, the novel ponders, do individuals retain their moral status and personal integrity against the backdrop of a political descent into barbarism? And can the novel do the same, despite the recognition that it came into being thanks to patronage from powerful actors like the Rockefeller Foundation which owed its endowment to the questionable business practices of a single family, a family that sat at the levers of power in America throughout several generations?

All three of the above writers have at one point or another come into contact with America's powerful private foundations like Ford or Rockefeller. These philanthropic foundations, notes Inderjeet Parmar, "have been a key means of building the 'American century,' or an American imperium, a hegemony constructed in significant part via cultural and intellectual penetration" (2). Programs to support the arts and humanities via grants, Kathleen McCarthy has shown, were often "cast in ideological terms, weapons in the Cold War quest for the hearts and minds of men" (93). Where the State Department, for example, was barred from supporting projects that went beyond clearly defined statutes, its "personnel often turned to private donors such as Ford" (102). This personnel, we should remember, also frequently switched roles, going from foundation jobs to government ones or vice versa—McGeorge Bundy, the White House National Security Advisor turned Ford Foundation president being only the most famous example.

One of the greatest contributions made by revisionist scholars has been to show how much this nexus contributed to building and supporting arts and humanities programs in the United States and abroad. Besides the Iowa Writers' Workshop, Eric Bennett writes, the *New Criticism*, too, "gained a high profile largely by way of funding from the philanthropic arm of Standard Oil"<sup>10</sup>—Bennett's epithet for the Rockefeller Foundation, which had protected vast parts of the Rockefeller fortune from the estate tax by moving them into the philanthropic realm. Such support, he goes on, "was part of an extra-institutionally supported internationalist vision for global culture under the terms of a liberal democratic capitalist American order" (60-1). This work was more subtle than Bennett's somewhat polemical

---

<sup>10</sup> Writings by the New Critics took up a large part of the reading list of the Harvard International Seminar, see ch. 1.

characterization might indicate. When Ford provided a supporting grant for the Intercultural Publications program (IPI), which had been initiated by New Directions publisher James Laughlin, the Harvard historian Perry Miller argued that “*no propaganda for the American way should be included; that omission will, in itself, become the most important element of propaganda, in the best sense*” (qtd. in McCarthy 97; italics in the original). Nonetheless, the project wasn’t neutral as State Department officials expressed their enthusiasm about the resulting publication *Perspectives USA*, which would play a great role in promoting contemporary American literature abroad (ibid.; see also Barnhisel 179-216). And Laughlin himself was a lot more upfront about his own intention in initiating the IPI, when he noted that its purpose was not “so much to *defeat* the leftist intellectuals in dialectical combat as to *lure* them away from their positions by aesthetic and rational persuasion. In other words: culture as the meeting ground, as the viable channel for future understanding and rapprochement” (qtd. in McCarthy, 96; italics in the original).

This to our contemporary eyes so surprising alliance between agents of the literary avant-garde on the one hand and state entities on the other didn’t last. It began to disintegrate roughly at the same time as the faith of Americans in their government’s abilities diminished following the nation’s double humiliations abroad (Vietnam) and at home (Watergate). It didn’t help when investigations by the *New York Times* and *Ramparts* magazine revealed the CIA’s role in surreptitiously supporting cultural institutions abroad and at home—the latter a violation of its charter. As Hugh Wilford puts it, these revelations “constituted the first occasion in the postwar period when Americans learned en masse that they were being systematically deceived by federal officials” (251). To him, this realization forms a crucial part

in the disintegration of the liberal consensus on which the coherence of postwar American politics had rested (248).

In one of the first major salvos fired by what could be seen as an emerging revisionism of America's Cold War culture<sup>11</sup>, the publisher Jason Epstein condemned the "the CIA and the Ford Foundation" in a 1967 article in *New York Review of Books* for having set up "an apparatus of intellectuals selected for their correct cold-war positions, as an alternative to what one might call a free intellectual market where ideology was presumed to count for less than individual talent and achievement, and where doubts about established orthodoxies were taken to be the beginning of all inquiry." Suddenly, being associated with the Non-Communist Left was less a badge of prestige than an admission of moral bankruptcy. Was this also why the long modernist tradition that we identified above as spanning at least from Baudelaire onward to Greenberg and Fried suddenly got such a bad rep?

Twenty years later the "consensus" among intellectuals was quite different and much closer to where we are now. Gone were the days where artists, intellectuals, and radical activists competed for who could lay claim to the legacy of the American revolutionary tradition—and the bourgeois tradition at large. As Richard Rorty observed in 1998, intellectuals on the left "associate American patriotism with an endorsement of atrocities: the importation of African slaves, the slaughter of Native Americans, the rape of ancient forests, and the Vietnam War" (7). These more fatalistic views of the American experience have now deeply pervaded all bodies of cultural production in America, especially academia. It is therefore no surprise, as he adds, that "a contemporary American student may well emerge from college

---

<sup>11</sup> Another being Christopher Lasch's no less accusatory *Nation* article "The Cultural Cold War: A Short History of the Congress for Cultural Freedom."

less convinced that her country has a future than when she entered” (10-11). It is within this late 20th century malaise that the revisionist school emerges, perhaps as the new self-doubt about the American project embodied in scholarly form.

Despite these intellectuals’ wishes, American soft power appeal occasionally continues to inspire admiration abroad, such as at the Hong Kong freedom protests of recent years where the American flag has been a ubiquitous icon (Torres, et al.). That, ironically, when the most active political protest movement in America of recent years, which spread across the nation as a result of the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers, would more commonly see the American flag set on fire (Guzman). The BlackLivesMatter protests, in a further and greater ironic twist, spread around the world like a wildfire in 2020. Countries as ethnically homogenous as South Korea, Finland, or Denmark would experience demonstrations with the exact same protest mannerisms and slogans as in the United States, the commentator Alex Hochuli has observed. Maybe the reason for this mysterious attraction toward American protest culture is quite simple: When the original Cultural Cold War was initiated, America’s foreign policy apparatus looked at horror at the rabid anti-Americanism among foreign intellectuals, and the BlackLivesMatter protests are taking place out of an anti-American reaction against injustices taking place in the United States. But more is at play, Hochuli believes. What the world witnessed in 2020 was the triumph, counterintuitively, of

American *idealism*. Its principle . . . is that the force of American ideals is sufficient to transform the world. The world, in this view, is just like America, only less so—a perspective unfortunately inhabited by global BLM protesters. Particularly in the anglophone world, as well as across northern Europe, a 51st state mentality prevails. (italics in the original)

And America's powerful foundations are right in the middle of it. In 2016, the Ford Foundation announced that it was going to provide \$40 million in funding for the Movement for Black Lives, the umbrella organization of Black Lives Matter (BLM). It did this, according to a press release, "to nurture bold experiments and help the movement build the solid infrastructure that will enable it to flourish" (Kelly-Green and Yasiu). The Ford Foundation to this day remains firmly committed to a certain kind of liberal internationalism, however changed by the political transformations of the post-60s world. Darren Walker, the current president of the Ford Foundation, has framed the underlying ideology driving Ford's funding models as "a new gospel of wealth," a reference to steel magnate Andrew Carnegie's 1889 article "The Gos-pel of Wealth." In Walker's account, it is the philanthropy of the likes of Bill Gates and Warren Buffet which "is lifting the lives and lots of millions of people around the world." The Ford Foundation, Walker goes on, intends to "lend agency—and legitimacy—to slum dwellers and rural farmers, incarcerated people and refugees, migrants pursuing a better life and families on public assistance."

One of these days, a cultural history of the first two decades of the twenty-first century will have to be written that will once more look critically at the intersections of art and the interests of powerful institutions. Maybe it won't find any illicit operations carried out by the CIA—then again, who knows?— but it may well document that scores of purportedly independent artists benefited from the support of many of the same philanthropies that are looked at as such key players in the first Cultural Cold War. In 2020, the Ford Foundation announced, in collaboration with Bloomberg Philanthropies and many other well-endowed billionaire-initiated organizations, a grant of "\$156 million to support Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous arts organizations in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that has

devastated America's arts and culture landscape" ("Sixteen Major Donors"). Given Ford's power and historical intersection with the interests of the American government, are we now to say that the artists who have benefited from this windfall are many things, just not "autonomous" in their artistic endeavors? Only a serious critical engagement with the resulting artworks will tell. For now, we'll look at writers whose lives and times are firmly documented enough so that we can render more definitive judgments.



## Chapter 1: Prometheus Revisited: Gregory Corso's

### "Bomb" and the Poetics of the Nuclear Age

It's a principle as old as human warfare, argues the esteemed Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis, that if new types of weapons were found to work, "they would be used." "Atomic bombs," he asserts, "were meant to be dropped, as soon as they were ready, on whatever enemy targets yet remained" (52). And so they were: Hiroshima and Nagasaki were wiped from the face of the earth once President Harry S. Truman had received word that the new technology was tested and ready to go. But then Soviet spies went to work, and they did so very well, for soon this top-secret technology found its way into the arsenal of the West's mortal enemy. By 1949 both superpowers began aiming vast stocks of atomic bombs at each other, and with the invention of the thermonuclear bomb in 1952, they had amassed enough firepower between them to destroy the globe several times over. This qualitative rupture was enough to change human nature, Gaddis concludes. Suddenly was "reversed a pattern in human behavior so ancient that its origins lay shrouded in the mists of time: that when weapons are developed, they will be used" (55). The public saber rattling between NATO and the Warsaw Pact was largely a form of diplomacy—politics—because both sides knew that a direct shooting war had to be avoided at all cost lest they bring to an end the reign of homo sapiens.

Regular Americans were ignorant of the fact that war with the Soviets was extremely unrealistic. Instead, they prepared with all they had for the nuclear apocalypse and feared that their brand-new suburban subdivisions were subject to imminent Russian infiltration. Out of Truman's announcement of his anti-Communist "Containment" policy emerged a cultural

climate of internal containment as well. According to the Americanist Alan Nadel, containment had massive reverberations that transformed the very foundations of everyday culture in the United States. It was a “rhetorical strategy that functioned to foreclose dissent, preempt dialogue, and preclude contradiction,” thus branding everyone found outside the safely contained American community as a dangerous, untrustworthy Other (14). And in the eyes of the cultural critic Mary McCarthy, the bang that ended World War II had shut down the imagination as well, since life in the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was defined by “irreality”: the “world today,” she explained in *Partisan Review* in 1960, “has become inaccessible to common sense” (456).

No one had broken the news to the eccentric American Beat poet Gregory Corso. “O Bomb I love you,” he read to an audience at New College, Oxford, in 1958, “I want to kiss your clank eat your boom.” Even worse: He didn’t just seem to “love” the atomic bomb, but to positively invite its detonation, as he exclaimed “spread thy multitudinous encompassed Sweep / set forth awful agenda.”<sup>12</sup> What Corso also didn’t know was that Oxford at that time “was a stronghold of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament” (Moraes 67), and so he and his friend Allen Ginsberg were soon heckled off the stage—by Corso’s own account, with the help of at least one shoe that was launched at them by an incensed audience member.<sup>13</sup>

What this audience didn’t seem know, however, was that Corso’s poem “Bomb” was by no means trying to shrug off the volatile geopolitical situation or to literally invite nuclear holocaust. Of course not. But the poem had perhaps to be seen in order to be understood. It

---

<sup>12</sup> All references to “Bomb” are from page 24 of *Junge amerikanische Lyrik*.

<sup>13</sup> Corso, Gregory. “To John Wieners.” 22 May 1958. *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*. Ed. Bill Morgan. New Directions, 2003. p. 105. Moraes, too, reports the incident.

was written in the shape of a mushroom cloud, and if printed on the same page top-to-bottom at a standard font size, measured two and a half feet in height. What Corso had done was to take the widespread fears of a planetary cataclysm and render them in literary form. The move was ingenious because “Bomb” took the intangible “irreality” of the age of containment—and contained it in turn.

The poem addressed a debate as ancient as human civilization: whether our discovery of fire and its utilization for our purposes had ever been a good thing. A young Henry Kissinger argued in his then widely-noted book *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (1957) “that the punishment inflicted on Prometheus was an act of compassion.” The mythic Titan, we might recall, had stolen the fire and handed it to humanity, a transgression for which the gods condemned him to be bound to a rock and have his liver pecked at by an unrelenting eagle for all eternity. But, Kissinger interjects, “it would have been a much more severe penalty had the gods permitted their fire to be stolen. Our generation has succeeded in stealing the fire of the gods and it is doomed to live with the horror of its achievement” (65).

Corso’s great idol Percy Bysshe Shelley, by contrast, celebrated the unshackling of Prometheus in his great closet drama *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), an impassioned call for the political autonomy of civil society from the sort of paternalistic absolutism that Kissinger deemed the least of all evils in the postwar world. In his introduction to a bilingual anthology of recent American poetry that Corso had co-edited for the German market with the critic Walter Höllerer, titled *Junge amerikanische Lyrik*, Corso proclaimed that “I know no poetry 1958 as great or as lovely as 1818” (246). The statement is an apparent homage to the Shelleys: Mary Shelley had published in early 1818 her novelistic reimagination of the Prometheus myth in *Frankenstein*, and Percy followed in his wife’s footsteps two years later with *Prometheus*

*Unbound*. “Bomb” picked up where the Shelleys had left off and served as a modern-day defense of the great humanistic impulses that had informed the Shelleys’ poetic principles. Where Kissinger’s only hope was to provide a check on humanity’s innate evil, Corso assumed that this “evil” was the best hope for our redemption.

In the limited scholarship that is available on “Bomb,” we get a rather warped understanding of the poem’s philosophical orientation. Reading Corso’s works at the high-moment of academic deconstruction in the mid-1990s, Robert C. Timm detected in the Beat poet a kindred spirit whose “libertarian approach to expression” (34) suggested a “(pre-)post-structuralist vision of language” (39). Corso’s postmodernism *avant la lettre*, Timm concludes, stemmed “from a fear of closure, metaphorically connected with a fear of death” (*ibid.*). Christine Hoff Kraemer agrees that Corso’s output, “Bomb” above all, was “characteristically postmodern” (214), but paradoxically this postmodernism stemmed rather from his “*embrace of death*” (212; *italics added*). Where Timm and Kraemer agree, however, is that Corso’s postmodernism was rooted in a mysticist rejection of the primacy of logos and the modern intellectual tradition that departed from it. The sentiment was anticipated in the preface to Donald Allen and George Butterick’s 1982 poetry anthology *The Postmoderns*, where they write that “modernism came to an end with the detonation of the Bomb in 1945.” Thus, Gregory Corso and the others included in the anthology “are the poets who propose a world since then” (10). In Allen and Butterick’s eyes, what held the cohort of postmodern poets together was

an acceptance of the primordial, of spiritual and sexual necessities, of myth, the latest understandings of science, chance and change, wit and dream. Some might even be called preliterate, prerational, premodern, if it is true that the attitudes and

commitments of modernism helplessly produced the Bomb and other forms of species altercation. (12)

The point expressed here strikes a radically pessimistic note: If it's true that "the attitudes and commitments of modernism helplessly produced the Bomb," this casts modernity and the entire revolutionary bourgeois tradition from it arose into question. What's left are "preliterate, prerational, premodern" attitudes to face the nuclear age. Then why the strange decision to *exclude* "Bomb" from *The Postmoderns*? Would it not have been the most symptomatic expression of these primordial and mythic viewpoints?

The answer is simple, and it shows that Allen and Butterick knew something that Timm and Kraemer didn't, who failed to properly grasp "Bomb's" optimism, its Shelleyan faith in humankind's ability to reign as "king over myself," as the Titan puts it in *Prometheus Unbound* (240, l. 492). Whether "Bomb" is formally modernist or romantic is beside the point. The "modernism" he was said to have moved past is here to be understood as an embrace of modernity and its liberating potential for humankind.<sup>14</sup> Ironically, this reveals that it was Kissinger's fatalism that anticipated the "preliterate, prerational, premodern" turn in postmodern thought, not the "detonation of the Bomb in 1945" itself or Corso's poetic response to it. What's even more ironic is that where Corso and Kissinger stood so far apart philosophically as they both wrote their own accounts of the nuclear age near simultaneously, they were actually separated from each other by one slim degree only.

---

<sup>14</sup> Though, as we shall see in the conclusion, he comes short in some ways of this meaning of modernism, as well.

There's no way around it: "Bomb" is a very strange poem. How could his Oxford audience not have lost patience as Corso's speaker announced that he'd wanted

... to put a lollipop

in thy [the Bomb's] furcal mouth

A wig of Goldilocks on thy baldy bean

and have you skip with me Hansel and Gretel

along the Hollywoodian screen

Many years later, in a more serious poem protesting the testing of nuclear weapons in the American West, Corso acknowledged that "Bomb" was rather "frolicy" in tone ("Many Have Fallen" 26). It's this frolic that has led Dom Moraes to observe not without justification that in "Bomb" Corso indulged in "the aesthetic pleasures of a nuclear explosion" (67).<sup>15</sup> The frolic is apparent throughout, for example when the speaker is imagining "so laughable a preview" of

---

<sup>15</sup> These pleasures are real and have struck more artists than just Corso. The hauntingly beautiful photographs of the Nevada nuclear testing sites by Emmet Gowin attest to that fact (*The Nevada Test Site*). Gowin himself has not disputed his primarily aesthetically oriented conception of what he got to see when he took his photographs ("Photographing Nuclear Sites"; see also Norman for what I think is essentially a correct account of Gowin's photographs). There are other examples, too, not least John Adams's 2005 opera *Doctor Atomic*, where the character of Kitty Oppenheimer proclaims that "Our conflicts carry creation and its guilt." "Could we have started the atomic age with clean hands?" Manhattan Project researcher Edward Teller echoes in an earlier scene. *Doctor Atomic*, of course, portrays J. Robert Oppenheimer at the close of the first act as psychologically torn at the invention he is about to unleash on densely populated urban areas in Japan, presented as an aria that draws on John Donne's self-flagellating "Batter My Heart, Three-Personed God." The sense of existential dread at this guides the entire opera and makes for its central drama throughout. Yet, in its closing scene, we look at dozens of Manhattan Project workers, from the lowest rank all the way up high, as they gaze wordlessly toward the bright flash of light they have just brought to its detonation in the first ever test of a nuclear bomb at the Trinity site in New Mexico, and we as the viewers are left to interpret their whole manner of witnessing the spectacle. Is it too far-fetched that they may not solely be experiencing horror at that moment? That their emotions range far more widely, all the way toward a deep sense of sublimity and even aesthetic delight at the interplay of light, smoke, and heat they helped to unleash?

“Bombdeath” at an improvised “subway shelter” in New York at the moment of impact. There we see

Scores and scores A fumble of humanity High heels bend

Hats whelming away Youth forgetting their combs

Ladies not knowing what to do with their shopping bags

Unperturbed gum machines Yet dangerous 3rd rail

Ritz Brothers from the Bronx caught in the A train

The smiling Schenley poster will always smile

Is he belittling a moment of unimaginable tragedy here when a nuclear assault is launched at America’s most densely populated urban center? We might detect a subtle critique of modern vanity with its concern for superficial appearance. “Bombdeath” makes it mute whether each strand of hair sits perfectly or not. Meanwhile, the popular Ritz Brothers find their untimely passing on the A train, throned over by an advertising poster luring consumers toward vice.

The point, for now, is not to brood too closely over the poem’s social message. We’ll hold off on that for another while. Of interest here is rather Corso’s surreal technique (cf. Skau 96) that twists and bends time and space to its liking as he palpably visualizes the thrust of a shockwave, which bulldozes over plausibility itself:

Turtles exploding over Istanbul

The jaguar's flying foot

soon to sink in arctic snow

Penguins plunged against the Sphinx

The top of the Empire state

arrowed in a broccoli field in Sicily

Eiffel shaped like a C in Magnolia Gardens

St. Sophia peeling over Sudan

Undeniably, Corso is having fun with “Bomb,” directing his wild poetic imagination at the very fabric of reality and doing with it as he pleases. The surreal outcomes of the blast echo the freedom of committing ink to a blank sheet of paper.

At the same time, not *anything* goes in this highly imaginative poem, since its line breaks—while somewhat flexibly applied on a line-by-line level, some wider, some narrower than their neighbors—have to abide by a predetermined formal constraint, the mushroom cloud outline. That’s why, as we said, absent the visual appeal of the poem, something important about it was missed. We might say that “Bomb” never truly came to its fullest bloom until 1961, when it appeared in all its splendor as an uninterrupted foldout in the aforementioned anthology *Junge amerikanische Lyrik*. At this point, the poem had already existed for four years, but it proved a challenge for Corso to find a publisher willing to accommodate the shape of “Bomb.” Lawrence Ferlinghetti had published the poem first in a cheaply made 1958 print run in his City Lights Books series, all printed on a single sheet of paper in which the reader was prompted parenthetically to turn over the page about two-thirds of the way through. The same fate awaited “Bomb” when it was included in Corso’s 1960 poetry collection *The Happy Birthday of Death*. It was not until Corso collaborated with Walter Höllerer to produce *Junge amerikanische Lyrik* with the prestigious German publishing house of



Carl Hanser that “Bomb” appeared uncontained by the page break, all on one side of the paper, with its English original on the left complimented by yet another mushroom cloud in German translation on the page opposite.

A member of the writers’ collective Gruppe 47, Walter Höllerer was an eminence in the world of German postwar letters. As co-founder of the influential literary journal *Akzente*, he played a major role in giving rise to such literary luminaries as Paul Celan, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, and Günter Grass. His poetic inclinations showed themselves early on. In the dying days of World War II, the Wehrmacht soldier Höllerer scribbled a manuscript of his own Prometheus play, in which he had a character named “Der Einsame” (The Solitary One) lament how much the Thousand-Year Reich had “twisted” the foundations of German culture.<sup>16</sup> While a skilled poet, Höllerer’s true calling became that of being “the first literary manager in today’s sense of the word” (Böttiger 8; my translation; see also Hehl).<sup>17</sup> Part of his responsibility of managing the German postwar literary scene was to form institutional networks that would allow the young federal republic’s writers to make connections with other writers abroad. At the urging of the influential publisher Siegfried Unseld, Höllerer partook in the 1957 rendition of the Harvard International Seminar, a summer school co-founded by the aspiring graduate student Henry Kissinger. The project was pitched in 1951 to possible funders—among which were CIA fronts like the Farfield Foundation—as a way of counteracting Communist tendencies among the European intelligentsia

---

<sup>16</sup> Höllerer, Walter. “Prometheus (Manuskripttitel).” Act I, Scene 1, p. 6. 03WH/BA/1,6, Literaturarchiv Sulzbach-Rosenberg, Literaturhaus Oberpfalz. Henceforth LSR.

<sup>17</sup> According to the damning estimation of fellow critic Dieter Zimmer, Höllerer’s clout in the literary scene was so immense, in fact, that he deemed him the head of a bona fide “literary mafia” in West Berlin.

by giving active, intelligent young Europeans an opportunity to observe the deeper meaning of United States democracy. It is hoped that contact with intense young Americans may demonstrate to foreign participants that a concern for abstract problems is no European monopoly and that the United States does not exhaust its aspirations in material prosperity.<sup>18</sup>

The proposal checked all the right boxes since it was in tune with the objectives of the American foreign policy apparatus which secretly funded efforts at combating European anti-Americanism so as to bind the continent's leaders to the United States amid the so-called "Cultural Cold War" (Saunders). And so, beside a rigid reading list which included works by Irving Babbitt, Cleanth Brooks, T.S. Eliot, and Allen Tate, Höllerer got to experience the Framingham Shopping Center, "an extensive suburban shopping district where all types of stores are grouped together under one roof for their [sic] mutual advantage of the consumer," as the report on the 1957 seminar puts it, and a visit to Fenway Park to see the Red Sox take on the Orioles.<sup>19</sup> The experience excited Höllerer who kept in touch with his friend Kissinger henceforth and submitted to him further candidates for the summer school, Martin Walser among others.<sup>20</sup> But what rubbed off on him much more than any visit to the mall or ballpark were, of course, the first-hand impressions of the vibrant American literary scene, where he got exposed to the works of Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Kenneth Rexroth, and Saul Bellow.

---

<sup>18</sup> "Preliminary Statement of Objectives and Program of the Harvard Summer School Foreign Students Project." April or May, 1951, p. 1. Harvard Summer School archives, UAV 813.141.25, box 4, Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, MA. Henceforth HUA. On the Harvard International Seminar in general and its funding mechanisms more concretely, see Parmar 103-108. On the so-called "Kissinger Boys," the series of German writers and publishers who over the years participated in the summer school, see Bürger.

<sup>19</sup> "Report of the 1957 Harvard International Seminar." Harvard Summer School archives, UAV 813.141.25, box 4, HUA.

<sup>20</sup> "Letter to Henry Kissinger." 29 Nov. 1957, 01AK/02563, LSR.

After buying a copy of Ginsberg's *Howl* in San Francisco,<sup>21</sup> Höllerer soon arranged a German translation and published it in 1959 with Limes.<sup>22</sup>

How fortuitous, then, that he made the personal acquaintance of Corso in January 1958. The American poet was on an extended tour of Europe, mostly crashing at the famed "Beat Hotel" at 9 Rue Gît-le-Cœur in Paris, though also venturing out to Venice and Frankfurt (Miles). It was in the latter city where he met the Goethe University professor Höllerer who proposed to Corso a collaboration on an anthology of new American poetry which was to appear with Hanser. At first, Corso cherished the opportunity "to get out a great anthology," since there "ain't hardly any really good anthologies today."<sup>23</sup> He was "sure," he explained with little humility, "that our anthology will shatter the blue ribbons of God."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, it even looked for a while like the duo was to come out with the first anthology of new American poetry of its kind. Many years later, Robert Creeley, who was featured in *Junge amerikanische Lyrik*, wrote to Höllerer of his fond memories of "that extraordinary anthology." He added that he thought that "it was, in fact, the first of any 'New American' poetry anthologies then to

---

<sup>21</sup> See Corso, Gregory. "To Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky." ca. 9 Jan. 1958, *Accidental Autobiography*, p. 71.

<sup>22</sup> This was not the only way in which the San Francisco Renaissance poets came into indirect contact with the secretive actors of the so-called "Cultural Cold War." In James Laughlin of New Directions, the Beats found a patron whose projects were frequently "underwritten by Ford Foundation money" (Barnhisel 179). The Ford Foundation, after all, operated in close alignment with the foreign policy interests of the United States at that time, often filling its leadership positions with old cold warriors like McGeorge Bundy (K. McCarthy). Höllerer himself remained in the orbit of Ford, drawing on a grant from the foundation to launch the Literarisches Colloquium Berlin, thanks to his close camaraderie with foundation figures Shepard Stone and Walter Hasenclever (Böttiger; Hehl). Laughlin, incidentally, would be represented in *Junge amerikanische Lyrik* with his three poems "Prognosis," "It's warm under your thumb," and "A bad night on Third Avenue." Frances Stonor Saunders in passing notes Stone's possible intelligence connections (412), but the best and most extensive treatment of Stone's role as a major player in American philanthropic involvement in postwar Europe can be found in Berghahn.

<sup>23</sup> "To Lawrence Ferlinghetti." Late Jan. 1958, *ibid.*, 73.

<sup>24</sup> "To Walter Höllerer." Undated. 03WH/BH/2,12.

appear.”<sup>25</sup> Almost. The two may have had a head start, but the labor was too intensive for Corso, and so he went incommunicado. Höllerer had to seek him out at the Beat Hotel, only to find a disheveled Corso confessing that “This book kills me.” The many poems that had been submitted to him from American poets were stuffed underneath his bed, many of the letters unopened still, and so the two went about selecting and arranging an order on the floor of Corso’s attic room at 9 Rue Gît-le-Cœur.<sup>26</sup> After a while, Corso vanished altogether—Höllerer learned later that he had eloped and gotten married<sup>27</sup>—and it was left to the professor-poet to put the last finishing touches to the anthology.

The chaotic procedure should not overshadow the fact that *Junge amerikanische Lyrik* ended up being a great accomplishment, much deserving of Robert Creeley’s praise. For a few Deutsche Marks extra, it even came with a 7-inch vinyl with original readings by Corso, Ginsberg, and Ferlinghetti. While still in Germany, Corso’s stay proved much rewarding to him. Unlike his experience at Oxford, Corso’s reading of “Bomb” at an event in West Berlin in 1960 that also featured Larry Fagin and Günter Grass earned him great applause from the adoring audience instead of a barrage of shoes.<sup>28</sup> When *Junge amerikanische Lyrik* finally appeared a year later—though not soon enough to beat Donald Allen’s *New American Poetry* to the punch—, it

---

<sup>25</sup> 19 April 1993. 03WH/BT/4,2a, LSR.

<sup>26</sup> Höllerer, Walter. “Letter to Markus Trabus.” 15 March 1993, 03WH/BH/12,6, LSR.

<sup>27</sup> *idid*.

<sup>28</sup> Which isn’t to say that the reading went without a glitch. True to his fashion, a possibly intoxicated Corso promptly fell asleep right after finishing his reading of “Bomb,” which he ended with a giggle (which is captured on the vinyl recording that accompanied *Junge amerikanische Lyrik*), only to awake during Fagin’s interpretation of Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s poem “He.” After shouting abuse at Fagin for allegedly butchering the poem, Corso turned to the moderator, Ulrike von Möllendorff (who later went on to become an anchor for the German evening news on public television) and asked her to show him the bathroom. When he returned, he went on to read a few more poems without any further outbursts. “Corso’s appearances weren’t meant for show,” Höllerer reflected many years later, “they were balancing acts.” See his letter to Markus Trabus.

was left to Corso to frame in erratic prose what in his mind bound together the various contemporary poets that had been included in the anthology. It was “romance,” he argued counterintuitively in his introduction, that connected Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Frank O’Hara, Le Roi Jones, John Ashbery, and so many more to each other. He defined this romance as “the joy of all existence, the wonderment and realization that we are alive, man, the victory of life, here, now, on earth, breathing, that mad glorious mystery, with it love beauty sorrow laughter Agamemnon Goethe Shelley Christ Buddha fish cherries death” (246).

There are no two ways about it: Corso’s account of romance is brimming with clichés as he naively celebrates “the joy of all existence” and “the victory of life,” a gesture that clashes violently with, say, the tone of the opening poem of *Junge amerikanische Lyrik*, Charles Olson’s somber “The Death of Europe.” But there is actually something more profound going on as Corso attempts a modern-day “Defence of Poetry” in these pages. In obvious reference to Percy Shelley’s own famous “Defence,” Corso goes on to argue that what separated poets from regular people was that “only the poet can create,” that is to say, “to turn sand into gold” (“Introduction” 246), the mundane into the meaningful, much like the badly berated alchemists had who led Victor Frankenstein to bestow “animation upon lifeless matter” (82). In his 1821 “Defence of Poetry,” Percy Shelley had noted that poetry

transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes: its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow

from death through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms.<sup>29</sup>

And so, in this account and Corso's, Charles Olson oddly enough did embody the spirit of romance, since he believed that he could literally transform mere oxygen, his breath, not into carbon dioxide, but meaningful manifestations of poetic creation.<sup>30</sup>

But, and here his concerns differed sharply from Olson's, Corso thought that the selection criteria for *Junge amerikanische Lyrik* had exhausted themselves with "romance" and its transfigurative capabilities. Donald Allen, by contrast, decided to narrow down his own criteria for his *New American Poetry* exclusively to *American* poets. At first he had hesitated and considered including the Scottish-Canadian poet Gael Turnbull in the anthology upon Robert Creeley's prompting, but Olson sounded an emphatically nationalistic note by discouraging Allen from making the move, since *New American Poetry* was to be "most national" (qtd. in Delbos 2). Corso, in turn, struggled with an altogether different question, namely whether his anthology was to be limited to poets who fit the bill of "Beat." His introduction to *Junge amerikanische Lyrik* bears witness to the struggles, where he blames the narrowness of the Beat label for his hesitation to complete the anthology, but an epiphany finally opened his eyes: My mistake two years ago," he writes in the introduction's concluding paragraph,

was in wanting to make a Beat anthology, such a project is for the machinist not the poet, because poetry is poetry and Beat is something else, poetry has nothing to do

---

<sup>29</sup> The unnamed first-person narrator in Henry James's short story "The Real Thing" shares in the sentiment. Aspiring to be a great portrait painter, he frowns upon the belief that artists merely copy the real world. No, what they engaged in instead is "the alchemy of art" (239), a transformation of the "real" into the "ideal" (253).

<sup>30</sup> See his contemplations on the centrality of breath as a rhythmical element in his poetry in the essay "Projective Verse."

with Beat, Beat has to do with poetry, as everything has to do with poetry—I will abide by poetry, not some word coined by a man—No wonder I was upset, I was about to see Beat above poetry—I hail no thing but poetry, so here is an anthology of some young American poets, some are Beat and some are not, and they are the ones I personally like. Long live Beat! Long live non-Beat! Long live everything! Poetry will always live. (252, 254)<sup>31</sup>

But this very generous selection criterion meant that narrow considerations of nationality played a much diminished role in determining a poet's inclusion, which was evidenced by the fact that Gael Turnbull makes an appearance in *Junge amerikanische Lyrik* with his poems "The Scratching Sound," "The Sun," and "You and I." This is because the primacy of a commitment to poetry understood as a transfigurative force necessarily burst through national boundaries.

According to Corso's Shelleyan poetics, poet-creators can "turn sand into gold," i.e. instill matter with qualities of exclusively human interest. As Percy Shelley explains in his "Defence of Poetry," the application of mere reason leads us solely to register "qualities already known" about the external world, whereas it's the "imagination" that transforms these empirical observations—and the world with it—into meaningful expressions of human agency. Hegel illustrates the point in reference to a boy who gazes in amazement at the circles that he's drawn in water after he threw a stone into the river. The amazement, however, triggers not solely his observational instincts but leads him to realize that he has the ability "to strip the external world of its inflexible foreignness and to enjoy in the shape of things only an

---

<sup>31</sup> About the pagination of *Junge amerikanische Lyrik* it should be noted that on even-numbered pages are always printed the English originals, followed by the German translation on odd-numbered ones. The quote just cited, in other words, jumped straight from page 252 to 254.

externalization of himself” (qtd. in Fried 276). To the developing child, this impression will serve as a crucial developmental step in asserting his humanity, i.e. his ability to govern in freedom over the stuff of mere empirical reality and to impose on this reality his own imaginative powers. To bestow “animation upon lifeless matter,” then, or to “turn sand into gold” means to disenchant mere nature and make it subject to humanity’s freedom. The atomic bomb, Corso’s speaker asserts in “Bomb,” can therefore “unmenace Nature’s inviolate eye.” The scars left upon the land and the unimaginable human cost of atomic blasts surely violate Nature in the extreme, to its and our own detriment. But to “unmenace” Nature also means to no longer gape in sublime puzzlement at its vastness and uncontrollability. Despite “Bomb’s” literal largeness and profound subject matter, it is therefore not a sublime poem but rather one appropriated entirely to human scale because what it bursts asunder is not our comprehension but merely the typically available printing formats. Little else did Prometheus intend by unmenacing fire and making it subject to human agency. Fire as a brute empirical force had been transformed to mean something else entirely, never to be looked at the same again by humanity.<sup>32</sup>

And the conversion of helium into hydrogen nuclei that occurs at the core of a thermonuclear reaction? These are cosmic forces finally captured by the human mind as Oppenheimer, Fermi, and Einstein, all of whom make an appearance in “Bomb,” had done when they disenchanted nature and brought fire to humankind.

---

<sup>32</sup> As John Berger and his fellow authors put it in the book version of *Ways of Seeing*, the meaning of fire changes dramatically if one associates it with eternal damnation in Hell or if this uncertain outlook on the afterlife gets finally dispelled (8). We could say then that the Promethean revolution found its culmination in modernity as a way of making humanity king over itself—but only of sorts. The uniquely modern problem we now face is whether we’re simply put under a new spell—say, an empiricist outlook on fire as a brute fact of the natural world—or whether we appropriate Prometheus’s gift to our own conscious control. Nothing less than our own future might be at stake in this new epic struggle.



To “unmenace” nature in this way, Corso seems to suggest, means to tap into the netherworlds, unsuppressed by heavenly commands to resist the temptation to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. The alchemists, he writes in the introduction to *Junge amerikanische Lyrik*, dared “the plunge into the dreamy Luciferian evil” and balanced “the inward fear of God’s wrath with the outward look of man’s power toward all things” (246). The point is reminiscent of William Blake’s famous quib that Milton, the “true Poet,” was “of the Devil’s party without knowing it” (71) in *Paradise Lost*, a claim that gave the British Romantics the go-ahead to express their sympathies with Satan for his act of defiance against absolute rule. Of course, the gods had to punish Prometheus just as the Christian God had to punish Adam and Eve because to the celestial rulers the attempt to know and to change things was the first violation of their unchecked power. Yet, without this “outward look of man’s power toward all things,” there would be no progress. To both Corso and Shelley, this outward look gets manifested first in humanity’s imaginative powers, above all in the poetic imagination. As Shelley puts it, the philosophical “exertions of Locke, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, Rousseau” may have been the wisest expressions of Enlightenment thought, and had they not been made, the bourgeois revolution may have been held off “for a century or two.” At the same time, had not these exact individuals formulated the canon of the Enlightenment, others inevitably would have since the foundations for their insights had already been laid. What had gotten the ball rolling in the first place was primarily a revolution of the imagination, according to Shelley, for had it not been for “Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Calderon, Lord Bacon, [or] Milton,” our awakening from Medieval slumbers would have surely taken an even longer time. It is in this sense that Shelley famously calls poets the “unacknowledged legislators of the world,” i.e. the harbingers of a world to come, a world that exceeds the stuff of extant reality.

Naturally, Corso echoes the words of his idol in yet another unsubtle way in “Bomb” when his speaker proclaims that “I am a poet and therefore love all man / knowing my words to be the acquainted prophecy of all men.”<sup>33</sup>

Once the imagination had given rise to the scientific method, it had become inevitable that the secrets of the sun would fall into our lap at some point as well. Corso’s speaker makes clear throughout the poem that the question is not to turn our eyes away from the radiance of the bomb but to embrace it. “Know that the earth will madonna the Bomb,” he asserts in one of the closing lines, which Kirby Olson has interpreted as evoking the image of Mother Mary cradling baby Jesus (11). To the ears of an anti-nuclear activist (or simply a Christian), this imagery may appear positively sacrilegious because it places the sacred on the same level as the thermonuclear bomb. But to Corso, the bomb is merely yet another logical step on the ladder of human development, evident in so much of our civilization’s sacred iconography. It’s not unreasonable to picture it as baby Jesus, for “hath not St. Michael a burning sword St. George a lance David a sling,” as the speaker posits early on in reference to biblical images of weaponry-wielding saints.<sup>34</sup> Then again, it’s one thing to picture a saint in human form holding

---

<sup>33</sup> Was Samuel Johnson of the Romantics’ party without knowing it? Early on in his *History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, the unhappy prince encounters an “artist” who hopes that a pair of wings would give him the ability to fly. Cautioning against this folly, the prince says that he’s “afraid ... that your imagination prevails over your skill, and that you now tell me rather what you wish than what you know. Every animal has his element assigned him; the birds have the air, and man and beasts the earth” (18). Rasselas’s reference to external nature as immutable fact works as the moral lesson of the chapter because of course the artist will come crashing down in the end. And yet, the latter urges before his inevitable fall, “Nothing ... will ever be attempted, if all possible objections must be first overcome” (19). While his imagination may have gotten the better of him, the artist serves as an early example in the narrative of what might await the prince outside the stagnant reality of the immutable “happy valley” that so depresses his imagination. The failed pilot’s artistry is that of the early modern inventor (down to the desire to patent his discovery, i.e. to proclaim “that the art shall not be divulged” if successfully tested [ibid.]) who still lacked the scientific insight to base his experiments on informed observations. But the episode works perfectly to illustrate Shelley’s argument that imaginative excess necessarily precedes the workings of the scientific method.

<sup>34</sup> In his 1981 poem “In Praise of Neanderthal Man,” Corso would complement the historical account of weaponry he presents in “Bomb.” “O thou bigot anthropology,” the speaker exclaims in the poem’s final stanza, “deem not Sir Neanderthal a stupid thing / all milk and no cream / in his time / throughout the world / he was philosoph

an object explicitly marked as a weapon, but an altogether different one to picture a saint like Mary holding *the atomic bomb as a metaphorical stand-in for Jesus Christ*. What's more, perhaps the bomb doesn't even stand in for Jesus, *but replaces him altogether*. After all, Mary is turned from subject to verb here, and the trace that's left of her is purely gestural. The image is thus entirely secularized and pictures a caring relationship between the earth and the bomb.

On its own, the bomb is entirely free of guilt in the poem. It is not evil in itself. Whatever horrible outcomes may result from its detonation, the fault would be entirely that of the people keeping their fingers on the trigger.<sup>35</sup> And there arises a crucial paradox at the heart of the poem: On the one hand, we read that the bomb is only "as cruel as man makes you," suggesting that the bomb would only be triggered by human cruelty. But then, a mere four lines down, the speaker asserts that it's "Not up to man whether you boom or not." So, what is it? Is the bomb's explosion assured by fate? Does this somehow reveal a mystical, transhistorical truth about innate human evil? This would mean for once to break with the Shelleys, since, as Mary Shelley put it in her notes on Percy's *Prometheus Unbound*, central to her husband's "theory of the destiny of the human species was that evil was not inherent in the system of the creation, but an accident that might be expelled" (295). The claim would correspond well to Percy's atheism, which had led him to stray from the Christian dogma of humanity's natural fallenness. It would also fly in the face of the influential early modern theories of Niccolo Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, both of whom had written secular

---

supreme" (45). And why is this so? Because "unlike their brain-sucking forebears," our cousin already "himself knew to sing / inventor of the churinga / (first musical instrument) / able to make the air ring" (44). Thus, the Neanderthal had invented the perfect tool, one that didn't destroy but create, that made "the air ring" in sacred ritual.

<sup>35</sup> As Corso put it in a letter to Höllerer, "I say that I love the bomb and want to kiss it and eat its boom, because I think it's the best way to put down the bomb, everybody says they hate it, and by hating it, they'll explode it: but if everybody loved the bomb, then the bomb wont [sic] explode." 25 June 1958, 03WH/BH/1,8, LSR.

accounts of innate human wickedness as a problem to be grappled with if we sought to establish just political orders. “For,” as Machiavelli asserts in *The Prince*, “one can say this generally of men: that they are ungrateful, fickle, pretenders and dissemblers, evaders of danger, eager for gain” (ch. XVII, 66). Hobbes makes essentially the same point in *Leviathan*, famously picturing the state of nature as one in which jealous men, always on the hunt for power, engage in a “war ... of every man against every man” (I, xiii, 7; p. 76). To prevent such barbarity from ever occurring, the state must take a realistic account of humanity’s evilness and rule without much pretense to democratic ritual.<sup>36</sup> It’s worth drawing on these two early modern thinkers since they would be so central to the realist school of political theory, which in turn informed Henry Kissinger’s philosophical development. It is therefore quite logical for him to assert, as we saw, that Prometheus’s gift to humankind may have been such a tragic curse instead of a blessing. Can we trust the Prince to assure the safe usage of the hydrogen bomb if his primary goal is the accumulation of prestige by ruthless conquest of the realm of other princes?

This begs the question who these modern day princes may be. The closing lines of “Bomb” give us a clue, and they begin with a now familiar image:

Know that the earth will madonna the Bomb  
  
that in the hearts of men to come more bombs will be born  
  
magisterial bombs wrapped in ermine all beautiful

---

<sup>36</sup> Although, in Machiavelli’s defense, his account is finetuned enough so as to distinguish between the rulers’ thirst for prestige and the desire on the side of the governed to be left in peace (see esp. Ch. IX, 39).

and they'll sit plunk on earth's grumpy empires

fierce with moustaches of gold

If we keep in mind the form of the poem, we must recall that the point of explosion comes at the very end of it. In other words, while we read from top to bottom, the poem is built from the bottom up. We begin with smoke and end in fire, but it's the fire whose origins the poem now forces us to investigate. Who are the men from whose hearts will originate further bombs, thus threatening to set the world on fire? We know that their bombs are "wrapped in ermine," i.e. the favorite type of fur of the nobility. These bombs throne over "earth's grumpy empires," and they are embellished with gilded facial hair. The imagery lets us answer our earlier question, whether princes could be trusted with the bomb: No, since it is *they* who take it out of the hand of man in the abstract, all of humankind, to determine whether the bomb "boom[s] or not."

And who would these modern-day princes be in a nation like the United States that prides itself on its republican roots? The historian Francis Stonor Saunders has shown in her influential 1999 study of the Cultural Cold War, *Who Paid the Piper?*, that in the early days of the rise of the CIA a very particular stratum of American civil society felt called to serve in the newly established successor organisation to the OSS. It was, so Saunders, the "historic elite, the Ivy-Leaguers who cast their influence over America's boardrooms, academic institutions, major newspapers and media, law firms and government, who now stepped forward to fill the ranks of the fledgling Agency." This American nobility, she goes on, "stood for the preservation of the Episcopalian and Presbyterian values that had guided their ancestors" (36). While the Ivy League-educated German-Jewish émigré Kissinger was never of this native ruling

class, he certainly had its ear when he argued in *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* that the Eisenhower administration took too timid a stance toward the newly assertive Soviet Union. The nation's nuclear arsenal would never function as a deterrent if its adversaries could sense that its leaders shied away from actively deploying it. Hence, a realistic and serious threat had to be made to the Soviets that America intended to contain Communism's further spread across the globe with the preemptive use of its nuclear weapons arsenal if need be. It's this brinkmanship that kept the world in fear of imminent extinction, and we can only say in retrospect, as Gaddis has, that it was also this scenario of mutually assured destruction that may have kept us alive in the end. And so, the bomb may have saved us from damnation, after all. Because who knows? A conventional shooting war may have served as less of a deterrent for the leaders of both superpowers. In sending regular armies to the battlefield, as they just had done in the Second World War, they wouldn't have staked the survival of our species, merely the lives of expendable soldiers. As we also said at the outset, this reality was not yet clear to most regular Americans, Corso among them, and so irrespective of the political consequences of the nuclear stand-off between superpowers, it appeared to be the ruling classes of either side who threatened to set the world on fire. To blame the technology for the outcome would be to deflect from the true culprits of impending planetary genocide.

The contradiction that Corso seeks to explore in "Bomb" has much more to do with social inequality than it does with moralistic anti-nuclear posturing. His speaker makes clear that his grudge rests not with any particular technological discovery, but with a society as America's in the 1950s "that consents / a child in a park a man dying in an electric-chair." The humanistic impulse that allows Corso to understand that it's our freedom that led us to uncover the secrets of the universe should also permit us to transform the very social fabric

that we have spun all around us and that for now sees no contradiction between fun in the park on the one hand and the destruction of human life by the state on the other. “Bomb’s” “frolicy” tone is a necessary deployment of satire that defuses the tense state of containment and redirects our attention from secretive enemies abroad to the internal social destitution that needs to be alleviated. The political realism that led a Henry Kissinger to conclude that humanity had best never wrested control of fire away from the gods is also a realism that believes that evil is simply innate, unchangeable, and that the “man dying in an electric-chair” probably had it coming, nothing we can do about it. But how could he say this at a moment in time when humanity had deciphered the deepest secrets of the universe and may have yet utilized these secrets for good?

The fact of the matter is that it is Kissinger’s realism and his fatalism regarding seemingly innate human nature which puts him in proximity to the sort of postmodernism that Allen and Butterick define when they write that “the attitudes and commitments of modernism helplessly produced the Bomb.” The late romantic, early modernist consensus regarding human nature, by contrast, was diametrically different from Kissinger’s. Most famously, Hegel would insist that “Reason is the Sovereign of the World,” and that the progressive realization of freedom in History which had become observable in the bourgeois revolution and the Enlightenment pointed to the fact that humanity was driven not by innate jealousy and wickedness, but by an “impulse of *perfectibility*” (np; italics in the original), a notion which he inherited from the intellectual forefather of the French Revolution, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. If the foundations of injustice and unfreedom get progressively removed through Reason’s reign in History, then it is entirely plausible to argue, as Percy Shelley did in his wife’s account, that “evil was not inherent in the system of the creation, but an accident

that might be expelled.” Corso’s modernized version of this grand narrative in “Bomb” puts him far away from the postmodern pessimism that Timm and Kraemer had attested to him.

The problem of History is a useful note to which to turn in the concluding moments of these reflections, and it is where “Bomb” begins:

Budger of history   Brake of time   You   Bomb

Toy of universe   Grandest of all snatched sky   I cannot hate you

The direct address sets the tone for the remainder of the poem, establishing it as an ode to the bomb, though what’s particularly interesting are the epithets with which the bomb is described here. We’ve already come across many of the reasons why the speaker thinks it’s energies misspent to blame the bomb itself for the problems haunting American society at midcentury; adding to this impression are the opening epithets which picture the bomb as an entity both with agency and then again as a passive “toy,” yet either way as quite a noble and grand subject matter, perhaps the “grandest” and most urgent of them all in the wake of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The nominalization of the verb “budge” suggests that the bomb is giving an impulse to History, moving it onward in its course. Then again, the bomb also hits the brake on time, which adds a paradox to the very first line of the poem, infinitely complicating what we are to make of the lyrical I’s view of the bomb. But History is qualitatively different from time. The latter is a quality measured in physical terms, i.e. in the extant stuff that, as we noted earlier, the imagination surpassed and transfigured. The bomb, then, may be said to transcend the world of mere physics in this opening line and move on to the philosophically more profound realm of History, which we have seen signified to the



revolutionary moment of Hegel and Shelley's era a progression in the consciousness of freedom. This progression is represented clearly in the immediately following lines:

Do I hate the mischievous thunderbolt the jawbone of an ass

The bumpy club of One Million B.C. the mace the flail the axe

Catapult Da Vinci tomahawk Cochise flintlock Kidd dagger Rathbone

Ah and the sad desperate gun of Verlaine Pushkin Dillinger Bogart

And hath not St. Michael a burning sword St. George a lance David a sling

We begin with the Olympic thunderbolt that loomed as a constant threat over humanity for thousands of millennia, a form of godly punishment that was disenchanted the second that Benjamin Franklin invented the lightning rod. From there, we move on from the realm of nature and myth to the primitive weaponry of prehistoric man, mere found objects reappropriated for human use. Then, a set of objects that would never be found in nature, i.e. tools, the results of human craft and inventiveness. These, too, follow a path from brute simplicity to heightened complexity, from the mace to the concoctions of the Renaissance man Da Vinci. Finally, another shift in the imagery as we enter modernity and particularly the American age. But here the move is no longer represented as being one from primitiveness to complexity; rather, we've returned to the realm of myth and human culture, as we move from the conquest of the American West through the Civil War and, via a (somewhat distracting) detour through European Romanticism, onward toward the products of the modern culture industry, Humphrey Bogart's pistol as much as that of John Dillinger, whose true historic function was to inspire the imagination of downtrodden Americans amid the slump of the Great Depression, more myth than a tangible historical figure. From there, the passage

terminates in the listing of biblical saints that we came across earlier. Overall, we have witnessed a twofold move—primitiveness to complexity to myth and culture—that shifts our attention from the stuff of nature and the passing of physical time to a human-based history and the triumph of culture. In the end, we couldn't be further away from nature than the cinematic exploits of a Humphrey Bogart or the sacred representations of the human form as the embodiments of divine power—or, indeed, humanity's ultimate form of rebellion against divine tyranny, i.e. our wrestling of control over fire away from the gods toward our own potential self-rule.

Now contrast the evolutionary progression of tools listed in the passage cited above with the emerging concerns around entropy so common among Corso's contemporaries like Thomas Pynchon or Philip K. Dick. In Dick's novel *Ubik* (1969), for example, the disintegration of the main character Joe Chip's mental world finds its manifestation in the devolution of household items found in his own age back to their more primitive forms of several decades earlier. "His last labored actions governed by a tropism," we read as Chip begins to be overcome by a mysterious and deadly process of decay. "An orientation urging him toward death, decay and nonbeing. A dismal alchemy controlled him: culminating in the grave" (763). Here, alas, the alchemists' "plunge into dreamy Luciferian evil" does not in the end lead to an "outward look of man's power toward all things." As the philosopher Peter Dews argued in paraphrasing Theodor Adorno, the social world of late capitalism—with its triumphant integration of all cultural processes under the commodity form—had led to a disintegration of "the bourgeois individual, the breaking down of the autonomous ego." In "the high bourgeois epoch" of Hegel and the Shelleys' days, Dews adds, "individuals were at least able to experience themselves as constituting their own society through the market-mediated pursuit

of private interest” (275). But where the political economy of Adam Smith, for example, could still proclaim that a greater expansion of manufacturing and trade may lead to the wealth of all nations, the rise of industrial capital, which constantly threatens to automate away workers who in turn are responsible for producing social wealth, has undermined the stable unfolding of this old bourgeois idealism. The moment the grounds of this idealism collapse under the weight of capital’s total triumph, the unity of bourgeois individuals gets supplanted by the disempowering experience of disintegration that haunts Chip in *Ubik*.

But perhaps the true dividing line between a stubborn modernism and an emerging postmodernism is not as much a question of aesthetic form as one of attitude. Do you resist this disintegration, challenge it, explore the grounds for its reversal? Then you’ll be more likely to defend the accomplishments of bourgeois modernity. Do you give in to it and find intellectual justifications for it by writing “that the price to pay for such an illusion [as Hegel’s] is terror” (Lyotard 81), then you’ll end up theorizing in coldly descriptive and thoroughly affirmative terms the postmodern condition. And if all that’s left to keep all the contending forces of the globe from killing each other is setting in place a system of mutually assured destruction, then so be it.

None of this means that Corso had some sort of brilliant and unprecedented insight into the emancipatory potentials of his day. In his vicious critique of the Beat Generation, Norman Podhoretz famously accused Corso’s cohort of being proud “know-nothing bohemians” whose celebration of spontaneity reeked of “anti-intellectualism” (488). Podhoretz had mostly Jack Kerouac in mind, but one wouldn’t be surprised if he’d have said just the same thing of a writer

who proudly celebrated “the joy of all existence, the wonderment and realization that we are alive, man, the victory of life, here, now, on earth, breathing,” and so on.

We needn’t go so far or be as polemical as to say that there were serious limitations to Corso’s poetics, and these lay in the fact that he did not consciously oppose the “logics of disintegration” but sometimes denied their unfolding in pseudo-romantic posture. But this criticism still does not prove Robert C. Timm’s assessment correct that what preoccupied Corso in his lyrics was “a fear of closure, metaphorically connected with a fear of death.” Too preoccupied with the deconstructivist fad of his day, which sought to detect open forms wherever it directed its attention, Timm overlooked Corso’s constant celebration of life and his innate optimism about the human condition. Likewise, we can fault the poet at most for too much of a faith in closure, not a fear of it. Take these lines from “Bomb” which describe

Electrons Protons Neutrons

gathering Hersperean hair

walking the dolorous gulf of Arcady

joining marble helmsmen

entering the final amphitheater

with a hymnody feeling of all Troys

heralding cypressean torches

racing plumes and banners

Here, the atomic age finds its entry into the pantheon of high culture, represented exclusively in reference to ancient Greece as seemingly the pinnacle of human achievement. In a poem seething with irony, there isn't much of it we can detect in these lines. They do feel rather celebratory, as if the bomb had made 20th century society come full circle to the civilization to which Prometheus's act of rebellion had given rise. Long before Kissinger could raise doubts over the demigod's gift, Prometheus's transgression seemed to have paid off in the achievements of classical antiquity.

But, argued Karl Marx, this nostalgia itself was indicative of an inability to grasp the present on its own terms. Given the horrors of the early industrial age, so Marx,

the childlike world of the ancients appears to be superior; and this is so, insofar as we seek for closed shape, form and established limitation. The ancients provide a narrow satisfaction, whereas the modern world leaves us unsatisfied, or, where it appears to be satisfied, with itself, is *vulgar* and *mean*. (np; italics in the original)

We shouldn't "fear" closure, but at the same time we shouldn't diagnose it where it's disrupted by social antagonisms. Another, and perhaps more serious charge against the entire Corso-Ginsbergian aesthetic is its ironically detached, intellectually "unserious" nature (to think back to Norman Podhoretz) that produces a distinct gap between the Shelleys' historical moment and that of Corso. As Christopher Lasch puts it in his critical examination of *The Culture of Narcissism*,

Men used to rail against the irony of fate; now they prefer it to the irony of unceasing self-consciousness. Whereas earlier ages sought to substitute reason for arbitrary dictation both from without and within, the twentieth century finds

reason, in the debased contemporary form of ironic self-consciousness, a harsh master. (99)

What distinguished the Shelleys' era from Corso's was that by the latter's lifetime, capital seemed to have universally consolidated its domination over human civilization whereas in the time of the former the new Enlightenment ideals of human self-consciousness and freedom still had a distinct salience. This historical regression made the Kissingers of the world and their fatalism regarding Prometheus's act of self-emancipation possible. Shaken by the awful realization that inescapably "in the hearts of men to come more bombs will be born," Corso's speaker looks at the world like a joking trickster, impotent to change it so at least capable of ridiculing it. Then again, with a poem this long and multifarious as "Bomb," we know that Corso didn't apply his light-hearted touch for its entirety but that a distinct seriousness governed it at crucial moments. In fact, the poem often insists on its awareness of the contradictions of a society "that consents / a child in a park a man dying in an electric-chair," governed by the same men in whose hearts "more bombs will be born." If only Corso's audience at Oxford had held off from throwing their shoes until these lines, they would have grasped the seriousness of his greatest poetic achievement.

Chapter 2: “Time to Have Become”: Saul Bellow’s  
*Henderson the Rain King* and the Persistence of Liberalism

Many artists and writers in 1950s America were gripped by a sense of cultural and social alienation amid a sea of plenty. Here’s a representative account of the dilemma, expressed by Eugene Henderson, the first-person narrator and protagonist of Bellow’s 1959 novel *Henderson the Rain King*:

America is so big, and everybody is working, making, digging, bulldozing, trucking, loading, and so on, and I guess the sufferers suffer at the same rate. Everybody wanting to pull together. I tried every cure you can think of. Of course, in an age of madness, to expect to be untouched by madness is a form of madness. But the pursuit of sanity can be a form of madness, too. (25)

To readers in our tumultuous age of social discord and economic decline, this passage feels like it was written in quite a different world, anywhere but the United States, the country of irreconcilable blue vs. red states and immiserated gig workers hustling for scraps. Henderson’s is an era of full employment, where “everybody is working”; it is also an era of political and cultural consensus, with “[e]verybody wanting to pull together.”<sup>37</sup> As part of the vast social division of labor, the task of suffering from near inescapable “madness” has to fall to someone too.

---

<sup>37</sup> There is, of course, a good portion of nostalgia involved in this common account of 1950s America. The political scientist Cedric Johnson has helpfully pointed out that the postwar era often gets all too easily glorified as a “golden age of modern American civilization,” while many of the social disruptions that get blamed on 60s radicalism were already present in the 50s (xxxiii-iv).

But why the madness in an age of American dominance and affluence? Henderson's historical narrative answers the paradox thus:

You have to think about white Protestantism and the Constitution and the Civil War and capitalism and winning the West. All the major tasks and the big conquests were done before my time. That left the biggest problem of all, which was to encounter death. We've just got to do something about it. It isn't just me. Millions of Americans have gone forth since the war to redeem the present and discover the future. . . . And it's the destiny of my generation of Americans to go out in the world and try to find the wisdom of life. It just is. Why the hell do you think I'm out here, anyway? (276-77)

The "out here" is a mystical, dream-like version of "Africa," somewhere "in the farthest African mountains," as Henderson puts it, "damn it, they couldn't be much farther!" (87). And Henderson's point is that the age of the traditionally male hero bravely conquering the unknown was no more, supplanted as this age had become by the safety and comfort of the modern welfare state. "All the major tasks" in which this male hero could've exerted himself and proved his worth had been taken off his hands by the sweat and toil of preceding generations. What he was faced with now was ennui and dread at the prospect of death, since the age of abundance would allow for few other activities to distract the brooding mind.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> In Ross Douthat's take on our present "age of decadence," there was at least one major task left to accomplish for those with the right stuff: the conquest of the moon (aptly accounted for by Bellow, too, in his 1970 novel *Mr. Sammler's Planet*). But since that had been taken care off by 1969 as well, what Henderson laments here has become the universal condition of 21st century humanity, as allegedly groundbreaking innovations that have been promised to us for what feels like ages now—weren't we supposed to move on and settle the moon, i.e. expand the "final frontier" ever further?—are always too far off our reach. In Douthat's view, what might very well be ahead of us is no tragic demise of contemporary civilization in an awful bang, but centuries of economic and social stagnation, that is to say, little more than a whimper. In this sense, the present pathologies gripping the world in the form of the rise of demagogic populism and increasingly widespread conspiratorial worldviews are



Bellow may have hated the writers of the Beat Generation—branding them resentfully as the “Dirties” (“Writer as Moralist” 158)—but, as Thomas Hill Schaub has shown, his preoccupation with the peculiar condition of postwar civilization put him squarely in their company. Concerned with growing pressures to conform amid the inexorable rise of mass culture, postwar writers turned away from the predominant social realist mode of the 1930s and frequently deployed psychological tropes of alienation and, as we have seen, madness. Schaub writes that “[t]his pattern of self-recrimination and mental illness, through which the speaker works his way over the course of the novel, typifies American narrators during this period” (76). In Schaub’s view, the epitome of this self-doubting narrator is Bellow’s *Herzog*, the main character of the eponymous 1964 novel, though *Henderson* is no less representative of this formal design than its much more famous successor.<sup>39</sup>

It is on top of Henderson’s mind “to go out in the world and try to find the wisdom of life,” and to do so in such a way that his personal sense of self is preserved—preserved from the ever widening grip of the political world that is, which threatened to swallow up the individual through its totalizing grip unless that individual managed to carve out a “significant space” that was shielded from the public sphere. And “for art and literature there is no choice” but to maintain this “significant space” if it wanted to survive (Bellow, “A World” 276-77). As Schaub concludes, trying to recenter the individual in this way, especially against the lurking threat of totalitarianism, was a common feature of the liberal Cold War novel (56). In Eric

---

symptomatic of a lack of social dynamism. Alex Gendler’s recent account of the incel phenomenon brilliantly captures how this feeling of stagnation amid a sea of geopolitical peace has produced a whole set of “superfluous men” who have nowhere to channel their excess energies and are thus left to blame an emancipated womanhood for their own unsatisfied sexual desires.

<sup>39</sup> And in many ways *Henderson* is also formally a lot more successful than *Herzog*, see footnote 52.

Bennett's eyes that's precisely the problem because this preeminent Cold War concern for the individual provided "a vindication of the liberal democratic capitalist subject. New theories of the individual replaced the old utopian visions of a collective deliverance from want" (35). Bennett's study is concerned with the rise of creative writing workshops, which he gloomily calls the *Workshops of Empire* due to their alleged proximity to the interests of the emergent national security state. And Bellow fit a profile here, having taught at numerous creative writing programs domestically and abroad before turning to various powerful private foundations, like Rockefeller and Ford, to plead with them to free him the yoke of teaching so he could concentrate on his writing.<sup>40</sup> Then finally, on February 12, 1959, a mere eleven days before *Henderson* was published by Viking Press, the Ford Foundation came through and awarded Bellow a grant of \$16,000 payable over a period of two years.<sup>41</sup> As Bennett darkly notes, foundations like Ford and Rockefeller "cooperated and crossbred with the State Department, swapping personnel, effectively becoming, with smaller foundations, the privatized face of American foreign policy" (69), a foreign policy geared toward the globalization of liberal capitalist governance under American auspices. The anti-Communist Bellow, of course, would not necessarily have objected. After all, he more than once lent his name to Cold War organizations that were meant to combat the Soviet threat from the east.

---

<sup>40</sup> A summary of his meeting with Bellow in 1951 by the Rockefeller Foundation officer EMD, possibly Edward F. D'Arms, paints a picture of a desperate Bellow pleading for assistance. "His financial situation, however, is becoming more and more acute," EFD reports, "and he is desperately anxious for RF assistance. . . . B would find a full-time teaching position now particularly satisfactory and a means of continuing his writing, although at a slower pace than he would prefer. B pressed tactfully but persistently for a speedy decision as to the possibility of RF assistance to enable him to continue his current novel." The Rockefeller Foundation was, however, less than impressed with the still young Bellow of pre-*Augie March* days and rejected his request. EFD diary, Rockefeller Foundation Records, Projects, SG 1.2, Series 100 International–Series 253 Washington, Series 200: United States; Subseries 200.R: United States–Humanities and Arts, FA387a, Box 296, Folder 2773, Bellow, Saul (Humanities Consultant) Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

<sup>41</sup> McDaniel, Joseph. Letter to Saul Bellow. Ford Foundation Records, American Literary Manuscripts Collection, FA718, Box 1, Folder 6, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

But he always did so only knowingly and was dismayed as many other to find out of later revelations that the US intelligence apparatus had secretly mingled in the affairs of numerous anti-Communist cultural institutions. What this represented was an incursion by the state in the affairs of art and culture, spheres that, as we have seen, were to be shielded from politics lest they die. No wonder, then, that Henderson sought refuge in “the farthest African mountains,” a mythical space that he believes to be outside of history and in which he could engage on an absurdist spirit quest. On the way, he will learn an important lesson: that no space outside of history existed anymore, which is why he comes out on the other end exactly as he had before, a resolution that has baffled more than one critic but that is perfectly consistent with the novel’s formal design and philosophical outlook.

So why did Eugene Henderson, fifty-five years old, a decorated World War II veteran and multi-millionaire by inheritance, undertake this journey to Africa? Henderson asks the same question in the novel’s opening line, but with a grammatical twist: “What made me take this trip to Africa?” (3) Bellow’s protagonists often paint themselves as the passive objects of forces beyond their control—as, indeed, Bellow himself often enough does. He didn’t choose to take the trip, but was “made” to do it. But by whom or what exactly? Thirty pages later, he will open the fourth chapter with the rhetorical question “Is it any wonder I had to go to Africa?” (32) But in the interim he never actually presents sufficient reasons to answer this question coherently. We know he feels gripped by “madness,” is an alcoholic, mean and cold-hearted to his wife Lily, has picked up the violin, dreams of going to medical school at his late age to become a doctor, and has started a pig farm on his rural property to stick it to his Jewish neighbor (20). The point is that there is no rational reason that occasioned his journey to

Africa other than an internal voice that repeats the mantra “*I want, I want, I want*” (12; italics in the original). The mantra will accompany him throughout his journey, which, in many ways, is about completing the sentence by lending it a direct object—something that will never turn out to happen in quite a satisfying way. Early on he teases that at some point in Africa “living proof of something of the highest importance has been presented to me so I am obliged to communicate it” (22). Communicate he will for another 320 wild, rambling pages, though what that “something” really is we will never know—except that he rediscovers in himself a desire to live.

Unsurprisingly, the novel has been accused of “complicity in imperialist discourse” (Lamont 144) for its alleged debt to an Africanist outlook that paints the continent as a savage backwater outside of history (see also Muhlestein 67-71 for an overview of the scholarship that accuses Bellow of racism). Of “savages” Henderson does speak (115), and his favorite adjective is the word “African,” which collapses the vast diversity of a large continent into an undiversified whole, as in “African manner” (76), “African gesture” (180), “African English” (184), or “African dignity” (215). It is a little bit like the rhetorical slip-up by former President George W. Bush who said that “Africa is a nation that suffers from incredible disease,” thus collapsing the continent into a single nationhood and revealing his ignorance of its complexity (qtd. in Cochran). And a further Africanist stereotype is deployed by Henderson, which is that he loves Africa for being “all simplified and splendid, and I felt I was entering the past—the real past, no history or junk like that” (46). The temporal distinction here is one between the mere flux of time, signified by his reference to the “past,” and the philosophical concept of “history,” which rips the passing of time from the hands of nature and narrativizes it as a heroic development that’s actively shaped by human agency. In other words, things *just happen*

in “Africa,” while things *get done* in the West. Henderson himself starts out by being genuinely committed to this world view, but Bellow retains too much of an ironic distance from his bumbling protagonist to let him get away with this.

Too many critics seem to have missed that point. Daniel Lamont, for example, believes that in *Henderson* Bellow embraces “the myth of the heroic European venturing into the interior of Africa, bringing the virtues of civilization” (134), thus overlooking that there’s no easy identification possible between the readers and Henderson. In fact, this identification is actively precluded by design, as we shall see. John Cullen Gruesser has correctly argued that Bellow depicted in the character of Eugene Henderson a white man who’s “clownish, incompetent, or powerless” (40). Daniel Muhlestein has since concurred, seeing in *Henderson* a novel that’s engaged in the carnivalesque, an absurdist bending of the conventions of realism, which in turn leaves Henderson off as less than an easy to identify with hero. Bellow himself asserted in 1997 that

I don’t think the race question enters into *Henderson the Rain King* at all. I think it is too much a comic fantasy to be thought of as having any serious social importance. I do think that in a funny way we could put it differently. I was really making fun of President Truman’s “point four” program about going to the [sic] Asia and Africa to be helpful and teaching American ways. (qtd. in Lamont 146; square brackets in the original)

Lamont follows up this quote with the claim that this was “a disingenuous comment” (ibid.) for all the reasons stated above regarding Bellow’s engagement in colonialist discourse. But there is plenty of textual evidence to support Bellow’s comment.

The first emphasis needs to be put on his statement that the novel is a “comic fantasy.” Early on, Henderson reflects that what occurred to him in Africa “happened as in a dream” (22). While guest to the fictional Wariri tribe, he observes “a certain amount of Alice-in-Wonderland jollity” (241), a perfect analogy for his experiences in Africa as a whole, a place depicted not as much in terms of geographical accuracy, but one that you’d find on the other end of a rabbit hole. “Africa,” then, must be seen as a stand-in for any place remote enough from the reality of Henderson’s home in America, a place as “undeveloped” as possible. Naturally, choosing Africa as the setting for this “comic fantasy” still raises uncomfortable questions about the common Western writer and reader’s view of the continent as a mystical other, but it’s unclear how exactly Bellow is supposed to have contributed to “imperialist discourse,” especially, since Henderson is portrayed as a bumbling, destructive force with little self-awareness of the consequences of his deeds. Hence, Bellow’s point about making fun of American-style developmentalism. Besides, as we shall see, Henderson will learn—or at least we the readers will, given Henderson’s ignorance—that his image of Africa as a pre-Historic place is simply untrue.

Henderson encounters two fictional tribes, the Arnewi and the Wariri, thanks to his local guide Romilayu, a character who’s often overlooked in the scholarship because he may appear as little more than a primitive sidekick, though that would be to miss the fact that in important ways, Romilayu is the novel’s sole anchor to any claim to realism, the Sancho Panza to Henderson’s Quixote. From the point of view of Henderson’s Western gaze, Romilayu bears “manifestations of his former savagery” (277), i.e. he can function as a guide to the Arnewi and Wariri because he’s had his foot in both worlds, that of “civilization” and history on the one hand and that of “savagery” and mere time on the other.

The first tribe Romilayu leads Henderson to are the Arnewi, a meek-spirited, cattle raising people. Their queen Willatale even appears to provide Henderson with the possibility of satisfying his inner voice that persistently intones “I want, I want.” Baring his soul to Willatale via translation, the queen responds “Grun-tu-molani,” which translates as “Man want to live” (85). Henderson is thrilled by her reply and decides to reward the Arnewi for their wisdom—a fateful decision—but it is not exactly clear how the mere statement “Grun-tu-molani” should have helped him. In many ways, she’s just repeated Henderson’s mantra back to him, although, granted, with the verb complement “to live.” But how would that be any more meaningful than the mantra “I want” on its own? To say you want to live is a platitude, but from the mouth of Willatale it must sound like deep wisdom to Henderson. After all, as a pre-Historic “savage,” perhaps her ways have not been tainted yet by those of the West.<sup>42</sup>

In fact, Willatale gives off an air of contentedness, a hesitance to change (79), and that despite the fact that her people are going through an existential crisis. Already plagued by a drought, the Arnewi’s sole water cistern is infested with frogs. To them this infestation is a sign of a curse which forces them to keep their thirsty cattle from drinking the water. The cattle, as a result, are close to death (59). Henderson, now enlightened for having learned that he wanted to live, believes that it is on him “to do something . . . something that only I can do” (51) and that this would earn him Willatale’s gratitude who would surely “elevate me to a position equal to her own” (94) since “the Arnewi would consider me their very greatest benefactor” (61). But Henderson’s determination comes with no little amount of condescension toward the Arnewi’s culture. After all, “the Arnewi are milk-drinkers

---

<sup>42</sup> Besides, the made-up words might be another joke at Henderson’s expense who recognizes later on that he’s beginning to sound and act a lot like the hogs on his farm—he begins *grunting* unconsciously (282).

exclusively” and “never eat meat except ceremonially whenever a cow meets a natural death, and even this they consider a form of cannibalism and they eat in tears” (ibid.). With the cattle now too weak and scared to give milk, the Arnewi’s crisis is ever more compounded as they look helplessly toward annihilation. This, to Henderson, is a highly irrational mindset, akin to the Jews’ defeat by the Romans “[b]ecause they wouldn’t fight back on Saturday.” To survive, then, all the Arnewi would have to do would be to give up their customs. It’s that simple.

“Should you preserve yourself,” he asks, “or the cows, or preserve the custom? I would say, yourself. Live . . . to make another custom” (62). And later, he exclaims in frustration:

“Everything depends on the values—the values. And where’s reality? I ask you, where is it? (87). Michael LeMahieu has read this moment in *Henderson* as an obvious reference to Bellow’s own encounters with logical positivism and its famous fact/value dichotomy, which was overtaking philosophical discourse in America at the time. Henderson seems to be falling squarely in the positivist camp in his approach to the Arnewi’s crisis given his easy brushing aside of their customs as something quite nonsensical in the face of death. He himself, of course, strives for higher values, nothing less than an answer to his personal existential dread. But for now, what the Arnewi need is a good portion of Western-imposed developmentalism, benevolently presented to them against their own “irrational” beliefs. Or as Henderson puts it, “I figured that these Arnewi, no exception to the rules, had developed unevenly; they might have the wisdom of life, but when it came to the frogs they were helpless. . . . And therefore I thought, this will be one of those mutual-aid deals; where the Arnewi are irrational I’ll help them, and where I’m irrational they’ll help me” (87). But would the Arnewi want to experience any change given Henderson’s insistence that they had to give up their old customs?

Modernization in the West in many ways meant primarily the eradication of old customs and



their replacement by the sort of rationalism that he celebrates here. He doesn't recognize that it would mean a death of a certain kind, a cultural death, for the Arnewi to simply let go of their customs by embracing his own rationalist approach to life.

Henderson's "help" consists of a naive plan to exert brute force by building a bomb in order to blow the frogs out of the cistern. There are warnings. Itelo, an Arnewi prince, cautions him not to get carried away (88). Romilayu, too, is opposed, "but due to his wrinkles," Henderson speculates condescendingly, "he had an ingrained expression of that type, and he may have felt no disapproval at all" (84). These brief acknowledgments of the natives' doubts by Henderson, the first-person narrator, give insight into the fact that it isn't even true that the African peoples he encounters are that "backward" to begin with. They are quite as rational, if not a lot more so, than Henderson himself. Thus, he ought not to have brushed aside his original impression that easily because of course his plan ends in calamity, as the bomb doesn't just eradicate the frogs but destroys the whole cistern along with them, leaving the Arnewi with no water infrastructure at all. Defying the conventions of the *Bildungsroman*, this humiliating and destructive act serves as no lesson to Henderson who, in retrospect, reports that he had become "convinced (and still am convinced) that things, the object-world itself, gave me a kind of go-ahead sign" (100). How could he say this with the Arnewi left with not just the destruction of their customs but possibly their very grounds for existence?

As we will see, Henderson is ostensibly eager to experience change, but will continue to tread in place. This mythic quest will not end in the growth of the protagonist, but his return to where he had started from. Having just eradicated the Arnewi's way of life, Henderson simply takes off. It's not as if he doesn't offer his help yet again in rebuilding the structure, but the Arnewi have had enough of his "help," so that Itelo counters "Bettah you not, sir" (112).

Where to next, Henderson asks Romilayu, who suggests an encounter with the nearby Wariri tribe, though not without immediately regretting the suggestion (113). Persistently needling Henderson with snarky remarks at his expense, Romilayu implies that the Wariri have every reason to be concerned about in their impending encounter with Henderson (115). Henderson, as the novel's narrator, faithfully reports these bits of dialogue, but from his aloof point of view that doesn't know what to do with his guide's "ingrained" expressions, Romilayu's reasonable warnings go unheeded.

And so, the two end up with the Wariri, a much less benign tribe than the Arnewi. With the tribespeople potentially engaging in human sacrifice (149), the privilege of serving as part of their royalty is a doubtful one. The Wariri king keeps a large harem of warrior-women, though if his sexual performance is ever found lacking, he will be taken into the surrounding bushlands and strangled by the chief priest (157). It's a literal case of noblesse *oblige*, or as the present king Dahfu notes, "a most complex existence" of "duties" and "prerogatives" (155). The most fateful of these duties has left a sword of Damocles hanging over Dahfu: As part of a complex succession ritual, Dahfu has to capture a grown male lion believed to carry the soul of his deceased father Gmilo—alive. If he fails to accomplish this duty within a set timeframe, he will be killed. Until then, he remains king only nominally.

As we have seen, navigating the complex customs of African bushpeople doesn't come naturally to the positivistically inclined Henderson, who is quick to see the "irrational" sides to a nation's cultural customs. Overtaken by the hubristic belief once again that only he can help out the Wariri, Henderson participates in a rain-making ritual which asks him to lift the heavy statue of a Wariri goddess off the ground. If he does, then he'll be asked to stay with the Wariri for an undefined time, part of a wager he made with Dahfu. The heavyset Henderson succeeds

and is automatically crowned the Wariri's new "sungu," or rain king, something which puts him in a very precarious position vis-a-vis the Wariri's complex order of succession. After all, if Dahfu fails to capture Gmilo and gets killed, Henderson will rise to the throne and will then have to capture Dahfu reincarnated as a lion himself. No wonder then that the Wariri strongman who had originally been tasked with lifting the goddess statue off the ground had probably been strong enough to do so, but faked his weakness to avoid the doubtful honor of becoming sungu himself (315).

Henderson won't find this out for another good chunk of the novel and will feel instead quite comfortable in his role as sungu and close confidante of Dahfu whom he reveres as a philosophically enlightened mentor. As it turns out, Dahfu previously had contact with the outside world when he and the Arnewi prince Itelo attended medical school in Malindi, Kenya, before traveling as far as Syria and India (208). Neither the Arnewi nor the Wariri, then, are truly unspoiled peoples who've managed to steer clear of contact with civilization and therefore the reaches of capital H History as construed in Western bourgeois philosophy.<sup>43</sup>

And it's that philosophical tradition that is on top of Henderson's mind and that will occupy his wide-ranging conversations with Dahfu. At the heart of Henderson's concern is the Being/Becoming dialectic, which in his understanding is an undefined mish-mash that essentially signifies nothing more than that someone who is committed to "being" has it rather good because he is where he's always meant to be. "Becoming," meanwhile, refers in Henderson's life philosophy to the modern condition in which we're stuck with discovering who we want to be without a predetermined end point toward which to strive. A life spent in

---

<sup>43</sup> As Itelo reveals to Henderson, the Arnewi had been visited by white outsiders already, though this contact by now had been thirty years in the past (54).

the process of “becoming,” then, is an unhappy one to Henderson. Or so at least he assures his African hosts time and time again.

If this is the philosophy of modernity, then Henderson—and Bellow by extension—can easily be seen as anti-modernist given his wish “to stop Becoming. Jesus Christ, when am I going to Be?” (191). Gloria Cronin is perhaps the most influential proponent of this reading of Bellow’s entire literary project, which she labels “antimodernist, antirationalist, antimaterialistic, and antiliberal” (80). As a framework of interpreting Bellow as a whole, this would fly in the face of Thomas Hill Schaub’s, who, we remember, saw in his novels the perfect embodiment of Cold War liberal triumphalism. In Cronin’s account, Henderson successfully “resolves” his spirit quest by moving “from personal chaos to spiritual integration, from Africa to the USA, from ignorance to knowledge, from absurdism to belief. . . . The essential Henderson is what finally emerges, not the romantic, not the nihilist” (83). But Bellow, as we shall see, “resolves” nothing and will end up exactly where he had left off. Cronin’s categorical error lies in seeing Henderson’s journey as taking him “from Africa to the USA,” overlooking the fact that the real journey goes from the USA to Africa and back again. It was a journey, as we saw above, down the rabbit hole into a mystical parallel world out of which he emerged unchanged, ever the bumbling ignorant fool that Bellow intentionally paints him as. Besides, how can the “essential Henderson” come to “emerge,” if not through a process of becoming? The point, of course, is that Henderson doesn’t become what he already isn’t, though his personal stagnation occurs amid an irrepressible maelstrom of historical change. He won’t end up confirmed in any form of antirationalist illiberalism, but rather in the recognition, however

unconscious, that the world of liberal rationalism is inescapable, a concession that even some of the sharpest critics of liberalism often have to make.<sup>44</sup>

But to come to this conclusion, we must first see what else Henderson has to say about Being and Becoming. In response to Dahfu's question "[w]hat kind of traveler" he was, Henderson begins to ruminate internally that he was hoping to find some "satisfaction in *being*" and then goes on to reference Walt Whitman's poem "The Mystic Trumpeter" and its closing lines "Enough to merely be! Enough the breathe! Joy! Joy! All over joy!" (qtd. in *Henderson* 160; italics in the original). His internal monologue goes on thus:

*Being.* Others were taken up with *becoming*. Being people have all the breaks. Becoming people are very unlucky, always in a tizzy. The Becoming people are always having to make explanations or offer justifications to the Being people. While the Being people provoke these explanations. . . . I would have confessed [to Dahfu] that Becoming was beginning to come out of my ears. Enough! Enough! Time to have Become. Time to Be! (ibid.; italics in the original)

Henderson can't help but romanticize self-acceptance in an embrace of "Being" when he believes that "Being people have all the breaks." How so? Doesn't the fate of the Arnewi prove precisely the challenges that premodern peoples face when their inherited ancient customs come into contradiction with the brute reality of droughts, plagues, and intruding Westerners? But Henderson doesn't probe the question much deeper than lamenting the stressfulness and

---

<sup>44</sup> Even Patrick Deneen, the conservative author of the 2018 book *Why Liberalism Failed*, can't close out his argument without a begrudging nod to the inevitability of having to work through the challenges set up by liberalism in order to overcome liberalism. For almost 200 pages, Deneen has nothing but scorn for liberalism, which he accuses for having overturned prior social formations that were built on custom and virtue; but then, as if from nowhere, he acknowledges liberalism as "perhaps a necessary step whose failures, false promises, and unfulfilled longings will lead us to something better" (188).

anxiety-riddenness of the moderns who are “always in a tizzy” and who can’t ever be fully assured that their life choices are the right ones, since being right would mean to supply “explanations” and “justifications” that may or may not turn out to be correct. And only a people whose culture is rendered ephemeral by modernization has to persistently justify before itself its own choices. Henderson is trapped in quite the philosophical pickle here since he can’t seem to reconcile his desire to search for meaning, to quell the inner voice that wants, with his purported desire to accept reality as it had come to be. This, perhaps, is the source of the “madness” that he laments early on, or what Judie Newman calls, in her own astute reading of *Henderson*, the “deep-rooted schizophrenia in American life” that hopes “to wipe out the past and begin again in a new world” by overthrowing “inherited tradition and customs” (73). For if you have no certainties to fall back upon in your quest toward the autonomy of the liberal individual in an ever more ephemeral social world, what remains?

Louis Menand has very effectively described this transition of modern life from its premodern origins, and he deserves to be quoted here at length:

In premodern societies, the ends of life are given at the beginning of life: people do things in their generation so that the same things will continue to be done in the next generation. Meaning is immanent in all the ordinary customs and practices of existence, since these are inherited from the past, and are therefore worth reproducing. The idea is to make the world go not forward, only around. In modern societies, the ends of life are not given at the beginning of life; they are thought to be created or discovered. The reproduction of the customs and practices of the group is no longer the chief purpose of existence; the idea is not to repeat, but to change, to move the world forward. Meaning is no longer immanent in the practices of

ordinary life, since those practices are understood by everyone to be contingent and time-bound. This is why death, in modern societies, is the great taboo, an absurdity, the worst thing one can imagine. For at the close of life people cannot look back and know that they have accomplished the task set for them at birth. This knowledge always lies up ahead, somewhere over history's horizon. Modern societies don't know what will count as valuable in the conduct of life in the long run, because they have no way of knowing what conduct the long run will find itself in a position to respect. The only certain knowledge death comes with is the knowledge that the values of one's own time, the values one has tried to live by, are expungeable. (xiv-v)

The Arnewi and Wariri are perfect embodiments of what Menand here calls "premodern societies." Henderson was highly confounded by the fact that a people could prefer its potential demise—and even face it with contentedness as Queen Willatale did—rather than overturn its customs. The chief purpose of social life for the two tribes is the reproduction of themselves in cyclical fashion, an attitude that from Henderson's modern standpoint looks highly irrational. After all, there is no value in the eyes of Henderson, the modern, in facing one's death absent some sense of having accomplished a great task in one's life. On top of everyone's mind today is the goal of "making a difference," after all.

Dahfu seems to agree, thus compounding the threat to the survival of Wariri culture. Did he return from his ventures to the Arabian peninsula and the Indian subcontinent a changed, i.e. modern man? According to Menand, there are no other "ends of life" than the ones "created or discovered" in the course of life. No longer bound to carry on the traditions of their forefathers, modern individuals will more often than not end up in a different place than their parents and grandparents, often with the progressive notion of moving the world

“forward” in the course of individual self-exploration. Dahfu appears to buy into this outlook, telling Henderson that “I too must complete Becoming” (210). He complains that so much of humanity’s time is spent with reproducing

[m]ore or less the same fear, more or less the same desire for thousands of generations. Child, father, father, child doing the same. Fear the same. Desire the same. Upon the crust, beneath the crust, again and again and again. Well, Henderson, what are the generations for, please explain to me? Only to repeat fear and desire without a change? This cannot be what the thing is for, over and over and over. Any good man will try to break the cycle. (297)

He’s pushing at an open door with Henderson here, who had broken the cycle of his family’s intergenerational reproduction—though in rather negative ways. After all, Henderson comes from a line of accomplished men, as he tells us early on in a third-person internal monologue: “his great-grandfather was Secretary of State, his great-uncles were ambassadors to England and France, and his father was the famous scholar Willard Henderson who wrote that book on the Albigensians, a friend of William James and Henry Adams” (7). Henderson continues this line living comfortably from his inherited millions while making little more of himself in his postwar retirement than to intentionally piss off his neighbors and wife by breeding pigs. Hence the realization that this can’t be it and that he, too, must change.

Dahfu’s challenge to the Wariri culture, in any event, proves to be radical. When his father Gmilo died, Dahfu failed to capture his reincarnated manifestation in the form of a lion but, erroneously, took the lioness Atti into custody and tamed her. The Wariri elders believe her to be a witch who has cast a spell over Dahfu who is failing in his royal duties to continue



the line of succession as custom prescribes it. Instead, he subjects a frightened Henderson to a strange, Wilhelm Reich-inspired conversion therapy (Atlas 272), in which he takes his American visitor down to the lion's den to put him face to face with Atti and asks him to let out unbridled roars in imitation of Atti. Henderson is scared to death by the exercise. What ought to sound like mimetic lion roars are actually cries for help, "like 'God,' 'Help,' 'Lord have mercy,' only they came out 'Hoooolp!' 'Mooooorcy!'" (274). In the end, Dahfu's conversion therapy has the exact opposite effect of what he had intended. Rather than having become reconciled with reality and the ways of nature and the animal kingdom, Henderson's confrontation with this life-threatening situation has reaffirmed his desire to live, *tu-molani*. And so, he realizes that he "had to go back to Lily and the children," having "developed a bad case of homesickness. For I said, What's the universe? Big. And what are we? Little. I therefore might as well be home where my wife loves me" (328-9).

Slowly the realization creeps up on Henderson that Dahfu is an ideologically committed true believer. Or as he puts it to Romilayu: Dahfu didn't have to come back from his foreign travels to "put himself at the mercy of his wives. He did it because he hopes to benefit the whole world. A fellow may do many a crazy thing, and as long as he has no theory about it we forgive him. But if there happens to be a theory behind his actions everybody is down on him. That's how it is with the king" (276). This is a strange assessment because Henderson doesn't really seem to speak too fondly of Dahfu here. In fact, he assures Romilayu that Dahfu posed no threat to him with his obsession with Atti and whatever Henderson did in response to the therapy he did of his own "free will" (*ibid.*). Nonetheless, it appears as if he's just called Dahfu, a man he allegedly looks up to for his ostensible genius, "crazy." And he's "crazy" because he seems to harbor theoretical views that aim to "benefit the whole world." A man who's

interested in fostering the customs of his tribe would do no such thing. If all you do is to continue the ways of your people, you don't need to have a theory to engage in their rituals. You do these rituals because they've always been done. This would represent actions free of any ulterior motives or intentions, Henderson seems to be saying. Unlike the moderns, premodern societies don't need to find justifications for their actions. They simply do them, as if almost mindlessly.

We know a character from a previous Bellow novel, *The Adventures of Augie March*, that prefigures Dahfu in striking fashion. After the ship on which he was going to join the European war goes down, Augie finds himself on a life raft with the ship's carpenter Basteshaw. It will take Augie little effort before he realizes that Basteshaw is a fanatic who goes from theoretical program to theoretical program, including socialism for a while (548), to give an outlet to his megalomaniac fantasies of becoming the next "Moses" who will lead "the entire human race" across "a new River Jordan" in search of redemption (555). Augie, who had up to this point been all too eager to take on any one who crossed his path as his mentor, draws a line at Basteshaw. Defiantly, Augie tells him that "I'm dead against doing things to the entire human race. I don't want any more done to me, and I don't want to tamper with anyone else. No one will be a poet or saint because you fool with him. When you come right down to it, I've had trouble enough becoming what I already am, by nature. I don't want to go to the Canaries with you. I need my wife" (556).

It's hard not to see Bellow's own disenchantment with his former Marxist leanings at play here, a development that Bellow narrates in *Augie March* with some grounding in biographical fact. Just as in the novel, Bellow spent some time in Mexico mingling among the admirers of the exiled Leon Trotsky. As he explains in an essay from 1993, he even had a

personal visit with the Russian revolutionary scheduled, but arrived in time only to see Trotsky's bloody corpse stretched out on the hospital bed ("Writers, Intellectuals, Politics" 394). By that point, Bellow writes, he had already "drifted away from Marxist politics," but still felt admiration for Lenin and Trotsky (ibid.). This admiration, however, stemmed more from the cultural status that an identification as a Trotskyist bestowed on you at the time. As Irving Howe explained, "The Trotskyists were highbrow [as opposed to the Stalinists who were merely 'middlebrow'; G.B.], because they thought in the kind of terms that you had when *Partisan Review* started out . . . , the union of two avant gardes, a political avant garde and a cultural avant garde" (qtd. in Leader 169). But Bellow soon began to prefer the cultural side of things to politics and thus, despite his oscillations between the political extremes, preferred to keep his distance from the political arena, deriving "vital personal nourishment" not from Lenin or Trotsky, but "from Dostoyevsky or Herman Melville, from Dreiser and John Dos Passos and Faulkner" instead (qtd. in ibid.).

This purported preference for culture over politics meant that Bellow had to walk a fine line in the early Cold War years. Strained financially, he agreed in 1947 to teach in the Ford Foundation-funded Salzburg Seminar, which was unofficially labeled a "Marshall Plan of the Mind," i.e. geared toward improving the outlook on America held by its European participants (Leader 375; Parmar 108). Bellow was sympathetic to the project, having experienced, to his great annoyance, persistent anti-Americanism while on an extended stay in Europe thanks to a Guggenheim fellowship. During that stay, Bellow was invited to attend the founding conference of the anti-Communist and CIA-sponsored Congress for Cultural Freedom in West Berlin—where Arthur Koestler would famously announce before the public that "freedom has seized the offensive!" (qtd. in Saunders 82)—but he ultimately chose to stay

away to continue work on *Augie March* (Leader 378). Bellow spent the remainder of his career walking the fine line between practising acquiescence to state power—agreeing in 1960, for example, to travel abroad as a lecturer for the State Department (Atlas 284)—and resisting its total absorption. What Bellow wouldn't have accepted was to be a stooge for the state. When it was revealed that the CIA had been a major funder of the activities of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, Bellow was dismayed and told as much to his friend Daniel Bell. The news got through to Irving Kristol, who had co-founded the CCF's official journal *Encounter*. Yet in no way, Kristol pleaded in a long letter to Bellow, was the editorial integrity of *Encounter* compromised by CIA meddling. Kristol would persistently deny any knowledge of the CIA's involvement and told Bellow that he'd been just as much a "dupe" in the matter as many other CCF-affiliated intellectuals.<sup>45</sup>

What was at stake for most Western combatants in the "Cultural Cold War," whether they were aware of the CIA's activities or not, was the survival of the freedom of the individual in the face of Eastern bloc-style totalitarianism. But from the point of view of the liberal consensus politics of the 1950s, no one needed to actively enlist as a combatant. The trust in America's competency as the newfound leader of the "free world" and the general disenchantment with utopian programs among Western populations was reflected in the postwar literary world as well.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Kristol, Irving. Letter to Saul Bellow. 19 Sept. 1967. Saul Bellow Papers. Series II, Box 43, Folder 11, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>46</sup> Hence David Riesman's assessment that demagogues of the Huey Long type no longer had a shot at ascending to the presidency because "Americans possess increasingly competent government, without having to spend much energy getting it" (310-11).

Thus, however much critical distance Bellow preferred to keep from state power, he appeared to be just as much fighting this war than some of his more consciously committed colleagues. In his recommendation letter for the Ford Foundation creative writing grant, Marshall Best, the editorial director at Viking Press, thought it opportune to point out that Bellow's fiction "took the reader, in the wake of the central character, through the length and breadth of America, with sorties into the larger world beyond." But so as to assure the funders that Bellow wasn't interested in designing character types, Best added that the average main character in his novels lived "a brilliantly particularized life, but not at all a 'representative' or 'typical one.'"<sup>47</sup> This was an apt description of Bellow's larger literary project, which he'd conceptualized in stark opposition to the social realism that had dominated American letters only a few years before. In 1951, the Rockefeller Foundation solicited from him an essay on "The Responsibility of the Novelist in Society," for which he was remunerated with \$75 even though the foundation saw otherwise little promise in Bellow and chose to leave the tract unpublished.<sup>48</sup> In this rookie manifesto, Bellow bemoaned the sort of main character that populated American novels to that point. This character was "rather abstract, [and] he exhibits collective rather than personal traits (I am thinking now of a Steinbeck hero), and he shows what is wanted more than what is seen, heard, known."<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Best, Marshall. "Critical Evaluation of Nominee's Work." Ford Foundation Records, Education and Public Policy Program, Office of the Arts, Series XIII: Program Files, FA640, Box 64, Folder: Creative Writers—Grantees 1958, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

<sup>48</sup> In his officer's diary from February 7, 1951, the Rockefeller Foundation officer EFD wrote that he "was not greatly impressed at B's intellectual position" after a conversation with Bellow about his literary practice following his submission of the essay to the Rockefeller Foundation in satisfaction of the terms of contract. Rockefeller Foundation Records, call number same as in footnote 40.

<sup>49</sup> Bellow, Saul. "The Responsibility of the Novelist in Society." Rockefeller Foundation Records, call number same as in footnote 40. Reprinted as Bellow, "Sharp Edge."

This encapsulates perfectly in one single sentence the entire issue that the literary scholar Eric Bennett has with many Cold War era writers. Bennett believes that this tendency toward the individualistic and its analogue hostility to the social is itself the product of the powerful institutional mechanisms controlled by Cold War American actors in government and the philanthropic sector to push back against “totalitarian” threats from the left. Interestingly, in his account the socially conscious literature of pre-War days favored abstraction over concreteness, meaning: Where politically committed writers used to probe the abstract operations of complex social systems, demystifying them by making them cognitively mappable, individualists in the Bellovian—but also Southern Agrarian—vein favored, as Bellow puts it, “what is seen, heard, known.” To Bennett, this signified the “triumph of the sensory, the personal, the individual, and the idiosyncratic” that’s become a handy methodology for creative writing instructors to convey to their students (172). And because prominent creative programs like the Iowa Writers’ Workshop benefitted from institutional proximity to Cold Warriors in the CIA and beyond, this also signified a diminution of aesthetic forms that favored “creatively reimagining the world in a way that matters” (173). This meant, as we’ve seen already, “a vindication of the liberal democratic capitalist subject” as opposed to “old utopian visions of a collective deliverance from want.” Naturally, a writer like Bellow who willingly and openly threw the previously predominant social realism of John Steinbeck and others under the bus and bemoaned in Wordsworthian lament the encroachment of the “significant space” of art by politics made him to critics a perfect embodiment of capitalist subjectivity.

And endeared him to the liberal Cold Warriors at the Ford Foundation in turn? The director of its Humanities and Arts program, McNeil Lowry, believed that Ford represented a

“philanthropic institution chartered so broadly as to embrace the advancement of human welfare.”<sup>50</sup> Bellow received the news of their support just as *Henderson the Rain King* was about to appear. He certainly shared the foundation’s liberal cosmopolitanism, believing that World War I had revealed that the “transnational characteristics of human beings . . . were far more important than national character” (“Saul Bellow Interview”). The United States foreign policy apparatus was geared toward proving him right, albeit under the very skewed forms of capitalist expansionism. But Bellow’s literary personae, we know, were significantly more cynical about this benevolent liberal utopianism. After all, Augie March was “dead against doing things to the entire human race,” while Eugene Henderson thought his mentor Dahfu to be well-meaning in his “hopes to benefit the whole world.” But Henderson decided nonetheless to take a page out of Augie’s book, not Dahfu’s, and to go back home to where his wife loved him. The only difference between these two characters is that Augie felt the need to invoke “nature” as a justification for “becoming what I already am.” There’s no trace of that in Henderson who moves solely within history, i.e. far beyond the bounds of nature. The goal for him, as he states it himself, is “to have Become. Time to Be!” These two sentences are counterintuitively synonymous. Counterintuitively because Henderson here posits Being as the outcome of a process of becoming, which he renders in the future perfect: Being as a goal. But this would entail no Being in nature, i.e. Being as he’d been meant to be, but to be as he’d become. This takes freedom, i.e. conscious action in the form of self-making.

This intricate resolution to the Being/Becoming dialectic is far more interesting than the dichotomy set up by Bennett between the abstract and the concrete, the social and the

---

<sup>50</sup> Lowry, W. McNeil. “The Role of the Foundation in American Society.” Papers of Lowry, W. McNeil, Speeches and Writings, Box 26, Folder 7, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

individualistic. Bennet's preferred terms can be translated differently, namely into political and apolitical art. To say that you prefer art that's "creatively reimagining the world in a way that matters" and that will bring about "a collective deliverance from want" is somewhat odd and wordy phrasing. Matter in what way? And how will art contribute to the "collective deliverance," a decidedly millenarian way of putting things? Some unstated subject seems to be doing the delivering here, but who and toward what goal? The Marxists once believed that this subject was going to be a newly-formed socialist society itself, which had overcome the anarchic tendencies of capitalist accumulation and replaced them with conscious control over the development of the economy.<sup>51</sup> We are today almost a century removed from the last time Socialist and Communist parties held mass memberships in parts of the world, which promised to make the dream reality. With the events of 1917 to 1919, when Russia, Hungary, and Germany were overtaken by Marxist revolutions, capitalism's reign seemed to be nearing its end. Then all revolutions but Russia's collapsed, however, and in the Roaring Twenties capitalism strengthened its grip on the Western world as the peace-time boom made workers less susceptible to revolutionary sloganeering. But when the crash of 1929 inaugurated what seemed like a terminal downswing, literary critics like the not-yet-disillusioned Philip Rahv foresaw what he called in 1932 a "literary class war" between "proletarian" and "bourgeois" writers. It was the task of the Marxist critic, Rahv believed, "to indicate how the dynamics of dialectical materialism can vitalize the new proletarian expression . . . A more definite frontier

---

<sup>51</sup> As Max Horkheimer writes in his short essay "The Little Man and the Philosophy of Freedom":

[T]he error is not that people do not recognize the subject [of history] but that the subject does not exist. Everything therefore depends on creating the free subject that consciously shapes social life. And this subject is nothing other than the rationally organized socialist society which regulates its own existence. In the society as it is now, there are many individual subjects whose freedom is severely limited because they are unconscious of what they do, but there is no being that creates reality, no coherent ground. (51)



between the proletariat and the bourgeois in letters should be established” (7). For a while, this frontier seemed indeed to emerge as many writers came to document the lot of America’s working class in Great Depression America through the emergence of “proletarian” fiction (see Foley; Denning). The institutional support for this leftward shift among American artists took the form of the so-called “Popular Front,” a Moscow-ordered reconciliation between the Communist Party and sympathetic fellow travelers of artists and intellectuals. The revelations of the Moscow Trials and Stalinist sabotage of the Second Spanish Republic (exposed by the former fellow traveler Ernest Hemingway in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*) ultimately broke apart the Popular Front and soured the outlook of many of its former participants on Communism. Writing in 1952, Mary McCarthy explained that many formerly Marxist intellectuals feared that any relaxation of attitudes toward Communism would result in the return of Stalinism within America’s intellectual circles. These intellectuals “live in terror or a revival of the situation that prevailed in the thirties, when the fellow-travelers were powerful in teaching, publishing, the theatre, etc., when stalinism [sic] was the gravy-train” (qtd. in Saunders 199).

Some intellectuals held out, especially in Europe. Jean-Paul Sartre, for example, believed that fiction writers couldn’t but be committed given the novel’s grounding in its present historical moment. Every writer wrote with an ideal audience in mind, and the better writers would do so knowingly and actively commit themselves by embracing the political nature of their craft. To Sartre’s German neighbor Theodor Adorno this would have meant to sacrifice art’s integrity to the inescapable course of the world. Besides, to try to capture the abstract processes of capitalist society in the course of a novel, play, or poem would more likely than not result in oversimplification. Real capitalist exploitation wouldn’t be captured, just its dumbed-down reflection. And the audience of the committed artwork wouldn’t be a

heretofore uncommitted one who'd suddenly be aroused into consciousness by the messaging of the political work; rather, committed art would always be, Adorno believed, an exercise in "preaching to the converted" who already held the radical views that the artwork was supposed to evoke (419)— a real echochamber in which the radical intellectuals would never get exposed to surprising and unprecedented forms, but ones that neatly fit into their preestablished worldview.

Bellow thought similarly, but took his dislike for these intellectuals in a different direction than Adorno who still wanted to preserve a more appropriate, if critical account of contemporary art. Less than a week before *Henderson's* publication date, his essay "Deep Readers of the World, Beware!" appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*. The essay reads like a prophylactic caution against reading too much into *Henderson*. Bellow takes aim at the Marxist or psychoanalytic critics who see in Melville's *Moby Dick* an allegory of class war or the Oedipus complex respectively (93). Unlike Adorno, who valued artistic abstraction as perhaps the last best remnant of the human genius in a totally administered world, Bellow intoned a now familiar refrain: "Novels are being published today that consist entirely of abstractions, meanings, and while our need for meanings is certainly great our need for concreteness, for particulars, is even greater" (94-5).

The essay has baffled even Bellow's best readers, like his biographer James Atlas who notes that despite Bellow's propounded literalism, *Henderson* also reads like his "most 'literary' novel" (271). Chock-full of "biblical motifs" and other literary allusions, the novel "satirizes the very allusiveness that Bellow warned against in 'Deep Readers of the World, Beware!'" (271-2). What Atlas misses is that Bellow doesn't preclude *reading*, that is interpreting the novel as it is. His adversaries are mustered in the adjective "deep." (Close) reading looks for the

concrete meaning and forms of experience as the author had intentionally planted them in the text, while “deep” reading looks past them into the realm of one’s favored theoretical approach. Bellows favors characters that are not representative of some mythical placeholder; rather, they just are, as he puts it in the essay (93).

We know that Dahfu is modeled on the Reichian therapist Dr. Chester Raphael (Atlas 272) and that Henderson himself emerged out of a synthesis of many different personalities, including, as many believe, Ernest Hemingway (Newman 73; Gruesser 39) But once the act of artistic synthesis and transformation was completed, Dahfu wasn’t Raphael any longer and Henderson Hemingway. They were, as Marshall Best had put it, “particularized” characters, whose unique personalities made them unrepresentative of larger social forces—in other words, the novel is foreclosed to the sort of “deep reading” that may have turned these characters into something other than what they are. The point should be unsurprising given the fact that Bellow frequently rejected getting reduced to a particularized identity himself, namely that of the “Jewish-American” writer from which his literary output could be assessed as the representation of a type held together by unshifting ethnic bonds (Siegel). When Bellow denied that *Henderson* had “any serious social importance,” he meant that quite literally—meaning was to be found internally to it and not to be grasped for beyond the text, neither in mystical symbols nor in the fact of Bellow’s personal politics and his entanglement with Cold War agencies.

But that didn’t mean that the novel meant nothing at all or somehow resisted its own place in history. When Bellow questions whether his novels can have “any serious social importance” and his characters doubt that they can “benefit the whole world,” they nonetheless recognize that in a world of absolute becoming, the pull of history won’t leave

them unscathed. In his more resigned moments, Henderson laments that the universe was big and he little, so that he “therefore might as well be at home where my wife loves me.” In the same passage, he complains to Romilayu that “you can’t get away from rhythm . . . The left hand shakes with the right hand, the inhale follows the exhale, the systole talks back with the diastole, the hands play patty-cake, the feet dance with each other. And the seasons. And the stars, and all of that. And the tides, and all that junk” (329). What’s striking about this passage is that Henderson appears to give in to the overwhelming cyclical nature of the world. But none of the elements of the universe whose rhythm dominates the “little” self are of a social nature. Breath, the heartbeat (“systole,” “diastole”), the “seasons” and “tides” are all the stuff of physical reality. Yet, Henderson’s recognition of the smallness of the individual against these irrepressible forces doesn’t hit the reader unprepared. In fact, it had been pretty much a recurring theme in his thought for many chapters by this late point in the novel. Halfway through the novel he had recognized that “[t]he world of facts is real, all right, and not to be altered. The physical is all there, and it belongs to science. But then there is the noumenal department, and there we create and create and create” (167). In the same chapter, he gets more concrete as to how humanity could possibly access the “noumenal” realm. He asserts “that chaos doesn’t run the whole show. That this is not a sick and hasty ride, helpless, through a dream into oblivion. No, sir! It can be arrested by a thing or two. By art, for instance. . . . Why the hell else did I play the fiddle?” (175-76). Henderson will later give up the violin, recognizing that he had no artistic skills. Instead, he will decide to recommit himself to his dream of starting a medical degree at his late age. A degree in medicine, too, is a form of resisting the inevitable course of nature, i.e. acting from freedom, albeit merely from the level of science. An even higher form of human expression that gives shape to what would

otherwise be pure “chaos” and a “hasty ride . . . into oblivion” is art. Where humanity is acted upon in the physical realm of nature, it becomes the subject of its destiny in the “noumenal department” where it actively creates. While Henderson longs to become a “Be-er” (191), he can’t help but cherish the freedom that lies in Becoming. Hegel sought to sublimate the basic dichotomy between nothingness and death—both of which are forms of oblivion where agency is once and forever extinguished by the “rhythm” of the world. He found the key in Becoming, as the dynamic that distinguished modern man from all other creatures of the physical world. Henderson is right with him, longing to Be but recognizing the inevitability of Becoming.

Capitalist subjectivity also sees the physical world as something to be changed, though for purposes that are ultimately subjected to the anarchic logic of accumulation. It’s therefore worth distinguishing between Bennett’s great antagonist of capitalist subjectivity and what Schaub has called the liberalism of the Cold War novel. Malcolm Bradbury has helpfully defined the liberal novel as “the novel of Whiggish history, where individuals may reach out into the world of exterior relationships for reality, civility and maturity, where the possibility of moral enlargement and discovery resides. It is thus attentive to history in both individual and community.” Grappling with anxiety-inducing patterns of nature, such as man’s inevitable mortality, Bellow’s heroes also recognize that man is more than these rhythmical forces of the physical realm—“man is consciousness, and consciousness is indeed in history” (29). Becoming is a social function which is deeply enmeshed with modernity’s recognition of its own historical nature. Which makes Henderson’s insight into the inevitability of Becoming an insight into his own social nature, where his individuality is entangled with community. When he opens the novel with the question what “made me take this trip to Africa,” it could have very well been the same forces that make everything happen in the same way that the tides

and seasons are made to recur; but as Bradbury has pointed out, it was more likely Henderson's own consciousness, i.e. a historical force, that brought him there. And while he naively expected to find a pure and pre-Historical world in which naked savages danced to the tune of time, he found cultures grappling with the same problems as people anywhere else and whose kings "too must complete Becoming."

But that point has exactly befuddled more than one critic, especially when read against the novel's strange closing scene. LeMahieu notes that "Bellow does not narrate Henderson's process of discovery so much as stipulate it, almost in the form of a cliché: like Dorothy at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*, Henderson realizes that he's been looking for something which he's had all along, something 'already inscribed'" (150). This criticism of *Henderson's* ending has held virtually steadily for more than half a century. In 1968, J.J. Clayton wrote that "Bellow is still unable to bring off the change because he cannot dramatise it. We see desire to change, symbols of change; we are told that change has occurred. But we do not see the change" (qtd. in Newman 69). In short, many critics feel that Bellow tells but doesn't show.<sup>52</sup>

So what has happened? When Dahfu dies in his failed attempt to capture Gmilo's reincarnated soul in the form of a lion, the Wariri quickly identify the lion cub into which

---

<sup>52</sup> But at least the ending doesn't outright undermine the novel's formal design as it does in Bellow's next novel *Herzog*, where we follow along the eponymous protagonist for hundreds of pages as he engages scores of famous and not so famous personalities in intricate epistolary discourse in order to distract his mind from his recent betrayal by his wife Madeleine. Herzog, however, won't find his redemption in any philosophical insight, as the novel seemed to forebode, but purely in his retreat to the private sphere as he awaits the attractive and sexually luscious Ramona for dinner. The end. A critic writing in 1965 for the German weekly magazine *Die Zeit* neatly captured many a reader's disappointment when he raged that *Herzog* closed with pure "sentimental triviality, which denigrates to a certain extent all that had come before. Why . . . force on us the whole philosophy of despair, when all the while the point was to get over the infidelity of a woman who had been insufferable and frigid from the get-go?" ("Revolution"; my translation).

Dahfu's soul has been transferred. Knowing that the same untimely passing from the royal throne might await him too if he stayed behind, Henderson, now declared king of the Wariri, decides to bolt—though not without deciding to steal the cub that held Dahfu's soul. The significance is rarely, if ever, commented on even though with one fatal act, the theft of the cub, Henderson has thrown the Wariri's entire order of succession into disarray. He won't be there to see the possible consequences, since he soon boards a plane back home to Lily and his newfound calling as a doctor.

Thus, in a couple of weeks, Henderson has possibly destroyed not just one but two African cultures. Instead, he continues to “feel that old self more than ever” (275) and is just as imposing and ignorant of Romilayu's own thoughts as ever. Romilayu's presence in the novel serves as a persistent reality check on Henderson, who is too deeply impressed by his own intellect to notice the many irrational and destructive acts he engages in in the novel. It is from Romilayu's vantage point that we come to appreciate Henderson's true hubris, even though Henderson narrates the novel. When Henderson tells Romilayu that he was leaving, despite the fact that an intense bout of dysentery had just confined him to the hospital, Romilayu replies that his employer was “too weak” and that he was “fraid to leave you go.” Henderson, too self-absorbed to notice the straight-forward medical advice, comments that “I took it every bit as hard as he did” (330). It is left to us the readers to notice the disconnect between Henderson's self-image and what the people around him thought of him, which leaves us with an advantage of perception over him as he continues to stumble through the tale. The distance between ourselves and Henderson has the effect of reemphasizing his idiosyncratic ways that make him a non-typical character with whom the audience cannot identify given this critical gap between our perception and his.

On the plane to North America, Henderson reiterates his plans of wanting to go to medical school, even though the stewardess informs him that it was almost Thanksgiving, too late, in other words, to enroll for the next academic year. The delay gives Henderson a potential out, as he could reconsider his plans, a possibility, however, that the novel no longer narrates. What it does narrate in its last scene is a fuel stop in Newfoundland. Before the landing, the stewardess asks Henderson whether he could attend to an orphan child whose American parents had died in Persia. Even though he didn't speak English, the boy was going to be taken in by his grandparents in Nevada. The stress of the uncertain journey is big, so the sight of the lion cub might distract him for a while. During the fuel stop, Henderson takes hold of the boy to go outside and stretch his legs. There, Henderson states in the novel's last sentence, "I felt it was my turn now to move, and so went running—leaping, leaping, pounding, and tingling over the pure white lining of the gray Arctic silence" (341).

As Bradbury has commented correctly, the endings of Bellow's novels frequently provide "less some rhetorical resolution than a suspended anxiety" (30). It's hard to see any anxiety lurking in Henderson as he's "leaping, pounding, and tingling" after making his return to the more familiar shores of North America. But this is merely a side of Henderson's that Bellow *shows*; he *tells* something quite different. To bemoan that "we are told that change has occurred, [while] we do not see the change" is to miss the fact that Henderson tells us quite a lot of things over the span of almost 340 pages. We shouldn't take him at his word that change had occurred when he'd told us that he felt "that old self more than ever" and when Romilayu bore witness to the fact that even at very late stages of the novel, Henderson continued to be his old, self-absorbed ignorant self. Running on the tarmac in Newfoundland, he mentions "the happiness that I expected at [his home in] Idlewild from meeting Lily" (340). But to expect



happiness from her would also mean to show her any reason why she ought to be happy at having her husband back. Will it be the same husband who acted abrasively and unlovingly toward her before his departure, or will it be a truly changed one whose behavior toward her will be much warmer going forward? The proof, in short, always lies in the pudding, but how he'll behave, whether he will lovingly care for the lion cub, become a trusting father to his children, or actually go through with his plans of studying medicine lie all beyond the novel's frame, truly leaving Henderson suspended between his good intentions and the necessity to act on them. If Bellow cautions us to read only what's concretely there, we have more than enough reason to believe that nothing much has really changed about his protagonist.

Of course Henderson had to stipulate his discoveries more than showing them. The former is consistent with his character whereas the latter would be bending the novel's believability. One doesn't just solve the madness plaguing an entire society as that of postwar America by going into Africa's hinterlands, destroying two cultures in the process, and going back only to promise betterment. *Henderson the Rain King* is a novel about the inevitability of change in a civilization built upon the very principle of change over stagnation and the immalleable nature of social customs. Its protagonist comes from a long line of accomplished New Englanders and has changed that family line for the worse by squandering his fortunes without any hope for the reversal of that generational tailspin. Whether he will ever actually change we will be left to guess; but the chance that he might is possible only in a culture that makes change not just inevitable, but positively mandates it.

### Chapter 3: “What Was Important About Today’s Laugh”:

#### Uwe Johnson’s *Anniversaries*, Private Philanthropy, and Autonomy

In 1971, the German novelist Uwe Johnson was awarded the prestigious Georg-Büchner-Prize, an honor worth 10,000 Deutsche Mark at the time. Previous recipients had been such postwar literary luminaries as Gottfried Benn, Max Frisch, Paul Celan, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Günter Grass. In typical fashion for the austere and reticent native of northeastern Germany, Johnson would state near the end of his life that he regarded the customary acceptance speech as one “I had to give” (qtd. in Bengel 126; my translation), an attitude that was reflected well by the fact that he would exclusively and dispassionately refer to himself in the speech as “the author” (“Rede” 53 et seq; my translation). Believing that he owed the award committee an “expense report” of “what he had spent the bigger part of the [award] money on before he even owned it” (ibid.), the entire speech is structured around an account of the costs of various cab rides, visits to the diner, or purchases of the *New York Times* when he lived in Manhattan with his family from 1966-68.

Johnson had sought the occasion to live and work in the United States because he felt that his literary career in Germany had reached an impasse. Since many of his novels and stories dealt with characters whose lives were shaped by the political division of Germany, he soon earned the moniker of the “writer of the two Germanies” (Dichter der beiden Deutschland), a label he resented with a passion (Zimmer 104; my translation). Spending time in America would allow him to take a break from the label and gather experience about a country that had fascinated him since his first visit in 1961 when he participated in the Harvard International Seminar, a summer school organized and run by the ambitious graduate

student Henry Kissinger. This time around, however, Johnson wanted to experience the real America, not the sanitized version offered to him at prestigious Ivy League campuses. The German-born publisher Helen Wolff finally managed to secure Johnson a job as a textbook editor at Harcourt Brace and World. The position allowed him to edit *Das neue Fenster* (1967), an anthology of recent German writing intended for high schoolers.

But Johnson couldn't escape his writerly instincts and felt inspired by events at this momentous time in American history to develop the outline of what would become his magnum opus, the novel *Anniversaries: From a Year in the Life of Gesine Cresspahl*, which appeared in four separate installments between 1970 and 83. *Anniversaries* tells the story of a full year in the life of its protagonist Gesine Cresspahl, with a chapter devoted to each day between August 20, 1967 and August 20, 1968. The single-mother Gesine is an émigré from the German Democratic Republic who settled at 243 Riverside Drive, New York (the actual residence of the Johnsons during their time there) to take the job as a foreign language correspondent at a Manhattan-based bank. Her inquisitive ten-year old daughter Marie wants to learn all there is to know about her family's past. Narrated in extensive retrospective passages, partly audio-recorded "For when I'm dead" (129)<sup>53</sup>, Gesine relates the story of how her parents Heinrich Cresspahl and Lisbeth Papenbrock met; what life was like in her fictional northeastern German home village of Jerichow during the time of the Nazi's rise to power (Gesine herself was born in 1933); how Jerichow's inhabitants arranged themselves with the regime or secretly resisted it; and of her adolescence in the Soviet-aligned German Democratic Republic. When her boss, the

---

<sup>53</sup> 2018 also saw the publication of the first-ever complete English translation of *Anniversaries* by Damion Searls after an earlier abridged version that was translated by Leila Vennewitz and Walter Arndt had appeared with Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in two volumes in 1975 and 87. All references to the English version are made to Searls's 2018 translation.

bank's vice president de Rosny, sends her on a mission to Prague to help establish financial relations between Alexander Dubček's socialist reform government and the West, Gesine has to choose between her personal socialist convictions and her responsibilities to her capitalist employer. Fatefully, her scheduled arrival date coincides with the Soviet invasion to quell "socialism with a human face"—which took place in the night of August 20-21.

Johnson was an adamant researcher of the historical background and setting for his stories, so his "American novel," as Johnson's Riverside Drive neighbor and friend Hannah Arendt called *Anniversaries*, would need to be based on his first-hand knowledge of life in New York.<sup>54</sup> But his contract with Harcourt Brace and World ran out long before the novel's intended endpoint, which would threaten his ability to collect first-hand impressions of everyday life in New York through August 1968. To bridge this gap, Arendt successfully pleaded with the Rockefeller Foundation to support the Johnson family with a \$7,000 stipend to make up for the cost of living until desired date. This grant-in-aid, however, had come at a time when many American philanthropic foundations were under intense scrutiny for having served as funding conduits for the CIA and other state agencies as they struggled for the allegiance of artists and intellectuals during the "Cultural Cold War."<sup>55</sup> An avid reader of the *New York Times*, Johnson would have known of this clandestine nexus, which was exposed in this and other newspapers.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Arendt, Hannah. "To Gerald Freund." 31 March 1967. Rockefeller Foundation records, projects, SG 1.2, Series 300 Latin America - Series 833 Lebanon, Series 717: Germany, Subseries 717.R: Germany - Humanities and Arts, FA387B, Box 11, Folder 111, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

<sup>55</sup> That the Rockefeller Foundation served as a "funding cover" for the CIA is claimed in Saunders 135.

<sup>56</sup> The story of how beginning in 1966 the New York Times broke the news that the CIA had backed many institutions of the "Cultural Cold War" such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom is narrated in Saunders 369-380 and Wilford 225-248.

The *Times* takes up a key role in the novel. Extended quotations and paraphrases from the day's edition often open up its 367 chapters, lending contemporaneous context from the world of local and global politics to Gesine's merely private life. To Gesine, the newspaper takes up a familial role—that of a trusted “aunt” (31). As such, glued to her every word, Gesine would read reports such as the following, paraphrased from its December 2, 1967 edition:

Yesterday, Lord Russell's tribunal for war crimes in Vietnam, seated in Roskilde, near Copenhagen, found the USA guilty of all charges . . . Jean-Paul Sartre, a member of the international tribunal at Roskilde, has already punished the USA once—refusing an invitation to the country two and a half years ago because its government was waging a war in Vietnam. Sartre's reasoning made every foreigner traveling to or living in the USA an accomplice. (345-46)

Following that logic, what would that make Gesine? Or Uwe Johnson himself, for that matter, who didn't just “live” in America, but derive his income partly from John D. Rockefeller's massive endowment?

At the heart of *Anniversaries* lies this conflict. Johnson's response is not to avoid it, but to address it head on. No fan of using literary fiction as an outlet for “tactical politics,” however, the shape that his response takes in *Anniversaries* is that of an intricate formal solution that draws a sharp dividing line between the space of real-life historical time and that of literature.<sup>57</sup> But as will become clear, this is not to revert to an escapist aestheticism to avoid implication in history; rather, his embrace of aesthetic autonomy in the novel holds the key to

---

<sup>57</sup> His famous denunciation of “tactical politics” is made in “Rede” 71.

the ethical core of Johnson's thought at this late stage in his life. It is an ethics, as we will see, that compels his readers to understand themselves as their own best legislators.

Growing up in the GDR, Uwe Johnson soon ran afoul of the state authorities. A report on his involvement with the official state youth organization, the Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ), paints a portrait of an independent mind, who held "critical and skeptical views of our FDJ work" and who "openly stated his convictions" (qtd. in Johnson, *Begleitumstände* [henceforth *BU*] 109; my translation). Johnson concludes that such testimony to personal integrity "guaranteed that one would never find employment in any institution throughout the GDR" (110). This nation-wide blacklisting probably contributed to the fact that Johnson failed at getting his first completed novel, *Ingrid Babendererde*, published in his lifetime. His GDR-based editors uttered ostensibly formally-minded concerns in justifying their verdict: They wished for a more socially conscious text that engaged in "historical critique" (qtd. in *ibid.* 89). The publishing house Mitteldeutscher Verlag stated that it missed a contextualization of the novel's plot as a "concrete and determinable stage within a grand dialectical process" (qtd. in *ibid.* 95). The state's directive seemed clear: It desired, as the cultural apparatschik Wilhelm Girnus put it, "artistic mastery and ideological clarity," though not necessarily in this order of priority (qtd. in *ibid.* 103). As we can see, Johnson's allergy to seeing literature as a tool for "tactical politics" had origins that hit close to home.

After his move to West Berlin in 1959, literary success was not long in the making. Originally written while still in the GDR, Johnson's first actually published novel *Speculations About Jakob* garnered instant praise when published the same year by Suhrkamp. A highly

ambitious modernist account of the suspicious death of its main character Jakob Abs while crossing the railroad tracks at his job site in the GDR, the novel was the first in Johnson's own version of a Yoknapatawpha-like universe. An admirer of William Faulkner, Johnson would introduce a number of characters throughout his subsequent novels and short stories which took place in the same fictional setting in and around the town of Jerichow. Jakob, after all, was Gesine's first lover, with whom he had conceived Marie before his untimely death. The life stories of these characters would unfold against the domineering background of the Iron Curtain—hence the hated label as the “writer of the two Germanies.”

A change of scenery was thus urgently needed, and he would call on any assistance he could get to expand his horizons. Freed from the oppressive travel restrictions of the authoritarian GDR regime, Johnson revelled in the opportunity to visit the world, especially the United States. Upon the suggestion of his publisher Siegfried Unseld, Johnson was invited to participate in the International Seminar, a Harvard summer school organized annually by a young Henry Kissinger. The International Seminar became an important, though underappreciated institution for the postwar German literary establishment. A host throughout the years of its existence to Unseld, poet Ingeborg Bachmann, critic Walter Höllerer, novelist Martin Walser, and Johnson, the Seminar would unite a series of German-language writers whom Johnson came to call (despite Bachmann's participation) the “Kissinger boys” (Bürger). While Kissinger denied that the Seminar intended “to ‘propagandize’ [sic] our participants,”<sup>58</sup> a 1951 outline that was drafted to gather support for the summer school sends a different message and reveals its key positioning as a player in the burgeoning “Cultural Cold

---

<sup>58</sup> Kissinger, Henry. “To Stanley Gordon.” 23 May 1960. Harvard International Seminar records, UAV 813.141.25, Box 1, Ford Foundation 1960-1966, HUA.

War”: As a young generation of aspiring artists and intellectuals in Europe had just “witnessed the collapse of many traditional values,” Communism might very well step in as “the residuary legatee.” “The Harvard Summer School Foreign Students Project,” its organizers promised<sup>59</sup>, “can assist in counteracting these tendencies by giving active, intelligent young Europeans an opportunity to observe the deeper meaning of United States democracy,” an opportunity that would entail an exposure to American “Individualism” or “the distrust of government” in favor of local politics.<sup>60</sup> No wonder that the CIA became a major backer of the seminar (Ferguson 277-79).

The terms laid out in this document contained the essence of the rhetoric of “Cold War modernism.” According to Greg Barnhisel, “Cold War modernism” was a modernism stripped of its prior oppositional stance toward bourgeois culture. Promoted by the American government as an alternative to the officially sanctioned socialist realism of the Eastern bloc, this form of modernism and its political underpinnings in

Cold War liberalism asserted the fundamental importance of the individual over the collective, and thus the Cold War modernist argument that stemmed from Cold War liberalism drew very heavily upon the individualistic Lockean construction of freedom—particularly in its focus on the heroic, dissenting artist free to create as his conscience directs him. (44)

---

<sup>59</sup> The proposal is without a stated author. In all likelihood, it may have been the project’s lead organizer, Kissinger’s dissertation director William Yandell Elliott.

<sup>60</sup> “Preliminary Statement of Objectives and Program of the Harvard Summer School Foreign Students Project.” Harvard International Seminar records, UAV 813.141.25, Box 4, op. cit. The quotes are taken from pages 1 and 4 of the document.



Johnson, for one, publicly acknowledged how much he enjoyed the fact that in his newfound home in West Berlin he could “write what he wanted, where he wanted . . . In drafting his book, he only had to consider what was good for the book, not what some authority would deem good” (“Rede” 70-1). Thanks to the freedoms guaranteed by the liberal order of the Western bloc, the days when he had to write with the political preferences of his potential publishers in mind were finally behind him.

Or were they? Colin Riordan has convincingly shown that Johnson’s early literary output was written precisely with such considerations in mind. As Riordan reveals through careful analysis of various manuscript versions of *Ingrid Babendererde*, Johnson must have known that some of his more explicit critiques of the GDR regime would have landed him in jail; and yet, “Johnson’s commitment to the GDR and to socialism, for all its faults in the contemporary manifestation, was great enough for him to censor his own work before even trying to have it published” (208). At the same time, the final manuscript remained too critical in the eyes of the GDR publishers while not being denunciatory enough of Eastern German socialism in the eyes of Siegfried Unseld in the West (209). In short, “Johnson’s self-censorship may thus have left him with a novel which confirmed neither side’s image of the other sufficiently to allow publication” (210). Riordan concludes that “*Ingrid Babendererde* was indeed a victim of a kind of literary Cold War” (211). So as to avoid a similar disappointment, Johnson wrote his first ever published novel, *Speculations about Jakob*, “with a Western audience in mind” (214), and this despite the fact, Riordan argues, that this novel remained committed to a kind of “anti-Stalinist socialism” as well (210).

Such an ideological standpoint, however, made Johnson fit right into the political climate of the early Cold War decades, when the “non-Communist Left” (NCL) reigned supreme

in intellectual circles. While allergic to Stalinism, the NCL maintained a largely social democratic outlook in economics and a liberal mindset in politics and culture. In Europe, it gathered around such publications as *Encounter* in Great Britain and *Der Monat* in Germany; in the United States, *Partisan Review* became the great locus of the NCL. Later it would come out that all of these magazines were secretly funded by the CIA, which was no surprise, the former Congress for Cultural Freedom officer Peter Coleman wrote in 1989, because “there developed a convergence, almost to the point of identity, between the assessments and agenda of the ‘NCL’ intellectuals and that combination of Ivy League, anglophile, liberal, can-do gentlemen, academics, and idealists who constituted the new CIA” (46).

Gesine Cresspahl’s political convictions could’ve been taken right out of the pages of an NCL pamphlet. Already in high school would she score low grades in classes devoted to analyzing such Stalin pamphlets as “Is the War Inevitable” (Johnson, *Anniversaries* 675). Hers is a socialism “with a functioning constitution, with freedom of speech, with freedom of movement, with the freedom for even an individual to decide how to use the means of production” (596-7). Gesine’s vision of socialism, in other words, latches on perfectly to that promoted by Alexander Dubček in Czechoslovakia. So much so, in fact, that she accepts her mission to establish contacts with him in her bank’s name, albeit with an ulterior motive. As Johnson explained in his 1979 poetics lecture in Frankfurt, Gesine’s boss de Rosny was left in the dark about her true intentions, which were to “help to repair a socialist economy and thus ameliorate its citizens’ circumstances; which, she realizes in turn, is her last attempt at getting herself involved with the alternative of socialism” (BU 422). To be fair, such plans would place her on the political compass of the Non-Communist Left decidedly on the left, closer to the democratic socialist Irving Howe faction than the pro-capitalist Irving Kristol one.

But to speak of “last” attempts would suggest that her patience was coming to an end and that her previous attempts must have led to disappointments in their own right. We know of plenty reasons why that was. After Jerichow came under Soviet occupation her father Heinrich was tortured in a Soviet internment camp, returning a broken a man; a similar fate would await her schoolfriend Dieter Lockenvitz who was sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor for having distributed a flyer which listed the names of the victims of the GDR regime; and this regime was distrustful enough of Gesine’s own convictions that it sent a spy after her to observe her every move, which was one of the many reasons that prompted her move to West Germany and from there to the United States.

And now, in the novel’s present, the precocious Marie, upset with the atrocities committed by American GIs in Vietnam, is suddenly challenging her mother on why she isn’t doing enough to stop the war (425). At dinner with de Rosny, she asks point blank whether it is “true that the banks are making money off the war in Vietnam” (403), a transgression that could’ve easily threatened her mother’s job. But it implies that Gesine, the ostensible socialist, may be deriving her income from blood money and yet chooses to keep her head low so as not to offend her employer. We remember Jean-Paul Sartre’s stinging accusation of criminal accompliceship against foreigners who voluntarily stuck around America. Then, after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated and the shock and outrage started to run deep throughout the nation, a choir of the unnamed dead—one of Gesine’s many dialogue partners throughout the novel whose words are rendered in cursive—accuses her of the very same accompliceship: *“What kind of country are you voluntarily choosing to live in? A country where black people get killed”* (835). Gesine, however, resists the moral pressure to engage in “activism” to show her opposition to the war. Marie is outraged that her mother didn’t participate in the famed March

on the Pentagon on October 21, 1967, but Gesine channels her inner Adorno when she counters defiantly that she didn't "*believe in it. The president's policy in Vietnam won't be changed by the protests of a minority*" (177; italics in the original). Confronted by her daughter with the example of Norman Mailer who "*got arrested at the Pentagon yesterday,*" Gesine assures her that "*he's long since back home in Brooklyn Heights . . . and next he'll be selling us his story about it*" (177-78).

Modern-day protest culture, in other words, doesn't amount to impactful political action in Gesine's eyes and merely appears as a form of virtue signaling that, if anything, can earn its participants convenient royalties, which is perhaps just another form of blood money.<sup>61</sup>

All that's left for Gesine is resignation. Once more she shares Adorno's sentiments, this time his famed claim that "wrong life cannot be lived rightly" (*Minima Moralia* 39). This is Gesine's rendition of the lament: "I would've liked to be more consistent, though, untouched by the influence of biography and the past, with the right kind of life in the right era, with the right people, working toward the right goal, at least a right goal" (772). No one will be dropped into this imaginary perfect world, though, so naturally we must take our stand in the "wrong life" instead. But once you take a look around, you'll notice that your field of options to "resist" the unjust state of things is severely restricted, maybe completely chimerical: "It's been a long time since we've bought any household products made by Dow Chemical Company," Gesine

---

<sup>61</sup> Gesine finally gives in to Marie's pressures. But when, in the April 27, 1968 chapter, a huge rally forms to protest the war in Vietnam, Gesine's observations merely note cynically the theatrical nature of the event where "young girls in Vietnamese clothing . . . wanted to show who the country was killing in their place" (930). All in all, the rally feels like a springtime picnic, where one was "Supposed to sit on the grass, sing in a group while waiting, chat familiarly with the people nearby, about the weather, about the city" (931). To make matters worse, New York mayor John Lindsay purportedly shows his support to the protesters by speaking at their rally, only for it to emerge that he had also made remarks at the pro-war Loyalty Day Parade several blocks over. This picnic-like occasion, in short, seems to have benefitted only the savvy Lindsay and pretty much no one else.

reports in reference to the corporation's involvement in the production of the napalm that was then dropped over Vietnam.

But are we supposed to stop riding the railroad since it profits from the transportation of war materiel? Are we supposed to stop flying on airlines that take troops to Vietnam? Are we supposed to not buy a single thing because that generates a tax, and we don't know what that tax money will eventually be used for? Where is the moral Switzerland we can emigrate to? (332)

There is a distinct streak in the scholarship on *Anniversaries* that looks at Gesine's purported inactivity condemningly. Ingeborg Gerlach was the first who observed that a number of writers had criticized Gesine as a character with too narrow an "ethical disposition" (*Gesinnungsethik*). Her rigid work ethic as de Rosny's underling also showed that she had "come to terms with the respective authorities" (254-55; my translation). Peter Bekes has described Gesine's quest for a "moral Switzerland" as a form of "resignation" which forecloses the possibility of drawing "practical consequences" for her era's peculiar challenges (69; my translation). That is because the moral guidepost of the novel isn't Gesine, in Bekes's eyes, but Marie in whose "thinking and acting there appear faint traces of the 'principle of hope,' that is to say traces of that utopia which her mother only ever dreams of" (75). Most recently, Sonja Boos has written that Gesine is "rendered passive" in the face of the post-Fascist world and conformant "with dominant social conditions" (90).<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> These critiques fade in comparison to the infamous review by the famed polemicist Marcel-Reich Ranicki who saw in Johnson's tender and sympathetic description of the bucolic world of Jerichow nothing less than a callback to

the blood-and-soil literature of yesterday . . . The book's contrived language mystifies events and relations [in Jerichow] and hence devalues or disarms its social critique. . . . Behind his strained and

But to say, as all these critics seem to do, that Gesine's "resignation" shows that she's shut herself off from practical solutions means ironically that they advocate a quite individualistic solution to world historical problems. In other words, what if Gesine thought and acted differently? Surely, the world wouldn't change and neither would her presence in Prague stop the Soviet tanks from crushing Dubček's government. To search for clues of "utopian" impulses in *Anniversaries*, meanwhile, means to seek to read it as an instruction manual for change—but these sorts of "tactical" considerations, of course, were not at all on Johnson's mind, at least not in the process of composing the novel. At the same time, the above mentioned critics may have been on to something, however unintentionally.

For, as Kurt Fickert argued in his overlooked 1987 study *Neither Left nor Right*, there is an "individualistic" streak of sorts in the novel at large and Gesine's thinking in particular. As he puts it, Johnson was occupied repeatedly with "the theme of individual responsibility in achieving public good and simultaneously selfhood while maintaining one's integrity" (9). That doesn't make Gesine a "confirmed individualist" as Fickert asserts (112)—hers isn't a commitment to "individualism" as a philosophical outlook; rather, what *Anniversaries* ponders is the *relation between* the individual and society and how the actions and goings-on of the one may affect the path of the other. While Colin Riordan insists that Fickert has gotten it exactly wrong—Riordan argues that Johnson and Gesine maintain "a definable position of democratic

---

ponderous phraseology lies hidden the ancient German longing for the Soul, for the undistorted mind, for the simple ways of life. (my translation)

Reich-Ranicki knew only the first volume when he wrote these words, but the full text gave him no occasion to change his mind, especially as the ending formed a return of sorts to the familiar shores of the Baltic and portrayed Gesine's last reunification with beloved figures from her childhood. If the charge was that *Anniversaries* reeked of blood-and-soil attitudes, no ending could've been worse from Reich-Ranicki's perspective than this.

socialism” (218, fn 8)—this would mean to overlook Johnson’s distinct Arendtian streak at this stage in his life.

Hannah Arendt figures noticeably in *Anniversaries* as Gesine’s Riverside Drive neighbor, albeit under the nickname “Countess Seydlitz” after Arendt pleaded with Johnson to leave her name out of the final draft (see Schmidt). Arendt was instrumental in securing her friend the grant-in-aid from the Rockefeller Foundation that financed his stay in Manhattan through the end of the novel’s timeframe. “[S]taying for another year would be of great objective importance,” she wrote to the foundation officer Gerald Freund in April 1967. “He is a man of exceptional moral integrity,” she stressed, and went on to note that “Johnson originally comes from East Berlin and he is the only one of this group of German writers who made a great effort to come and stay in this country for a while.”<sup>63</sup> In a follow up letter from January 1968, she appeared to clarify what this note on his German background might truly mean, writing that she was pleading the “case not just on Uwe Johnson’s behalf but on behalf of ‘international relations’ on the highest possible level.”<sup>64</sup> Arendt might have been savvy enough to recognize the Rockefeller Foundation’s role in contributing to America’s foreign policy mission amid the Cold War tensions with the Soviet Union. Freund seemed convinced and echoed Arendt’s thoughts in a report for the foundation by describing Johnson as “a modest, insightful person of remarkable integrity” who displays much “moral concern” for questions of international relations.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> For citation, see footnote 54 above. Underlining in the original.

<sup>64</sup> Arendt, Hannah. “To Gerald Freund.” 17 Jan. 1968. Rockefeller Foundation records, op. cit.

<sup>65</sup> Freund qualifies, however, that these concerns aren’t without their

strange moral quirks; for example, while he does not condone Stalin’s systematic starvation of 11 million kulaks, he says that this is so much more readily “understandable” because of the “sound

Moral fortitude combined with stark geopolitical realities seemed to hit the right notes with the powerful funders, and Johnson got the money.<sup>66</sup> But in the age of Vietnam, someone's not so distant ties to America's foreign policy apparatus would anger quite a few European intellectuals. Sartre wasn't the only one. *Anniversaries* devotes a significant amount of space to dissecting the complaints of another voice of the anti-American wing of the New Left, Johnson's friend and fellow Gruppe 47 member Hans Magnus Enzensberger who at the same time as Johnson lived and worked in the United States via a fellowship at the Center for Advanced Studies at Wesleyan University. Then, in the February 29, 1968 issue of *The New York Review of Books*, Enzensberger dramatically renounced the fellowship over America's involvement in Vietnam and wrote in the open letter that he was going to go to Cuba instead where he felt he "can learn more from the Cuban people and be of greater use to them than I could ever be to the students of Wesleyan University."

---

administrative reasons" that dictated this policy than was the systematic and useless or irrational annihilation of Jews and others by Hitler. A complementary element in Johnson's life is that he not only does not believe that Jews and Germans can "ever" be reconciled he detects Jewish animosity towards Germans including himself at every turn and rather looks for it. He finds the absence of such resentment almost unbelievable, i.e. he cannot believe that a Jew's reaction to a German can be honest if it is not hostile and furthermore does not appear to believe that a non Jew can be as hostile to Germans for their crimes against Jewish humanity as Jews must be.

This outlook isn't quite as strange if we keep in mind that Johnson was heckled while giving a speech at the American Jewish Congress on November 3, 1967, i.e. within the timeframe of *Anniversaries*. The event gave him an occasion to write himself into the novel as a real-life character, a crucial scene that we'll return to later. Freund's report can be found in Rockefeller Foundation records, op. cit. 22 Jan. 1968.

<sup>66</sup> It also wasn't the first time that Johnson had sought support from one of America's major foundations. A letter exchange between him and Henry Kissinger from 1965 proves that he attempted to finance his desired stay in America by any means. His only "pretense" for the desired stay in the USA, he wrote to Kissinger on September 25, 1965, was "to broaden one's experience." Kissinger then appealed to the Ford Foundation officer Shepard Stone in a letter from October 7, 1965 that Johnson "is probably one out of the two or three of the outstanding novelists in Germany and, incidentally, is an alumnus of the International Seminar" (he ends the letter with a fateful note about his impending visit to Vietnam, so the discussion with Stone was to be had upon his return). There were some additional exchanges between the foundation officer Joseph Slater and the founder of the Literarisches Colloquium Berlin (LCB) Walter Höllerer, but nothing ultimately came of the matter. The letters can be found in the LCB papers collected in the Literaturarchiv Sulzbach-Rosenberg.



Johnson's friendship with Enzensberger had already undergone significant strains in the meantime. During his stay in New York, Johnson agreed to sublet one of his two West Berlin apartments to his writer friend's brother Ulrich Enzensberger. To his great embarrassment, Johnson had to learn belatedly from newspaper accounts that Ulrich had used the opportunity to start the infamous hippie Kommune 1 in the novelist's apartment. That the activists caused great noise disturbances to their neighbors may have been the least of Johnson's concerns, however. As it turned out, the apartment also served as the base from which the commune plotted the so-called "Pudding Assassination." The plan was to throw a "bomb" made of custard powder at the visiting American Vice President Hubert Humphrey, though the West Berlin authorities prevented the "assassination," with great media fanfare in tow. The events were notorious enough to make it into the pages of Gesine's beloved "aunt" *Times* where she learned the details in one of the earliest chapters of *Anniversaries* (10). In one of the perhaps most comical images of postwar German literary history, the furious Johnson then delegated *Tin Drum* author Günter Grass from abroad to evict the hippie rabble from his property.<sup>67</sup>

Enzensberger had gotten under Johnson's skin who would then devote numerous pages of his magnum opus to cynical commentary on the revolutionist writer's stumblings, not least the lengthy paragraph-by-paragraph dissection of his open letter to Wesleyan President Edwin D. Etherington in the February 29 chapter. But it would be short-sighted to say that Johnson was merely airing his dirty laundry before the reading public. Indeed the chapter plays a crucial role in comprehending the larger ethical and aesthetic design of *Anniversaries*.

---

<sup>67</sup> The events surrounding Kommune 1 and its planned "Pudding-Attentat" have been recounted in Neumann 611-16.

Naturally, there is plain sarcasm, too. Noting Enzensberger's claim that he was going to be of "use" to the people of Cuba leaves the narrator—who isn't necessarily identical to Gesine's focal point as we shall see later on—to snark: "He, himself, personally, wants to be of use to an entire population" (697). The matter gets more serious when Enzensberger makes predictable Holocaust comparisons between Germany in the 1930s and the United States in the present—only that America has the potential to be a lot worse given that "our present masters wield a destructive power of which the Nazis could never dream." In *Anniversaries*, the response goes thus:

In 1945, the Germans had to answer to the world for fifty-five million dead, plus six million more victims at the dead camps.

In Mr. Enzensberger's eyes, American citizens carry the weight of a comparable guilt. (693)

Given Enzensberger and Sartre's insistence that foreign visitors to the United States are tainted by their very presence, such relativization of the Holocaust implies the harshest judgment on the moral integrity of someone who didn't just eagerly seek refuge in America, but petitioned some of its most powerful institutions to provide him with the necessary financial backing. But if qua Fickert—plus Arendt and Freund—the maintenance of moral integrity is so high up Johnson's agenda, Enzensberger's charge is extremely severe.

In fact, financial patronage might be the most compromising fact of all in a foreign writer's decision to dwell in America, according to Enzensberger. "Verbal opposition," he states in the letter, "is today in danger of becoming a harmless spectator sport, licensed, well-regulated and, up to a point, even encouraged by the powerful." The claim prefigures by

exactly fifty years the similar conclusion drawn by Juliana Spahr who argues that no writer who received patronage from any institution involved in the “Cultural Cold War” has any claim to artistic autonomy. As she puts it, “[w]hen literature is instrumentalized by the government as the good form of protest and then used to suppress more militant dissent, it is not autonomous.” (16) Devoting this much space to Enzensberger’s open letter, in short, is about more than pursuing a private vendetta; it is about defending his own integrity and that of his his most famous work from accusations of moral corruption.

Then again, Johnson might have fired the first shots in the dispute. In 1967, a year before his compatriot renounced his Wesleyan fellowship, Johnson had published a polemic titled “Über eine Haltung des Protestierens” (“Concerning an Attitude of Protesting”) in *Kursbuch*, a New Left affiliated journal co-edited by Enzensberger and Karl Markus Michel. In the short article, Johnson condemned the so-called “good people” of the German extraparlimentary opposition who did “nothing” to bring about the “good world” they so desired to see:

The good people don’t hinder the workers from earning their living by production of armaments, they do not hold up the conscripted who risk their life in this war, the good people stand in the marketplace and point themselves out as the better ones. These good people will also soon, with embarrassment, describe their protests against this war as their juvenile period, as the good people before them now talk about Hiroshima and Democracy and Cuba. The good people should kindly shut up. Let them be good to their kids, even to kids not their own, to their cat, even to strange ones; if they will only stop talking about a species of being good they help to make impossible. (97-8)

Upon reading these lines, Hannah Arendt wrote Johnson to congratulate him “for the attack on the ‘good people,’” a trope that would go on to make a comeback in *Anniversaries* (qtd. in Fahlke and Wild 10). The February 29 chapter closes with a mashup of conversational snippets between Gesine and her friends in New York who sought to make sense of Enzensberger’s anti-American screed. “You should never read other people’s mail, even if they show it to you,” Gesine comments dryly, adding that it is because of people like Enzensberger that she doesn’t seek to return to West Germany anymore. “Because of all the hot air from people like that?” her friend Naomi inquires. “Yes. From good people like that” (698).

The “species” of goodness represented by Enzensberger’s performative moralism is easily disregarded alongside Norman Mailer’s riskless and ultimately profitable participation in the March on the Pentagon; but what, by contrast, does Johnson mean in reference to the “species” that the “good people” helped to “make impossible”? If something is now impossible, it must mean that it could’ve been possible in some prior context. The statement implies that Johnson doesn’t discard goodness as a moral value purely in favor of systemic explanations whereby our individual actions are overshadowed by larger social forces beyond our individual control. This gets us back to the purported “individualism” that the novel ostensibly upholds and that we have since rebranded as Johnson’s Arendtianism.

By the time readers arrive at the critical account of Enzensberger’s letter, they will have already been exposed to the proper species of goodness, namely a goodness by which the individual acting morally selflessly puts at stake life and limb on behalf of an ethical truth. And one’s goodness, the subtext seems to go, is best put to the test not under the conditions of Western liberal democracy but under those of totalitarian oppression. Try to be good and act with moral integrity, in other words, when doing so may cost you dearly and the outlook to

recuperate those costs via a profitable book deal are out of the question. There are several characters in *Anniversaries* that fit this profile—we have already mentioned Dieter Lockenvitz—and the fate of two of them is narrated movingly and with much detail only a handful of chapters prior to the February 29 chapter.

Jerichow had its fair share of savage Nazi war criminals like Gesine's uncle Robert Papenbrock and committed party functionaries Friedrich Jansen, who carried out the *Führer's* will with varying degrees of ideological devotion though always with their own advancement on the top of their minds; but for each of those petty tyrants and criminal *Mitläufer*, Johnson paints contrasting portraits in courage and self-sacrifice. Gesine's mother Lisbeth falls into the latter camp, when, upon witnessing anti-Jewish pogroms in Jerichow on *Reichskristallnacht*, the devout Protestant burns herself in protest at the sight of this descent into barbarity, a series of events recounted starting with the February 14 chapter.

To some, Lisbeth is no moral guidepost, however. Peter Bekes has convincingly argued that Lisbeth doesn't provide an appropriate way out of complex moral dilemmas, given the fact that the only solution that she sees is one in which one's personal entanglement in tragic circumstances is to withdraw—and not just withdraw personally but potentially drag her daughter along with her. As the Nazis consolidate their power ever further, Lisbeth decides to starve Gesine and, at one crucial instance, to stand by idly after her daughter had fallen head-first into a rain barrel, seemingly welcoming her death by drowning in order to save her from existence in an utterly barbaric and un-Christian world. To Bekes, Lisbeth's ruthless moralism "latently entailed an amoral, pathological narrow-mindedness which did not look at the other as an autonomous personality, or, spoken via Kant, as an end-in-itself; rather, she looked at

this other only as the means to overcoming her own delusional sense of guilt and religious scruples” (72). Quite the devastating assessment.

But Lisbeth’s personal ethics are not really the focal point of this series of chapters surrounding her suicide on the Night of the Broken Glass; instead, her self-withdrawal from exposure to guilt puts to the ultimate test the moral integrity of the rest of the community, and Jerichow’s Pastor Brühaver rises to the occasion. Brühaver is faced with the theological dilemma whether to grant Lisbeth a Christian funeral, since suicide was forbidden by the Bible. And yet, his carefully constructed argument goes, Lisbeth hadn’t taken her own life as much as had her life taken from her by the community of Jerichow which tolerated at best and abetted at worst the un-Christian Nazi regime: “[I]t was very much the Jerichowers’ business,” Brühaver’s sermon, rendered in paraphrase goes,

*that* Lisbeth Cresspahl had died. They had contributed to the life she could no longer bear. Now came the catalogue that formed the basis of the verdict against Brühaver. He started with Voss, flogged to death in Rande; he omitted neither the mutilation of Methfessel in the concentration camp nor the death of his own son in the war against the Spanish government; until he came to Wednesday night outside Tannebaum’s shop. Indifference. Acceptance. Greed. Betrayal. The egotism of a pastor, too, who was concerned only with the persecution of his own church and who had, in violation of his mandate, kept silent—who had let a member of his community seek her own, implacable, unhallowed death before his very eyes. Where all had rejected the Lord’s everlasting offer of a new life, one woman alone was no longer able to believe in it. Benediction. Final chorus. The End. (659-60; italics in the original)

The sermon is recounted in the February 21 chapter, i.e. eight entries before Gesine encounters Enzensberger's open letter in *The New York Review of Books*. That text, too, was afforded attention via an extended paraphrase of its contents—plus some cynical metacommentary—but the ultimate consequences couldn't be more different as Enzensberger went on to enjoy a long and fruitful career, while Brühshaver would spend the rest of the war in a concentration camp and return a broken man, coopted by the Stalinist successor regime as a “minister responsible for church matters” in his home state (1395). The critic Joachim Kaiser writes that it is the “consoling utopia of *Anniversaries* that even the most ruthless dictatorship cannot dominate the souls of its victims” (337; my translation). Johnson makes a point to show that for each act of cowardice, another soul stands upright amid the cruellest inhumanity.

Hannah Arendt's fingerprints are all over these passages. In her extremely controversial book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), Arendt had taken the Israeli prosecution to task for blowing Adolf Eichmann's role in the execution of the Holocaust out of proportion. In pinning all cruelties associated with the campaign on him, even ones over which he had had no authority, a sober assessment of Eichmann's actual deeds fell to the wayside. What the Israeli officials didn't look into was to find out what had motivated an individual like Eichmann to assent to his involvement with the mass extermination of human life. As a result, the prosecution's strategy did not properly probe the logic behind Eichmann's defense that he was just following orders.

Arendt reminds us that Eichmann had drawn, in fact, on the Kantian categorical imperative to justify his actions, stating that acting against the *Führer's* will would have been a selfish violation of the law. “This was outrageous, on the face of it,” Arendt counters, “and also

incomprehensible, since Kant's moral philosophy is so closely bound up with man's faculty of judgment, which rules out blind obedience . . . [To Kant] every man was a legislator the moment he started to act: by using his 'practical reason' man found the principles that could and should be the principles of law" (136). In one of the most powerful moments of the trial, Arendt observes how silence came over the courtroom as the Jewish resistance fighter Abba Kovner reported of his dealings with the German soldier Anton Schmid<sup>68</sup>, who hid Jews from detection and supplied a Jewish resistance cell with "forged papers and military trucks" (230), a transgression for which Schmid ultimately paid with his life (though it also earned him the title of a Righteous Among the Nations). "[H]ow utterly different everything would be today," Arendt concludes, "in this courtroom, in Israel, in Germany, in all of Europe, and perhaps in all countries of the world, if only more such stories could have been told" (232). Morally sound judgments were therefore never entirely precluded, not even under conditions of totalitarian rule. And that these regimes remained perpetually unstable, Arendt claims in *Origins of Totalitarianism*, was an inevitable truth, since "each new birth" offered the chance of a "new beginning" that could set civilization back on a course to freedom (478-9). While totalitarian power seeks to collapse all private life into a matter of public concern by granting the state control over every last vestige of civil society, a "new birth" implies the return of private consideration from which everyone can self-legislate. Obedience must be trained and imposed, in short, while the capacity for making ethical judgment calls from the standpoint of practical reason is placed in your cradle.

---

<sup>68</sup> Erroneously spelled "Schmidt" by Arendt.



Gesine, born in 1933, the year of Hitler's ascendancy to power, presents one such "new beginning," as does Marie who was born twenty-four years later. We remember that according to Bekes the "principle of hope" is embodied in Marie especially. But we also know that the child is easily taken up by the course of events and the political fads that come in their wake, and her mother's task is to show to her that one cannot simply emigrate to a "moral Switzerland" without feeling the consequences. Not everyone has it as easy as Enzensberger, Mailer, and Sartre, who can all make a fast buck off a carefully curated public persona. Fickert has astutely observed that Gesine's journal is meant "to provide her [Marie] with an alternative **Weltanschauung** to that of her peers" as a sort of "cautionary measure" against oversimplified sloganeering (114; bold print in the original).

Fickert also knows that "[a]s a ten-year-old, Marie is uncomfortably precocious, lacking the naivete and spontaneity of adolescence" (ibid.). A less diplomatic way of putting it is that she's drawn too unrealistically, almost like a sort of proto-Wesley Crusher whose genius allows him to steer the Enterprise even though surely there ought to be many more trained adults available who could've done the job. The accusation has haunted Johnson who has felt the need to devote a significant chunk of his Georg-Büchner-Prize speech to defending her plausibility as a character ("Rede" 56 et seq.).

Yet, in spite of this unusual lapse in his skill for realist observation, Marie provides Johnson with the opportunity to conduct some clever meta-commentary that reveals the careful constructedness of Gesine's story. According to Gesine, after all, her father Heinrich maintained his own integrity all throughout the war by secretly spying on the Nazis for the British, a convenient fact that Marie questions right away. Marie's doubts, for example, lead her mother to acknowledge that her retrospective story of her upbringing was never meant to

have been based on omniscient knowledge, or as Gesine puts it: “I never promised the truth” (Johnson, *Anniversaries* 579). And later, this dialogue occurs when Marie protests that now you want to make out he [Heinrich] had technical military knowledge,” to which her mother replies: “No one’s making out anything. I’m just trying to tell a story” (722-23). Damion Searls didn’t have it easy accurately translating the original passage where Gesine says: “Hier wird nicht gedichtet. Ich versuche, dir etwas zu erzählen” (*Jahrestage* 744). Gesine, in other words, stresses the difference between *Dichtung* and *Erzählung*, or the artifice of poetic invention versus novelistic representation of the facts taken from real life. But we also know that these facts need not necessarily correspond to the truth, as she had admitted before. These passages are the greatest though easily overlooked reminders that what we’re holding in our hands when we’re reading *Anniversaries* is fiction. Add to this the complicating factor that Gesine may not actually be the one whose words and thoughts are faithfully being recorded here.

So, who’s actually narrating *Anniversaries*? On November 3, 1967, Uwe Johnson spoke before the American Jewish Congress in New York, though he was heckled by an audience that included many survivors who had little patience to hear a tall, bald, and leather-coat sporting German state his thoughts (see footnote 65 above). But since the event fell both within the timeframe of *Anniversaries* and took place in New York, it gave Johnson the perfect excuse to write himself into the novel. In its fictional world, there was Gesine attending a talk by the German writer “Uwe Johnson” at the “Jewish American Congress,” where she was sitting “way in the back, right next to the door” (219). Then, the two strike up a conversation—and soon after a “contract” (1240; translation amended).<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> Searls translates the “Vertrag” of *Jahrestage* (1268) into an “agreement” in *Anniversaries* (1240).

But what are its terms? Gesine believes that both she and Johnson, whom she repeatedly refers to as “Comrade Writer,” were “telling this story” (221). Johnson, meanwhile, appears to think otherwise. Much later, for example, we learn that Gesine “had started a diary in spring 1947,” but then we read this immediate qualifier: “It wasn’t technically a diary. (And this isn’t either, for different reasons: here she’s agreed to have a scribe—instead of her, with her permission—write an entry for every day but not of that day.)” (1283) The terms of contract will remain blurry. In Johnson’s understanding, he’s a “scribe” who writes in Gesine’s stead; but Gesine believes they were both “telling this story.”

They’ll have a minor falling out over such seeming minutiae. In the June 26, 1968 chapter, Gesine picks up Marie from a children’s birthday party where the brash, eccentric neighborhood staple Ginny Carpenter is pontificating on her views about race relations in New York. In the elevator ride down from the party, Gesine finally can’t contain her amusement about Ginny and breaks out laughing. As readers, we know Gesine otherwise as a serious, reticent person, so her show of emotions comes unexpectedly to us. But therein lies the rub. Gesine senses a violation of the contract’s terms. “*I see Ginny Carpenter twice a week,*” she complains to the narrator, “*and you give her her moment in the spotlight exactly once in ten months*” (1240; italics in the original). In Gesine’s eyes, Comrade Writer was too selective, too discriminating in telling her story. Were we, in the end, barred from reading a faithful account of Gesine’s year and of her character? Was she more jocular than we had thought? Was the narration, seemingly so encyclopedic with regard to the world events surrounding the characters and so extensive in its accounts of these characters’ lives, unreliable after all?

Comrade Writer counters that he had abided by the terms, but by including Gesine’s encounters with Ginny more frequently, “*what was important about today’s laugh might get lost*”

(*ibid.*). After all, the novel wasn't intended as a "*diary*" (*ibid.*). While Gesine, then, had believed all along to be a seemingly co-equal partner in a contractual relationship that aimed at adequately representing the truth, Comrade Writer had usurped powers that lay outside the initial agreement. When Gesine had told Marie that she had "never promised the truth," Marie understood that what her mother was telling her was "[o]nly your truth," to which Gesine added: "How I think it was" (579). Gesine's standpoint, in other words, is a deeply personal and idiosyncratic one. She tells a story that is only true for her, based on the life that only she and no one else has led. Her identity is the focal point, in other words, and the resulting text would be memoiristic. But when Comrade Writer claims to assess the particular importance of "*today's laugh*" and goes ahead to select the raw materials from which the novel is formed, he's applying entirely different criteria—Gesine's are personal ones and Johnson's aesthetic ones. Or, as Holger Helbig has aptly put it: "From Gesine's perspective, the text must measure itself against the criteria of history; from the perspective of Comrade Writer, it must be measured against the criteria of art, as well" (159-60; my translation).<sup>70</sup> Norbert Mecklenburg has usefully added that Johnson's peculiar kind of realism doesn't aim as much at "reflecting reality" as foregrounding the fact "that he can always only present certain views of it" (23; my translation). And given how fundamentally different the points of view are from which Gesine and Johnson look at the raw material, the usurpation of it by the latter was necessary in order to transfigure this material into something worthy of a novel as opposed to a mere "diary" or memoir. Juliana Spahr's protests notwithstanding, given Johnson's funding background, what he had done here was to have staked out the autonomy of his novel as a work of narrative art.

---

<sup>70</sup> For an almost identical argument whereby Johnson transfigures "history" into "belle lettres," see Baker, "Poetisierung" 144 (my translation).

In a way, he has suggested that it can be no other, that every novel must strive for this autonomy lest it stay too glued to mere reality and thus fail at noting “what was important” about its individual building blocks, like short laughs that, caught in isolation, would have no further significance to anyone but a woman named Gesine Cresspahl.

As Lisa Siraganian has convincingly shown, to many modernists autonomy meant simply that the artwork asserted its “independence” from any meaning an individual reader or spectator might ascribe to it (6). In this account, the point of autonomy is not as much the withdrawal from the concerns of society, but rather that the artwork will continue to mean what it was intended to mean irrespective of the whims of the individual beholder. No matter his or her identity or state of mind, the act of reading ought in theory to be capable of arriving at a valid interpretation of the work’s intended meaning.

Once we know that Comrade Writer is shaping the raw material of the *New York Times* articles, audio recordings, conversation snippets, and everyday impressions of city life that make up *Anniversaries*, we know that he is imposing a plan onto the material, a plan that creates a coherent story out of otherwise overwhelming data. It’s one thing that Gesine’s audio records portions of her own stories so that Marie can access them once her mother has died. This will be an intimate moment between the lonely voice of the deceased Gesine and her now grown-up daughter. But the arrangement of all the remaining materials, audio recordings included, into the coherent whole of *Anniversaries* is done not with Marie’s personal response in mind but with an eye on the design of the novel qua novel. Everyday life resembles the chaos of past memories and present quotidian acts that make up Gesine’s existence. From that

perspective, there is nothing “important” about a laugh, certainly not when it happens on a frequent basis in response to her neighbor Ginny Carpenter’s infamous ramblings. Only Comrade Writer, who keeps his critical distance and has no personal stake in how Gesine’s life is lived, can distinguish between the important and the quotidian.

But with that, his claim to the novel’s autonomy has less to do with the general reading public but with the personal preferences of its own protagonist. Johnson appeared much less discriminating when it came to the audience. He would go back and forth about what he wanted to deliver to the readers and how they ought to respond in turn. Pushed by Michael Bengel to elaborate on the influence that the German naturalist writer Theodor Fontane had on his work, Johnson explained that Fontane had “attempted to interpret the world, in which he, after all, had to live; in other words, he exposed the world against the backdrop of a made-up example. He would leave it to his readers, then, to draw conclusions” (qtd. in Bengel 124). But this, Johnson hastens to add, isn’t necessarily his own project: “What I have done in reality is merely to have told the story of a couple of related characters. It’s my only aspiration” (ibid.). So, what about the readers’ conclusions then? He was less coy about weaving in their potential responses in 1961, when he explained that

I don’t think it is the task of literature to burden the story (*Geschichte*) with accusations. Rather, it is the task of literature to tell a story. In my case, not to tell it in such a way that it would lead readers toward illusions, but to show him what this story is like. If this is a form of education (*Aufklärung*), then it’s not one of the social-activist kind. It doesn’t demand from the reader that he change himself immediately, but that he absorbs the story, ponders it, and draws his own conclusions. (BU 215)

Johnson is cleverly playing with words here because his reference to “Geschichte” might just as well have been in regard to history. In other words, while the writer collected the necessary data that would form the basis of his work, he would neither approve of nor condemn the historical circumstances in which his characters moved. Quite the important qualifier when we remember that there were critical voices waiting in the wings to pounce at Johnson for relating too approvingly to his raw material. In writing an “American novel,” as Arendt had described *Anniversaries*, surely he ought to have burdened the story with accusations against Yankee imperialism, no? Everything else would have suggested collaboration.

Yet, wouldn't such an approach have been too patronizing toward his readers, almost as if they did not have the moral agency to make their own judgments? But we know that in the ethical self-understanding of some of the novel's key players, such agency cannot be taken away from you or disposed of in your name on behalf of a great social “cause.” To do so would mean to throw you back into a supine state of moral minority. Anton Schmid in real life and Pastor Brūshaver and Dieter Lockenvitz in the fictional world of *Anniversaries* proved through their selfless actions that, following Arendt, “every man was a legislator the moment he started to act.” But the moral law against which these actions could be measured wasn't *sui generis*, merely subject to everyone's idiosyncratic whims. Siraganian argues that readers are faced by the same complicated relationship when they encounter a text to which they may relate in innumerable ways, while those ways cannot be said to be constitutive of the text's meaning. In thus enforcing a distance between itself and its readers, this type of autonomy “resembles a Kantian account of political autonomy, where you may act freely following self-imposed laws but you still are tied to the world's varied, inescapable forces” (17).

Sartre and Enzensberger's categorical mistake was that they believed that they could simply remove themselves from the equation and to have thus disentangled their relationship to the world in a satisfactory way. Johnson, by contrast, believed that "it is hardly possible to live on the outskirts of history" (qtd. in Baker, *Understanding* 17). To believe otherwise would mean to seek refuge in a "moral Switzerland" to which only the "good people" seemingly have access.



## Works Cited

- Adams, John. *Doctor Atomic*. Opus Arte, 2008.
- Adorno, Theodor. "Commitment." *Aesthetics and Politics*, Verso, 2007, pp. 177-195.
- . "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis." *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, translated by Henry W. Pickford, Columbia UP, 1998, pp. 259-278.
- . *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. Translated by E.F.N. Jephcott, Verso, 2005.
- Allen, Donald, and George F. Butterick. "Preface." *The Postmoderns: The New American Poetry Revised*, *ibid.*, editors, Grove Press, 1982, pp. 9-12.
- Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Penguin, 2006.
- . *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1973.
- Atlas, James. *Bellow: A Biography*. Modern Library, 2000.
- Baker, Gary Lee. "Die Poetisierung der Geschichte in Uwe Johnsons 'Jahrestage.'" *Uwe Johnson zwischen Vormoderne und Postmoderne*, edited by Carsten Gansel and Nicolai Riedel, Walter de Gruyter, 1995, pp. 143-151.
- . *Understanding Uwe Johnson*. Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1999.
- Barnhisel, Greg. *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy*. Columbia UP, 2015.
- Baudelaire, Charles. "Modernity." *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, translated by P.E. Charvet, Penguin, 1992, 402-406.
- . "Why Sculpture Is a Bore." *ibid.*, 97-100.
- Bekes, Peter. "Gefällt dir das Land nicht, such dir ein anderes: Zum Verhältnis von Moral und Politik in Johnsons 'Jahrestagen.'" *Text + Kritik*, vol. 65/66, 1980, pp. 63-76.
- Bellow, Saul. *The Adventures of Augie March*. Penguin, 2006.

- . "Deep Readers of the World, Beware!" *There Is Simply Too Much to Think About: Collected Nonfiction*, edited by Benjamin Taylor, Penguin, 2016, pp. 92-95.
- . *Henderson the Rain King*. Penguin, 1996.
- . *Herzog*. Penguin, 2003.
- . "The Sharp Edge of Life." Taylor, pp. 43-46.
- . "The Writer as Moralist." Taylor, pp. 155-165.
- . "Writers, Intellectuals, Politics: Mainly Reminiscence." Taylor, pp. 391-407.
- Bengel, Michael. "Gespräch mit Uwe Johnson." *Johnsons "Jahrestage"*, edited by Michael Bengel, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/Main, 1985, pp. 120-128.
- Bennett, Eric. *Workshops of Empire: Stegner, Engle, and American Creative Writing during the Cold War*. Univ. of Iowa Press, 2015.
- Berger, John, et al. *Ways of Seeing*. BBC and Penguin, 1972.
- Berghahn, Volker R. *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe: Shepard Stone between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy*. Princeton UP, 2001.
- Blake, William. "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell." *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, edited by Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant, W.W. Norton, 2008, pp. 66-82.
- Bloom, Alexander. *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World*. Oxford UP, 1986.
- Boos, Sonja. *Speaking the Unspeakable in Postwar Germany: Toward a Public Discourse on the Holocaust*. Cornell UP, 2014.
- Böttiger, Helmut. *Elefantenrunden: Walter Höllerer und die Erfindung des Literaturbetriebs*. Literaturhaus Berlin, 2005.
- Bradbury, Malcolm. *Saul Bellow*. Methuen, 1982.

Brzeski, Patrick. “‘Top Gun: Maverick’ Trailer Sparks Controversy as Fans Notice Taiwanese Flag Missing from Tom Cruise’s Jacket.” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 22 July 2019,

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/top-gun-maverick-trailer-sparks-controversy-tom-cruise-jacket-1225993>. Accessed 9 March 2021.

Bunch, Sonny. “The CIA Funded a Culture War against Communism. It Should Do So Again.”

*The Washington Post*, 22 Aug. 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/act-four/wp/2018/08/22/the-cia-funded-a-culture-war-against-communism-it-should-do-so-again/>. Accessed 9 March 2021.

Bürger, Jan. “Die Kissinger Boys: Von der Harvard Summer School zur Suhrkamp Culture.”

*Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2017, pp. 5-18.

Clark, T.J. “Clement Greenberg’s Theory of Art.” *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, edited by

Francis Frascina, Harper and Row, 1985, pp. 47-63.

Cochran, John. “Bush’s Big Trip: Why Africa? Why Now?” *ABC News*, 1 Oct. 2004,

<https://abcnews.go.com/WNT/story?id=129596>. Accessed 31 Jan. 2021.

Cockcroft, Eva. “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War.” Frascina, pp. 125-133.

Coleman, Peter. *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the*

*Mind of Postwar Europe*. The Free Press, 1989.

Colvin, Rob. “How Cold War Politics Sabotaged Norman Rockwell’s Art.” *Hyperallergic*, 18 Oct.

2016, <https://hyperallergic.com/329876/cold-war-politics-sabotaged-norman-rockwells-art/>. Accessed 27 April 2021.

Corso, Gregory. “Bomb.” *Junge amerikanische Lyrik*, edited by Gregory Corso and Walter

Höllerer, Munich, Carl Hanser, 1961, p. 24.

-- -. "In Praise of Neanderthal Man." *Herald of the Autochthonic Spirit*, *ibid.*, New Directions, 1981, pp. 43-44.

-- -. "Introduction." Corso and Höllerer, pp. 246-255.

-- -. "Many Have Fallen." *Herald of the Autochthonic Spirit*, p. 26.

Cronin, Gloria L. "Holy War Against the Moderns: Saul Bellow's Antimodernist Critique of Contemporary American Society." *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1989, pp. 77-94.

Debs, Eugene V. "Speech of Acceptance of the Presidential Nomination of the Socialist Party." *Marxists.org*, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/spusa/1904/0506-debs-acceptancespeech.pdf>. Accessed 9 March 2021.

Delbos, Stephan. "Poems and Passports: *The New American Poetry*, Nationalism, and the Cold War Anthology Wars." Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900, 22 Feb. 2019, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY. Conference Presentation.

Deneen, Patrick J. *Why Liberalism Failed*. Yale UP, 2019.

Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Verso, 1998.

Dews, Peter. *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*. Verso, 2007.

Dick, Philip K. "Ubik." *Philip K. Dick: Four Novels of the 1960s*, edited by Jonathan Lethem, Library of America, 2007, pp. 609-798.

"Die Revolution am Swimming-pool." *Die Zeit*, 14 May 1965, <https://www.zeit.de/1965/20/die-revolution-im-swimming-pool>. Accessed 31 Jan. 2021.

Douthat, Ross. *The Decadent Society: How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success*. Avid Reader Press, 2020.

Editorial Statement, "Our Country and Our Culture." *Partisan Review*, vol. 19, no. 3, May–June 1952, pp. 282–286.

Eliot, T.S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *Poetry Foundation*,  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69400/tradition-and-the-individual-talent/>  
 Accessed 16 March 2021.

Enzensberger, Hans Magnus. "On Leaving America." *New York Review of Books*, 29 Feb. 1968,  
<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1968/02/29/on-leaving-america/>. Accessed 20 April 2021.

Epstein, Jason. "The CIA and the Intellectuals." *New York Review of Books*, 20 April 1967,  
<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1967/04/20/the-cia-and-the-intellectuals/>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

Fahlke, Eberhard, and Thomas Wild. *Hannah Arendt - Uwe Johnson: Der Briefwechsel, 1967-1975*. Suhrkamp, 2004.

Ferguson, Niall. *Kissinger, 1923-1968: The Idealist*. Penguin, 2015.

Fickert, Kurt. *Neither Left nor Right: The Politics of Individualism in Uwe Johnson's Work*. Peter Lang, 1987.

Foley, Barbara. *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941*. Duke UP, 1993.

Frankovic, Kathy. "Russia's Impact on the Election Seen Through Russian Eyes." YouGov, 9 March 2018, <https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles->

[reports/2018/03/09/russias-impact-election-seen-through-partisan-eyes](https://reports/2018/03/09/russias-impact-election-seen-through-partisan-eyes). Accessed 9 March 2021.

Frascina, Francis. "Institutions, Culture, and America's 'Cold War Years': The Making of Greenberg's 'Modernist Painting.'" *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2003, pp. 71-97.

Fried, Michael. *Courbet's Realism*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990.

---. "How Modernism Works: A Response to T.J. Clark." Frascina, pp. 65-79.

Gaddis, John Lewis. *The Cold War: A New History*. Penguin, 2005.

Gendler, Alex. "The New Superfluous Men." *American Affairs*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2020, pp. 179-87.

Gerlach, Ingeborg. "Aus der Sicht des vierten Bandes: Individuum und Gesellschaft in Uwe Johnsons *Jahrestagen*." Bengel, pp. 251-262.

Gowin, Emmet. *The Nevada Test Site*, Princeton UP, 2019.

---. "Emmet Gowin: Photographing Nuclear Sites." YouTube, uploaded by Chicago Humanities Festival, 13 Nov. 2019,

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIqqneqW4lw&ab\\_channel=ChicagoHumanitiesFestival](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIqqneqW4lw&ab_channel=ChicagoHumanitiesFestival). Accessed 23 April 2020.

Greenberg, Clement. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." Frascina, pp. 21-33.

---. "Irrelevance versus Irresponsibility." *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, edited by John O'Brian, Univ. of Chicago Press, pp. 230-235.

---. "Modernist Painting." *ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 85-94.

---. "The Necessity of the Old Masters." *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 248-252.

---. "The Plight of Our Culture." *ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 122-152.

---. "Towards a Newer Laocoon." Frascina, pp. 35-46.

Gruesser, John Cullen. *White on Black: Contemporary Literature About Africa*. Univ. of Illinois Press, 1992.

Guilbaut, Serge. *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983.

Guzman, Joseph. "George Washington Statue Toppled, American Flag Burned by Portland Protesters." *The Hill*, 19 June 2020, <https://thehill.com/changing-america/respect/equality/503559-george-washington-statue-vandalized-and-toppled-by>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

Hannah-Jones, Nikole. "Our Democracy's Founding Ideals Were False When They Were Written. Black Americans Have Fought to Make Them True." *New York Times*, last modified March 11, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. "Lectures on the Philosophy of History." <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hi/hiconten.htm>. Accessed 23 April 2020.

Hehl, Michael Peter. "Berliner Netzwerke: Walter Höllerer, die Gruppe 47 und die Gründung des Literarischen Colloquiums Berlin." *Poetik im technischen Zeitalter: Walter Höllerer und die Entstehung des modernen Literaturbetriebs*, edited by Achim Geisenhalslücke and Michael Peter Hehl, Bielefeld, transcript, 2013, pp. 155-189.

Helbig, Holger. "Vom Material zum Roman: Zitieren und Erzählen in Uwe Johnsons 'Jahrestagen.'" *Text + Kritik*, vol. 65/66, 2001, 2nd ed., pp. 149-169.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Hackett, 1994.

- Hochuli, Alex. "The Triumph of American Idealism." *Damage Magazine*, 17 June 2020, <https://damagemag.com/2020/06/17/the-triumph-of-american-idealism/>. Accessed 15 March 2021.
- Horkheimer, Max. "The Little Man and the Philosophy of Freedom." *Dawn and Decline: Notes 1926-1931 and 1950-1969*, Continuum, 1978, pp. 50-52.
- James, Henry. "The Real Thing." *Henry James: Major Stories and Essays*, Library of America, 1999, 229-254.
- "John F. Kennedy Presidential Campaign In Harlem, New York 1960 (Full Speech & New Video)." *Harlem World*, 9 Feb. 2019, <https://www.harlemworldmagazine.com/john-f-kennedy-presidential-campaign-harlem-new-york-1960s/>. Accessed 9 March 2021.
- Johnson, Cedric. *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics*. Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Johnson, Samuel. *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*. Oxford UP, 2009.
- Johnson, Uwe. *Anniversaries: From a Year in the Life of Gesine Cresspahl*. Vols. 1 & 2, translated by Damion Searls, New York Review Books, 2018.
- . *Begleitumstände*. Suhrkamp, 1980.
- . "Concerning an Attitude of Protesting." *Berliner Sachen*, Suhrkamp, 1975, pp. 97-98.
- . *Jahrestage*. Suhrkamp, 2008.
- . "Rede anlässlich der Entgegennahme des Georg-Büchner-Preises 1971." Bengel, pp. 53-72.
- Kaiser, Joachim. "Die 'Jahrestage'-Tetralogie: Für wenn wir tot sind." *Erlebte Literatur: Vom "Doktor Faustus" zum "Fettfleck"*. Rowohlt, Hamburg, 1967, pp. 328-337.



- Kelly-Green, Brook, and Luna Yasiu, "Why Black Lives Matter to Philanthropy." *Ford Foundation*, 19 July 2016, <https://www.fordfoundation.org/just-matters/just-matters/posts/why-black-lives-matter-to-philanthropy/>. Accessed 15 March 2021.
- Kissinger, Henry A. *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*. Harper & Brothers, 1957.
- Kozloff, Max. "American Painting During the Cold War." Frascina, pp. 107-123.
- Kraemer, Christine Hoff. "The Brake of Time: Corso's Bomb as Postmodern God(dess)." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2002, 211-229.
- Kuo, Lily. "Disney Remake of Mulan Criticised for Filming in Xinjiang." *The Guardian*, 7 Sept. 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/sep/07/disney-remake-of-mulan-criticised-for-filming-in-xinjiang>. Accessed 9 March 2021.
- Lamont, Daniel. "'A Dark and Empty Continent': The Representation of Africa in Saul Bellow's Henderson the Rain King." *Saul Bellow Journal*, vol. 16-17, 2000-2001, pp. 129-149.
- Lasch, Christopher. "The Cultural Cold War: A Short History of the Congress for Cultural Freedom." *The Agony of the American Left*, Vintage, 1969, pp. 61-114
- . *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. W.W. Norton, 1991.
- LeMahieu, Michael. *Fictions of Fact and Value: The Erasure of Logical Positivism in American Literature, 1945-1975*. Oxford UP, 2013.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. "Answering the Question: What Was Postmodernism?" Translated by Régis Durand. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Univ. of Minneapolis Press, 1984, pp. 71-82.
- Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Prince*. Translated by Harvey C. Mansfield, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998.

Marx, Karl. "Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations."

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/precapitalist/index.htm>. Accessed 23 April 2020.

McCarthy, Kathleen D. "From Cold War to Cultural Development: The International Cultural Activities of the Ford Foundation, 1950-1980." *Daedalus*, vol. 116, no. 1, 1987, pp. 93-117.

McCarthy, Mary. "The Fact in Fiction." *Partisan Review*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1960, pp. 438-458.

Mecklenburg, Norbert. *Die Erzählkunst Uwe Johnsons: Jahrestage und andere Prosa*. Suhrkamp, 1997.

Menand, Louis. Foreword. *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History*. New York Review Books, 2003, pp. vii-xx.

Miles, Barry. *The Beat Hotel: Ginsberg, Burroughs and Corso in Paris, 1957-1963*. Grove Press, 2016.

Moraes, Dom. "Somewhere Else with Allen and Gregory." *Horizon*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1969, pp. 66-67.

Morgan, Bill, editor. *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*. New Directions, 2003.

Muhlestein, Daniel K. "The Politics of Art: The Colonial Library Meets the Carnavalesque in Henderson the Rain King." *A Political Companion to Saul Bellow*, edited by Gloria L. Cronin and Lee Trepanier, Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2013, pp. 67-100.

Myers, Steven Lee, and Paul Mozur. "Caught in 'Ideological Spiral,' U.S. and China Drift Toward Cold War." *The New York Times*, 14 July 2020,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/14/world/asia/cold-war-china-us.html>. Accessed 9 March 2021.

Nadel, Alan. *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*. Duke UP, 1995.

- Neumann, Bernd. *Uwe Johnson*. Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Hamburg, 1994.
- Newman, Judie. *Saul Bellow and History*. St. Martin's Press, 1984.
- Norman, Max. "Emmet Gowin's Tender Photography of Nuclear Destruction." *The New Yorker*, 7 Nov. 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/emmet-gowins-tender-photography-of-nuclear-destruction>. Accessed 23 April 2020.
- Olson, Kirby. *Gregory Corso: Doubting Thomist*. Southern Illinois UP, 2002.
- Parmar, Inderjeet. *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power*. Columbia UP, 2012.
- Podhoretz, Norman. "The Know-Nothing Bohemians." *Beat Down to Your Soul: What Was the Beat Generation?*, edited by Ann Charters, Penguin, 2001, pp. 479-493.
- Rahv, Philip. "The Literary Class War." *New Masses*, vol. 8, Aug. 1932, pp. 7-10.
- Reich-Ranicki, Marcel. "Uwe Johnsons neuer Roman: Der erste Band des Prosawerks 'Jahrestage.'" *Die Zeit*, 2 Oct. 1970, <https://www.zeit.de/1970/40/uwe-johnsons-neuer-roman/komplettansicht>. Accessed 20 April 2021.
- Riesman, David. "Our Country and Our Culture." *Partisan Review*, vol. 19, no. 3, May-June 1952, pp. 310-315.
- Rilke, Rainer Maria. "Archaic Torso of Apollo." *Poets.org*, <https://poets.org/poem/archaic-torso-apollo>. Accessed 9 March 2021.
- Riordan, Colin. "Reifeprüfung 1961: Uwe Johnson and the Cold War." *German Writers and the Cold War 1945-61*, edited by Rhys W. Williams, Stephen Parker, and Colin Riordan, Manchester UP, pp. 203-220.
- Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*. Harvard UP, 1998.

- Sanders, Linley. "Americans Now See Other Americans as the Biggest Threat to their Way of Life." YouGov, 20 Jan. 2021, <https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2021/01/20/americans-now-see-other-americans-biggest-threat>. Accessed 9 March 2021.
- "Saul Bellow Interview." YouTube, uploaded by Electric Cereal, 24 March 2014, <https://youtu.be/hls050A0We0>. Accessed 31 Jan. 2021.
- Saunders, Frances Stonor. *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*. Granta, 2000.
- Schaub, Thomas Hill. *American Fiction in the Cold War*. Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1991.
- Schmidt, Thomas. "Die anwesende Abwesenheit Hannah Arendts im Salon der Gräfin Seydlitz: Zur Funktion 'randständiger' Tageskapitel in Uwe Johnsons 'Jahrestagen.'" *Text + Kritik*, vol. 65/66, 2001, 2nd ed., pp. 135-148.
- Shapiro, David and Cecile. "Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting." Frascina, pp. 135-151.
- Shaw, Tony. *Hollywood's Cold War*. Edinburgh UP, 2007.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*. Broadview, 2005.
- - -. "Note on Prometheus Unbound, by Mrs. Shelley." *John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley: Complete Poetical Works*, vol. 2, Modern Library, 1932, pp. 293-298.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "A Defence of Poetry." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69388/a-defence-of-poetry>. Accessed 23 April 2020.
- - -. "Prometheus Unbound." *John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley: Complete Poetical Works*, vol. 2, pp. 225-293.
- Siegel, Ben. "Bellow as Jew and Jewish Writer." Cronin and Trepanier, pp. 29-56.

Siraganian, Lisa. *Modernism's Other Work: The Art Object's Political Life*. Oxford UP, 2012.

"Sixteen Major Donors and Foundations Commit Unprecedented \$156 Million to Support Black, Latinx, Asian and Indigenous Arts Organizations." *Ford Foundation*, 24 Sept. 2020, <https://www.fordfoundation.org/the-latest/news/sixteen-major-donors-and-foundations-commit-unprecedented-156-million-to-support-black-latinx-asian-and-indigenous-arts-organizations/>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

Skau, Michael. *"A Clown in a Grave": Complexities and Tensions in the Works of Gregory Corso*. Southern Illinois UP, 1999.

*Sorry to Bother You*. Directed by Boots Riley, Annapurna Pictures et al., 2018.

Spahr, Juliana. *Du Bois's Telegram: Literary Resistance and State Containment*. Harvard UP, 2018.

Timm, Robert C. "Unleashing Language: The Post-Structuralist Poetics of Gregory Corso and the Beats." *The Kerouac Connection*, vol. 27, 1995, pp. 34-41.

Torres, Ella, et al. "Why Exuberant Hong Kong Protesters Are Waving American Flags." *ABC News*, 28 Nov. 2019, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/exuberant-hong-kong-protesters-waving-american-flags/story?id=67371063>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

Trotsky, Leon. "A Letter to the American Trotskyists." *Marxists.org*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1929/03/letter-american.htm>. Accessed 9 March 2021.

---. "If America Should Go Communist." *Marxists.org*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1934/08/ame.htm>. Accessed 9 March 2021.

Wagnleitner, Reinhold. *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*. Translated by Diana M. Wolf, Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1994.

Wald, Alan. *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s*. Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1987

Walker, Darren. "Toward a New Gospel of Wealth." *Ford Foundation*, 1 Oct. 2015, <https://www.fordfoundation.org/just-matters/just-matters/posts/toward-a-new-gospel-of-wealth/>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

Whitney, Joel. *Finks: How the CIA Tricked the World's Best Writers*. OR Books, 2016.

Wilford, Hugh. *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America*. Harvard UP, 2008.

---. *The New York Intellectuals: From Vanguard to Institution*. Manchester UP, 1995.

Yglesias, Matthew. "The Raging Controversy over the NBA, China, and the Hong Kong Protests, Explained." *Vox*, 7 Oct. 2019, <https://www.vox.com/2019/10/7/20902700/daryl-morey-tweet-china-nba-hong-kong>. Accessed 9 March 2021.

Zimmer, Dieter E. "Die Literatur-Mafia von Berlin." *Die Zeit*, 25 Nov. 1966, <https://www.zeit.de/1966/48/die-literatur-mafia-von-berlin>. Accessed 23 April 2020.

---. "Eine Bewusstseinsinventur: Das Gespräch mit dem Autor Uwe Johnson." *Bengel*, 99-105.

## APPENDIX

Excerpts from the “Introduction” originally appeared in Baszak, Gregor. “A New Cultural Cold War?” *American Affairs*, vol. IV, no. 4., Winter 2020, pp. 128-48. Copyright 2020, American Affairs Foundation Inc. Republished by permission of the publisher.



**Julius Krein**

to me ▾

Thu, 22 Apr, 07:20

Dear Gregor,

Yes, we grant permission to republish your *American Affairs* article, in whole or in part, in your dissertation.

Best,

Julius

---

Julius Krein

**American Affairs**


One Boston Place · Suite 2600 | Boston, MA 02108

+1 617 621 4088 | [jkrein@americanaffairsjournal.org](mailto:jkrein@americanaffairsjournal.org)

The citations used from the Saul Bellow papers at the Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center at the University of Chicago Library “fall within the fair use guidelines of the United States Copyright law do not require permission from the Library.” See:

<https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/scrc/visiting/permission/>

## Approval for citations from archival documents by Gregory Corso received:

Corso Permission 

**Raymond Foye**  
to me ▾

Thu, 10 Jun, 21:19 (4 days ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Gregor,

I am the representative for the Literary Estate of Gregory Corso. New Directions forwarded your letter. You have the permission of the estate to quote from the excerpts you wish to use. If you need something more formal than this, please write the letter you wish me to sign and send it to me.

The Corso estate always grants rights that we control, free of charge for scholarly use. We are very grateful to scholars who take an interest in Gregory Corso's work.

Sincerely,  
Raymond Foye

## Approval for citations from archival documents by Walter Höllerer received:

### WG: Erlaubnis

3 messages

**Michael P. Hehl - Literaturarchiv Sulzbach-Rosenberg** <hehl@literaturarchiv.de> Thu, Jun 10, 2021 at 3:04 PM  
To: "baszak2@uic.edu" <baszak2@uic.edu>  
Cc: Renate von Mangoldt <renatevonmangoldt@gmail.com>

Dear Mr Baszak,

I am forwarding the below email by Renate von Mangoldt, widow of Walter Höllerer, who gives you express permission to use the quotations by her deceased husband in your dissertation.

I wish you every success and best of luck for all your future endeavors!

Sincerely,  
Michael Peter Hehl

-----  
Michael Peter Hehl, M.A.

Archiv und Literaturwissenschaft

Literaturarchiv Sulzbach-Rosenberg  
Rosenbergerstr. 9  
92237 Sulzbach-Rosenberg

Büro: +49 (0) 9661 815 959 1

<https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.literaturarchiv.de%2F&data=04%7C01%7Cbaszak2%40groute.uic.edu%7Cf3f45ebf28ac4facc35c08d92c105a2b%7Ce202cd477a564baa99e3e3b71a7c77dd%7C0%7C0%7C637589271474919743%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6IklhaWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C2000&amp;sdata=X0qYS%2FpVKGUSVcQz%2B1hOx3qpPOHMPCW6xBWKXXTiYVvk%3D&reserved=0>

-----Ursprüngliche Nachricht-----

Von: Renate von Mangoldt <renatevonmangoldt@gmail.com>  
Gesendet: Mittwoch, 9. Juni 2021 18:11  
An: Michael P. Hehl - Literaturarchiv Sulzbach-Rosenberg <hehl@literaturarchiv.de>  
Betreff: Erlaubnis

Hiermit erlaube ich Gregor Baszak, die angehängten Zitate von Walter Höllerer in seiner Dissertation zu verwenden.

Renate von Mangoldt



## Approval for citations from documents at Harvard University Archives received:

**Kuipers, Juliana**  
to me ▾ Fri, Jun 11, 5:39 PM (3 days ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Gregor Baszak  
Ph.D. candidate  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
English Department  
University Hall 2027  
601 S. Morgan St.  
Chicago, Illinois 60607

Dear Mr. Baszak,

In so far and only in so far as the rights of the Harvard University Archives are concerned, I am pleased to grant you permission to publish from our collections in the manner outlined in your email of June 4, 2021.

The University Archives can claim only the physical ownership of the materials in question, not any copyrights or other intangible rights therein. Responsibility for identifying any potential copyright owners and obtaining their permission must be assumed by users wishing to publish this material.

Please include the following credit line or a similar notation with your citations: Courtesy of the Harvard University Archives.

Sincerely,

Juliana Kuipers  
Senior Collection Development Curator/Archivist

*Due to the campus restrictions put in place in response to the coronavirus outbreak, the Harvard University Archives is closed, with staff working remotely. There may be a delay in response time to your inquiry, and some services may be curtailed or unavailable due to University closures. Thank you for your patience during this time.*

**Juliana Kuipers**  
Senior Collection Development Curator/Archivist  
Harvard University Archives  
Pusey Library, Harvard Yard  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
[juliana\\_kuipers@harvard.edu](mailto:juliana_kuipers@harvard.edu) | 617-384-7786

## Approval for citations from documents at Rockefeller Archive Center received:

**Hiltzik, Lee R**  
to me ▾ Fri, Jun 4, 2:29 PM (10 days ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Gregor:

Here is RAC's official permission statement:

*The Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) grants you permission to publish excerpts from the archives of the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation as well as from the papers of Wilson McNeil Lowry, as requested in your email of 3 June 2021, to the extent that it can do so. This permission is given provided that publication conforms to all relevant provisions of United States copyright law and provided that the publication does not constitute libel or an invasion of privacy. Please note that this permission is granted for the format listed in this specific request, so that future editions or editions in other languages or formats, including electronic, will require additional permissions. Please be aware that the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation maintain intellectual property rights on materials in their archives. Both the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation authorize RAC to grant the permission above, as RAC is the official repository of their records.*

Approval for citations from archival documents by Robert Creeley received:

The Permissions Company LLC

6101 Old Court Road #139

Boca Raton, FL 33433

PermDude@eclipse.net

June 7, 2021

Gregor Baszak  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
English Department  
University Hall 2027  
601 S. Morgan Street  
Chicago, IL 60607

Dear Mr. Baszak:

Thank you for your request for permission to use an excerpt from a letter by Robert Creeley to Walter Höllerer (April 19, 1993) in your doctoral dissertation "*Verbal Opposition...Encouraged by the Powerful*": *Transatlantic Literature and the Cultural Cold War* for the University of Illinois at Chicago.

This letter will grant you permission to use the material as requested in your dissertation and in all copies to meet university requirements, including deposit copies with the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Database. You must credit the source of the material (including any crediting required by the Literaturarchiv Sulzbach-Rosenberg and you must re-apply if your dissertation is later published.

In lieu of a fee, please have a print copy of your dissertation sent to:

Estate of Robert Creeley  
attn "Permissions Fulfillment"  
PO Box 1257  
Waldoboro, ME 04572

Thank you for your interest in the works of Robert Creeley. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Frederick T. Courtright, President  
The Permissions Company, LLC  
Rights Agency for the Estate of Robert Creeley

## VITA

**Education**

University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of English Ph.D., English Literature Studies	2021
Johannes Gutenberg-University, Mainz, Germany M.A., American Studies	2015
Johannes Gutenberg-University, Mainz, Germany B.A., American Studies (major), Film Studies (minor)	2013

**Selected Publications**Peer-reviewed

Review of *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars From 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* by Angela Nagle, *electronic book review*, Jan. 2018.

Articles

“A New Cultural Cold War?” *American Affairs*, vol. IV, no. 4., Winter 2020, pp. 128-48.

Annotated Bibliography entry on Niklas Luhmann, “Can the Mind Participate in Communication” in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Electronic Literature*, edited by Joseph Tabbi, Bloomsbury, 2017, pp. 437-38.

Book Reviews

“The Myth of the Sixties.” Review of *The Fire Is upon Us: James Baldwin, William F. Buckley Jr., and the Debate over Race in America* by Nicholas Buccola and *The Art of Return: The Sixties and Contemporary Culture* by James Meyer, *Public Books*, April 2020.

“Away in a Manager.” Review of *The New Class War: Saving Democracy from the Managerial Elites* by Michael Lind, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Jan. 2020.

“Nothing New Under the Sun.” Review of *The Moon Over Wapakoneta: Fictions and Science Fictions from Indiana and Beyond* by Michael Martone, *American Book Review*, vol. 40, no. 4, May/June 2019, p. 17.

“The Right Kind of Life.” Review of *Anniversaries: From a Year in the Life of Gesine Cresspahl* by Uwe Johnson (transl. by Damion Searls), *American Book Review*, vol. 40, no. 3, March/April 2019, pp. 18-19.

Interviews

“A New Progressive Era?” Interview with Robert Putnam and Shaylyn Romney Garrett, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, March 2021.

“Class War Returns to America.” Interview with Michael Lind, *Medium*, May 2020.

“‘The Democrats Are Worthless’: An Interview with Howie Hawkins.” *Platypus Review* #126, May 2020.

“‘Marxism through the Back Door’: An Interview with Prof. Cedric Johnson.” *Platypus Review* #79, Sept. 2015.

“‘To Unite the Many: An Interview with Adolph L. Reed, Jr.’” *Platypus Review* #75, April 2015. With Spencer Leonard.

### **Awards and Honors**

UIC Public Humanities Fellowship	2019
Honoring Our Professors’ Excellence (HOPE) Teaching Award	2018
DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) study abroad scholarship	2011-12
Rosa Luxemburg Foundation scholarship	2009-15

### **Grants**

Rockefeller Archive Center research stipend	2019
UIC Chancellor’s Graduate Research Award	2018

### **UIC, Department Talks and Webinars**

- Webinar Presentation on Working with Blackboard Learning Management System  
UIC English Department Tech Tuesdays, Chicago, IL, July 2020
- Webinar Presentation on Asynchronous Teaching Methods  
UIC First-Year Writing Program Remote Teaching Group, Chicago, IL, July 2020
- “No Logos: Appealing to Reason in the Age of Emotionally Charged Debate”  
Teachwrite series of the UIC First-Year Writing Program (discussion group for composition/ rhetoric faculty), Chicago, IL, September 2017

### **Selected Conference Presentations**

“Prometheus Revisited: Gregory Corso’s ‘Bomb’ and the Poetics of the Nuclear Age.”

Northeast Modern Language Association, Boston, MA, March 2020

“1848 and the Avant-Garde: Clement Greenberg’s Modernism Reconsidered.” Modern

Language Association, Seattle, WA, Jan. 2020

“‘Verbal Opposition . . . Encouraged by the Powerful’: Uwe Johnson’s *Anniversaries*.”

Northeast Modern Language Association, Washington DC, March 2019

“Bridging the Iron Curtain: When Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Andrei Voznesensky Met in

Berlin.” Northeast Modern Language Association, Washington DC, March 2019

“Prometheus Revisited: On the Modernism of Gregory Corso’s ‘Bomb.’”

Louisville Conference on Literature & Culture Since 1900, Louisville, KY, Feb. 2019

“*Junge amerikanische Lyrik*: On Gregory Corso, Walter Höllerer, and the Beats in Germany.”

Midwest Modern Language Association, Kansas City, MO, Nov. 2018

### Curator

Special exhibition “Beat und Kalter Krieg. Deutsch-amerikanische Literaturbeziehungen

1958 – 1968” at Literaturarchiv Sulzbach-Rosenberg, May 3—Dec. 20 2018. With Michael Peter Hehl.

### Teaching Experience

UIC, First-Year Writing Program

2015-2021

Introduction to Academic Writing

Academic Writing I - Writing in Academic and Public Contexts

Academic Writing II - Writing for Research and Inquiry

UIC, English Department

2016-2020

Introduction to Film

English and American Fiction

American Literature and Culture

Introduction to Moving Image Arts

English Literature II: 1660-1900 (Teaching Assistant to Prof. Mark Canuel)

American Literature: Beginnings to 1900 (Teaching Assistant to Prof.  
Jennifer Ashton)

UIC, Engaged Humanities Initiative 2020

Visual Literacy - Technology and Image Production in the  
21st Century (Teaching Assistant to Prof. Beate Geissler)

UIC, Writing Center 2016-17

Theory and Practice for Tutoring in the Writing Center

### **Professional Affiliations**

Marxist Literary Group, Midwest Modern Language Association, Modern Language  
Association, Northeast Modern Language Association, Uwe Johnson-Gesellschaft