Redefinitions of Selfhood: Stan Brakhage, Bob Dylan, and Allen Ginsberg as Thoreauvian Counterculturists

James Anthony Galione

Montclair State University

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ABSTRACT

My master’s thesis lies in examining the appropriation of Henry David Thoreau’s techniques of authorship within the American 1960’s counterculture. My investigation focuses on how Stan Brakhage, Bob Dylan, and Allen Ginsberg engage in Thoreauvian forms of selfhood, self-government, citizenship, and ecological awareness within the context of the 1960’s counterculture. These three artists take on issues of 20th century materialism, nationalism, sexuality, and racial equality, within their respective medium of expression, as participants in what I will define as “Thoreauvian tradition”. Elements of this “Thoreauvian tradition” include subjective vision, ontological identity, undermining myth, and evolving the medium. These are the sub textual components through which Thoreau’s writings become more blatantly associated to passive resistance, political and educational demonstration, and oral and written social reform.
MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

REDEFINITIONS OF SELFHOOD: BRAKHAGE, DYLAN, AND GINSBERG AS THOREAUVIAN COUNTERCULTURISTS

by

James Galione

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College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department: English

Certified by:

Dr. Marietta Morrissey
Dean of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences

August 2013

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Art Simon
Thesis Sponsor

Dr. Alex Lykidis
Committee Member

Dr. Janet Cutler
Committee Member

Dr. Emily Isaacs
Department Chair
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Contents

Introduction.............................................. 6
Stan Brakhage: The Redefinition of Vision........16
Bob Dylan: The Reclaiming of Personal Agency...29
Allen Ginsberg: The Restoration of Innocence....63
Conclusion....................................................78
Bibliography...............................................83
INTRODUCTION

Henry David Thoreau’s leadership and radical attention to pacifism, citizenship, and human agency echo in the 1960s counterculture (i.e. the Civil Rights Movement, Student Movement, and the Anti-War Movement). From politics to comedy, poetry to music, literature to film, a Thoreauvian sense of citizenship and agency predicts and informs a spiritual brand of individuality idealized and realized a century later in the work of filmmaker Stan Brakhage, musician Bob Dylan, and poet Allen Ginsberg. In defining nineteenth century Transcendentalism through a postmodern lens, the historian Charles Capper has argued that

If, as the post moderns tell us, modernity means “a self-reflexive engagement in a world seemingly without fixed ‘foundations,’ the leading Transcendentalists ... pushed closer to that leap than did any other intellectual circle before the twentieth century. (qtd. in Specq 4)

As the Transcendentalists’ most active social reformer, Thoreau’s personal and literary work merges together to redefine authorship and spectatorship of literature with an insistence upon the subjective vision of a single, deliberate life -- his own.

Brakhage, Dylan, and Ginsberg embody many of the ideals set down by Thoreau, similarly taking on 20th century issues such as materialism, nationalism, sexuality, and racial equality. Within their respective mediums of expression, each participates in four elements of what this investigation will define as “Thoreauvian tradition.” In exploring Thoreau’s usage of subjectivity, ontological identity, undermining and redefining myth,
and the evolution of the medium being utilized, these elements collectively work to foster an active sense of readership and autonomy.

Specifically, the term “subjective vision” means a perspective or lens that is “peculiar to a particular individual” (*Merriam Webster* 1168). Ontology is defined as “the branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of being” (*Merriam Webster* 811). For the use of this project, the term “ontological identity” means a state in which the viewer is simply “being” with the text, or readjusting in constant flux with every present moment of receiving the text. Ontological identity expands the meaning of authorship to include the reader, viewer, or listener of the work as equal creator through interpretation. If by interpreting a text it becomes defined beyond intentions of authorship, then a process of reinterpretation occurs in which each separate moment is a unique instance of textual contact between audience and author. Hence, each viewing, listening, or reading of a text changes moment to moment, or ontologically. When engaging with past works, or texts, each moment is a unique circumstance in which the audience can reclaim authorship and meaning internally. The process of textual redefinition is also a redefinition of selfhood.

Thoreau’s emphasis on personal agency often takes an anti-heroic standpoint and undermines mythical references as a means of social commentary. Joel Myerson, in *Transcendentalism: A Reader*, helps to draw the connection of the nineteenth-century Transcendentalist text and the heroic cycle in his general outline of the literary movement. In his introduction, Myerson states,

> If all -- God, humankind, nature -- emanate from the same source, then the natural world and its inhabitants are microcosms of the macrocosmic divinity; that is an
examination of the small -- such as, for example, the people
and natural world of Walden Pond -- encourages learning
about the patterns of God's designs. (*Transcendentalism* xxix)

Those simultaneous “microcosms” and “macrocosms” lying at the heart of
Transcendentalist philosophy correspond somewhat directly to the traditional narrative of
the heroic cycle: the central character must be, at once, “unique” and
“universal.” Contrary to convention, Thoreau’s *Walden* defies a traditionally sexual or
gendered context, in what is clearly the rejection of 19th century forms of masculinity, or
traditional heroism. In this juxtaposition, Thoreau satirizes the notion of manhood in
characters like Atlas, who bears the weight of the world on his shoulders. In *Walden*
Thoreau writes, “I never saw what kind of recompense he received” (1916).

Here, Thoreau chooses to exhibit to the reader a type of mundane suffering
attached to immortal and mortal routine alike by undermining the glorification of strength
and dependable nature of Atlas’s feat. The undermining of this myth deconstructs rugged
individualism as a possible means of self-empowerment. Specifically, Thoreau is
responsible for authoring a metamorphosis of meaning founded in classical allusion that
celebrates modern anti-heroism. The importance of undermining myth is the process of
reclaiming natural history and its ambiguity from a tradition of etiological narratives. It
allows for the unknown processes of nature to reenter discourses of origins, thereby
replanting a mystery of unknown actual events as something more interesting than
surrogate fiction.

Hesiod, Ovid, and Milton, and all creators of myth, forged a tradition of providing
culturally didactic accounts for the makings of all things unexplainable, and mostly
natural wonders. These etiological explanations, the sound of thunder as sport for gods in Olympus, for example, are hallmarks of western literature. Indeed, our days of the week are literally named after the gods of Norse mythology. The mere utterance of “Thor’s day” comes to remind us how communication and culture rely upon imagination. Yet, language and vision are disparate, resulting in inscriptions of mediation between the unspoken thought and the spoken word -- the written word.

As Thoreau reclaims authorial agency by editing Apollo into the teamster driver and chiding the dogmatic guilt of Atlas, what becomes obvious is how he reclaims a natural imagining of the world around him, in which even the oldest legends are revealed as infant characters in the scope of natural history. Indeed, Thoreau’s sensibility of time goes well beyond what humans deem ancient, and therefore, Homer and his predecessors are now adolescents in a world of the anthropomorphic universe. This adjustment of time dethrones humanity itself as a capable teller of origins, as the unfolding universe predates it. Subsequently, Thoreau turns men’s inquisitiveness of nature on its head by reimagining a lens by which Nature makes its inquiries into the workings of man. As Thoreau states, “Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in” (Walden 1924). His preference for a more nonfictional explanation of beauty privileges scientific and natural observation, while revealing even the ambiguity of the scientific process itself.

Though Thoreau was revered for being the most capable scholar of classical antiquity amongst his transcendentalist peers, what mattered most to him was preserving individuality in all its rawness, wildness, and nakedness. Hence, Thoreau was a representative of humanity who brought his own history to Walden Pond, just as the pond had its own history representative of all non-human nature. The subjective interaction
between these two entities, Thoreau and Walden Pond, interweaves the non-mythical narratives of the journal with anthropomorphic characterizations of both entities. To Thoreau, nature is always alive and in the now. It needs no introduction from Muses or epic narrative to report what is constantly visible all around him in every unique moment.

This insistence of the now lends itself most easily to the recording of subjective, seen facts in the mode of journal writing, a medium that focuses on disparate and random events. Thoreau’s enthusiasm for the classics of the past and potential readership for the future is not utterly silenced by his focus of the present moment. For how can one experience and record a journal simultaneously? However, in attempting to capture the moment with scientific specificity and authorial license, Thoreau evolves the medium of journal writing in the process. Exploring Thoreau’s well-known use of passive resistance, political and educational demonstration, and oral and written social reform implicitly involves these four smaller parts of which his approach consists.

The empowering sense of unpredictability that culminates in these methods helps to explain why individuals and groups of a various political alignment throughout the twentieth century and beyond seek to appropriate Thoreau’s wit for a particular cause. As Lawrence Buell in *The Environmental Imagination* observes,

> Like the body of Osiris, Thoreau’s spirit has been scattered and transplanted in a thousand forms through his transmutation into cultural property...From libertarians to the civil right marchers, the right winger to the vegetarians, almost every American *ism* has found something to its taste in *Walden*. (313)

The appeal of Thoreau’s techniques is undeniable in that his work transcends political
binaries on many occasions. The multiple dissections and appropriations of the following passage from Walden’s chapter “Higher Laws” exemplifies the accuracy of Buell’s observation as follows:

There is a period in the history of the individual, as of the race, when the hunters are the “best men,” as the Algonquin’s called them. We cannot but pity the boy who has never fired a gun; he is no more humane, while his education has been sadly neglected (Walden 49).

Clearly, this passage is attractive to propagandists of right-wing politics. Here, conservative themes of forest as hunting ground, guns as education, and proper masculinity through the taking of life are easily conveyed from Thoreau’s initial observation. However, no right wing argument benefits from the symmetry of this passage as it continues, “This was my answer with respect to those youths who were bent upon this pursuit, trusting they would soon outgrow it” (Walden 492).

The right’s exploitation of Thoreau hangs by a proverbial thread here as self-determinism and universalization become mere appropriations to bolster center aisle support for hot button issues like gun-control, hunting laws, and the “self-made” entrepreneur. Thoreau’s passage embodies his talent for redressing convention in the passage’s conclusion: “No humane being, past the thoughtless age of boyhood, will wantonly murder any creature, which holds its life by the same tenure that he does. The hare in its extremity cries like a child” (Walden 492).

Here, Thoreau offers a religiously challenging, or radically liberal, observation of maturation via identification of human with non-human. Paradoxical to the initial statement, Thoreau defines maturity, in part, as the acquisition of mercy through equality.
Yet the acknowledgment of equality is one of sameness even when the identification of boy to hare crosses boundaries of species. This Darwinist and pagan aspect of Thoreau’s work is revealed here. With great subtlety, there is an underscoring of ecological vision as a means to create egalitarian social perspectives through scientific disciplines. Thoreau’s paragraph appeals to dichotomies of political, religious, and generational binaries, while maintaining a distanced sense of authorship. For his time, it is radical in its all-inclusive approach to identifying human beings in simultaneously broader and more specific terms, initially as life forms, and then as specific individuals of the larger ecology. It uses scientific method to celebrate social evolution and diversity through nature writing, a popular and easily recognizable format for the nineteenth-century reader.

Laura Dassow Walls, in *Romancing the Real: Thoreau’s Technology of Inscriptions*, posits this aspect of Darwin’s work as well as that of nature writer Van Humboldt as “contemporary models for brave explorations in his own woods” (*Historical Guide to Thoreau* 132). However, Thoreau transcends and evolves the structure of Van Humbolt and Darwin’s scientific method in that he simply turns the means of science in upon itself, as he socializes the gathering of facts, species, and environmental information. Instead of merely cataloging natural observations of scientific evolution, Thoreau creates an ecological doctrine for humanity through an egalitarian interdependency of species. Darwin’s groundbreaking focus on evolution also includes an emphasis on the survival of the fittest, which often leaves the larger system of ecological relationships out of account. Knowledge, in the Van Humboldtian tradition, ends with its publishing of regional wildlife and consumer consumption of cold, hard data without
poetic expression. Thoreau sustains the value of each “catalogued fact” through poetic expression and executes social doctrine through direct action.

For Thoreau, transcending experiential contact is the pinnacle of transcendental achievement. It is the preference of the living moment over the documented moment. In seeking a singular identity within that ecologized world, Thoreau advocates the simple ability and frequent intention “to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment” (Walden 1880). This ontological quest “to be here now” is an edict of the 1960s counterculture. Thoreau’s weapon of revolution was that of consciousness.

Although Walls is correct in defining Darwin and Van Humboldt as influences, Thoreau’s perception is the evolved version of the two. The acceptance of Marxist doctrine is visible most clearly in Walden’s chapter “Economy.” After comparing unjust living conditions between the ruling class and slaves, he writes, “I hardly need refer now to the laborers in our Southern states who produce the staple exports of this country, and are themselves a staple production of the south” (Walden 1890). Here, labor as commodity is stressed through an economic perpetuation of slavery.

Thoreau’s transcendence of Marxist doctrine lies in non-participation as a model for activism. It is his written refusal to enlist in the army, to enforce corporal punishment in his teaching career after graduating Harvard, hiding “fugitive” slaves, or the refusal to fund the soldiers and guns in the Mexican war, which transcends the theoretical confines of intellectual Marxism. The directness of Thoreau’s political activism is realized through direct and artistic expression, non-violent protest, support for violent self-defense against the establishment, and rebellious subversion of economics. Undoubtedly, the 1960s
counterculture emerges as a perennial benefactor. Marx and Thoreau, as literary contemporaries, simply differ in their methods in that Thoreau’s solution

...Depends on the actions of individuals rather than on the actions of armies and mobs...If you want a Marxist revolution, you have to join with others to overthrow the present system, but if you want a Thoreauvian revolution, you need to change only your own life, not that of others. (Kifer)

An interesting dichotomy between what is an authentic and inauthentic usage of Walden requires, quite suitably, the most crucial aspect of Thoreauvian tradition: subjective vision. This vision privileges an inward location where “natural vision” can unfold. The following passage from Walden’s “Where I Lived and What I Lived For” demonstrates Thoreau’s concern with a nineteenth century New England lack of active perception. Thoreau claims,

I perceive that we inhabitants of New England live this mean life that we do because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things. We think that that is which appears to be. Look at a meeting-house, or a courthouse, or a jail, or a shop, or a dwelling-house, and say what that thing really is before a true gaze, and they would all go to pieces in your account of them. (Walden 1923)

This subjective form of “vision,” figuratively and literally, is the first aspect of Thoreauvian tradition relevant to 1960s counterculture. In this general statement, Thoreau prepares his readers for the chapter “Reading,” which urges for an athletic-type observation of all things cultural and natural, as opposed to a docile gaze of consumption
or novel entertainment. The realism of Thoreau’s philosophic approach is staggeringly postmodern in that he redefines individualistic action as revolutionary, observational as active, personal as political, and private non-participation as radical social reform. An observer capable of such strenuous, observational activity he celebrates with the nomenclature of “the adventurous student” (*Walden* 1925).

Thoreau defines visionary readership as follows: “To read well...requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object” (*Walden* 1925). Vision, here, is defined as an act worthy of lifelong, observational devotion, rigorous and refined training, and a pursuit in which the seer dedicates the majority of his life to perfecting active perception. Much of Thoreau’s attention to pacifism is informed by this active sense of observation, or subjective vision.
Stan Brakhage: The Redefinition of Vision

Over a century later, the work of avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage rearticulates Thoreau’s “vision” in the late Sixties with the film *Dog Star Man* and *Prelude*. From his visual filmic contributions, theoretical writings, painting and sculpture on film, and oral lecturing, Brakhage’s participation in this visual element of Thoreauvian tradition is most evident in his emphasis on “pure vision.” In *Metaphors on Vision*, Brakhage states,

> Imagine an eye unruled by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception. (qtd. in Sitney xxviii)

The most obvious association to Thoreauvian tradition is the insistence of agency -- an “unruled” existence. If we were to metaphysically replace the word “eye” with “person,” Brakhage’s statement becomes indistinguishable from *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience*. As Thoreau states in the latter,

> [G]overnment is best which governs least...also I believe...that government is best which governs not at all; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. (*Civil Disobedience* 1857)

In Brakhage’s insistence “to know each object,” there is a recollection of Thoreau’s demand:

> To drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it,
and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience. (Walden 1920) (emphasis mine)

Thoreau’s idea of the “adventurous student” is realized in these specific, primary characteristics of Brakhage’s reformation of American cinema.

The act of “seeing” in 1960s avant-garde film is transcendentalist in that it demands, or rather achieves, subjective vision in this athletic sense of Thoreauvian tradition. As P. Sitney states in Visionary Film, “the theme of consciousness as pure vision...has been a part of the American aesthetic tradition since Emerson...and dominates much of the theory of Abstract Expressionism...” (Sitney xxiii). In particular, Sitney recognizes that “It was Brakhage, of all the major American avant-garde filmmakers, who first embraced the formal directives and verbal aesthetics of Abstract Expressionism” (Sitney 233). Furthermore, an insistence on the viewer’s engagement with the text, namely the notion of readership as authorship, also reinforces Thoreau’s insistence on the “intention of the eye” (The Journal 514).

Brakhage lays down “open eyesight” as a pillar of his written work, Metaphors on Vision, which stresses the relationship between existences in the realms of subjective looking and being. In this sense, Brakhage acts as autobiographical mediator between vision and being, defining open eyesight as “a continual flux of focus and movement, sensuously probing the actual world that manifests itself before the eyes” (Sitney xxvii) as crucial to individuality. It is the equivalent to Thoreau sitting in the woods as a fixed tripod. Although Thoreau’s accounts would render him a seemingly objective observer, the editing process problematizes the reproduction of spontaneity. However, Brakhage’s method of open eyesight still mimics Thoreau’s lens as he gathers the widest range of
natural events as observer of “a constant flux of focus and movement.” Both authors demonstrate a concern to draw out the subjectivity of vision. Thoreau observes,

No method nor discipline can supersede the necessity of being forever on the alert. What is a course of history, or philosophy, or poetry, no matter how well selected, or the best society, or the most admirable routine of life, compared with the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen? (Walden 1930-31)

Brakhage’s blurring and constant shifting over “what is to be seen” are among the most observable examples of Thoreauvian technique to date. What the viewer experiences is an anchorless world that undermines narrative and temporal conceptions by destabilizing time and interpretation. As Sitney suggests, “The liberated eyeball experiences a temporal disorientation. It is incapable of seeing anything sequentially; it even sees forward and backward motion simultaneously” (Sitney xxiii). It is therefore in resisting the temporality of past and future that Brakhage too “stands on the edge of two eternities” (Walden 1880). This stillness amidst temporal simultaneity creates a suspended sense of selfhood in time, an ontological identity, and the second element of Thoreauvian tradition.

Through cinema Brakhage allows us to visualize a metaphysical world in which the senses cannot involuntarily create meaning through narrative convention. Through subjective vision and ontological identification, this world is simply too unstable and ambiguous to define from its external artifice alone. While this is true of all art, Brakhage brings the need for an authorial-type spectatorship to the surface.
In the beginning of the third part of *Dog Star Man*, Brakhage skews all sense of visual and temporal clarity. The viewer is unsure as to whether the image is an organic or inanimate object or what sequence of actions are meant to imply its trajectory in the film. What appears to be the possibility of a human mouth occupies the center of the frame, then quickly drifts to the top, left edge of the frame.

Then finally, the unidentifiable object leaves the frame entirely before a determination can be made. The observer has five seconds to attach a strict definition, a word, to this illusory shape. That shape then vanishes before any over-arching association can be made. Brakhage never allows for the possibility of attaching empirical definitions to these objects, which in turn, forces the viewer to establish a new identification, term, or meaning to each new and fleeting object. Without the implicit direction of narration or sound, the viewer is left to determine the film’s meaning by strictly visual means.

The ambiguity Brakhage creates by constantly bringing his camera out of focus establishes a non-narrative and temporal sense of formlessness as a result of cloaking visual specificity. Consequently, the frequent camera movement places the viewer in an autobiographical field of vision; it is a field of sight in which viewing and identification are polarized, which results in the forging of one’s own visual language.

At 1:36, Brakhage offers an initial nod to his audience, as the first distinct image comes in the form of a female nipple, which occupies the entire frame in extreme close-up. By 1:40, the image disappears in a fade to black. Although it might seem like Brakhage is giving four seconds of clarity, or reprieve, to what is a non-narrative and non-aural experience, this shot it is actually an underscoring of how he has actually skewed our associations from the convention of guided vision. What the extreme close-
up of the nipple tells us is that the human form itself is a transcendent text, in which the body itself participates. The individual viewer is the subjective artistry and process being conveyed on the screen. As Sitney states,

The lyrical film postulates the film-maker behind the camera as the first-person protagonist of the film. The images of the film are what he sees, filmed in such a way that we never forget his presence and we know how he is reacting to his vision...there is no longer a hero; instead, the screen is filled with movement, and that movement, both of the camera and the editing, reverberates with the idea of a person looking. (Visionary Film 160)

It is a metaphysical layering of meanings in which the assumed is now dismissed with extreme subjectivity. In the first minute thirty-nine seconds, the brief inclusion of something definable, the female body part, actually brings with it a temporal mistrust, or false sense of stability, as no predicated or foreshadowed meaning is present to inform meaning. Rather, the clarity experienced is now awkward in that it interferes with the rhythmic movement of narrative discontinuity Brakhage accomplishes. Through constant subjective vision, seeing the “definable” is now comparable to attempting to walk upon land after a long voyage at sea. Stillness and clarity now becomes the abnormal.

In content, the body is released from sexual fetish, becoming more a hieroglyphic image of femininity and nurturing. While the field of vision gradually becomes microscopic and microcosmic, the anatomical identification of the female breast becomes less central than its smaller elements. The emphasis is instead on the impression of lines,
the indentions on the flesh, of the newly redefined subject. These lines unify the body to
the artistry of “all creation” in Brakhage’s expressive technologies.

These basic units, or lines, symbolize primordial terrains of macrocosmic and
microcosmic proportion. In depictions of the sun, moon, planets, fire, and clouds the
creation process itself is the only visible theme that *Dog Star Man’s* agents of subjective
complicity ponder. As the viewer attempts to draw any sense of thematic and visual
familiarity or thematic continuity, a sense of embryonic consciousness is awakened to
shapes, lines, and patterns unrecognizable between universal and cellular. *Dog Star Man*
explores birth and recreation where these microcosmic lines seen all throughout the film
are now transcribed onto the body, the nipple in this case.

The etched and painted celluloid is now merged with the cellular, living flesh in
this all-inclusive and ecological vision. The ancient and elemental primordial associations
are attached to modern art of the 1960s, implicating Thoreauvian tradition far beyond the
reaches of the written medium and time period. In Thoreau’s terms, these “lines” are
visible in his observations of clouds:

> What hieroglyphics in the winter sky! ... Distinct ripple-marks at right
angles...parallel with the horizon, the lines indicating the ridges of the
ripple marks. These are like the abdominal plates of the snake...brain like,
finely reticulated; so thin yet so firmly drawn, membranous.

In short, Brakhage reworks the usual cinematic mode of expression, the narrative, as a
means of evolving individual consciousness from written to visual expression. Like
Thoreau’s observations of “drawn” clouds, sight transcends the confines of the written in
a celebration of the creation process, a divine authorship.
Indeed, in obscuring absolute meaning of an object, or word, it is now the relationship between symbols that gives the text meaning. Brakhage gives no master key to these ambiguous symbols, preferring instead to engender an expanded sense of authorship through spectatorship. In doing so, Brakhage ensures a new reading upon each screening through an active engagement of viewer to image. In Thoreau’s terms, this is the vicariousness of subjective reality, which he himself overcomes during his time at Walden Pond. Included in Odell Shepard’s edition, *The Heart of Thoreau’s Journals* is Thoreau’s clear desire to differentiate between assumed authorship and active observation. He states, “I am prepared not so much for contemplation, as for forceful expression. I am, braced both physically and intellectually. It is not so much the music as the marching to the music that I feel” (Shepard 58). It is in participating, not contemplating, nature which provides personal meaning. The “music” he wishes to engage with is non-diegetic, as he is incapable of totally penetrating his own being. This pre-Walden entry anticipates a desire to feel the rhythms of nature in the core of his being, and to “march” to his own meaning of that music.

The ripples of lines on the flesh are comparable to the microcosmic image of a lake, or pond, very much the same way a thumbprint could be enlarged into a picture of a maze. Each object, in this way, cannot scientifically be referred to as anything but unique, and yet, also relative to subjective associations of artistic vision. The reader would simply need to observe the lines of his own hand to understand the vast level of intricate workings of nature on each individual subject. An awareness to infinite, intertextual possibility results, as anything in metaphysics now becomes a text regardless of size, concept, or chosen medium. Brakhage’s interest in such basic units of living
measurements is a focus on unifying an unspoken language with the image, film with poetry, and nature with technology. In fostering a visual experience that encompasses the past and future, the process of unfolding of that disjointed language-imagery transcends temporal qualification. As Sitney states,

For Brakhage, the cinema is a primarily a visual medium with no direct means of representing a past which has not been recorded on film, and certainly no future. He rejects the fictional dramatic film and bases his concept of temporality upon the discontinuity between shooting and editing. (Sitney xxviii)

These unifying “lines” that Brakhage brings to his films -- of flesh, etched paint and celluloid, paint or moth wings -- represent the common threads of molecular existence. As Thoreau ties human beings to non-human beings, living to the non-living, and organic life to inanimate formations, Brakhage’s transitions between macrocosmic and microcosmic imagery as a means of transcending the narrowness of meaning typical of Hollywood narratives and genres.

All visual assumption is swept away by an indexical revealing of worlds within worlds of images. In this way, Brakhage participates authentically in the ecological ethos of Thoreau in that a microscopic and primordial appreciation validates the kind of individual largeness which Thoreau insists is extant in each cell, molecule, worm, human, planet, or speck of dirt. These metaphysical common lines of existence, in all their subjectivity, make up an entire network of systems to demonstrate the irrelevance of size and temporality. Each subjective entity is redefined in every shifting moment and movement. In Visionary Film, Sitney remarks on how Brakhage creates:
Modifications in the name of the eye, demanding of the filmmaker a dedication to what he actually sees, not what he has been taught to see or thinks he should see...his sense of vision presumes that we have been taught to be unconscious of most of what we see. (168)

In Walden, Thoreau attempts to draw the reader from this "uncouscious" sense of vision. He states, "With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense. By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent" (Walden 429). A cinematic "torrent" rightly describes the visual experience attributed to Brakhage's lyrical films, especially in its temporal discontinuity.

Clearly, what both Brakhage and Thoreau look to achieve is the maximum amount of vision possible, to be as all-inclusive of both observer and observed as a means of transcendental meditation and individual consciousness. That all-inclusiveness is an attempt to redefine language itself as a means to disrupt the meta-narrative of commercial culture. There is modern resistance to the non-narrative and symbolist languages of both authors' texts, and their shared reliance upon an active sense of readership is often shunned by popular culture. To these consumer-minded readers, such consciousness is not favorable, but rather long-winded, or tedious. As Thoreau states, It is not all books that are as dull as their readers. There are probably words addressed to our condition exactly, which, if we could really hear and understand, would be more salutary than the morning or the spring to
our lives, and possibly put a new aspect on the face of things for us.

(Walden 1929)

Brakhage creates a world for the 20th century "reader" of cinematic images which fosters “a new aspect” by transforming convention of story telling.

Brakhage does not seek to allow his audience merely to pass time with sentiment, but rather offer the viewer an opportunity to reclaim the text by asserting personal, individualistic meaning. It is this third element of Thoreauvian tradition, the very parting from textual convention, that Brakhage that enables spectatorship to act as an authorial process. This process embodies the inward characteristics of transcendentalist social reform, of which the innate and intuitive process of the individual leads to self-realization. Like in Thoreau’s work, metaphysical conceits are shared characteristics of Brakhage’s Dog Star Man’s mythological contemplations. The ability to envision the macrocosmic by observing the microscopic, as with the female nipple, is a purification process which disarticulates natural imagery from religious definitions of immorality.

Instead, Brakhage utilizes “a pre-natal language, a silent form of creation” (Sitney xxviii) to define the world in his own terms and experience. The Thoreauvian approach is clearest here in that it deploys a formula for self-realization through individual need. Childishness, in a utopian sense of innocence, becomes symbolic of the Sixties counterculture. Unsurprisingly, the Anti-War Movement, Civil Rights Movement, and Student Movement sought no less than the reclaiming of personal autonomy of this symbolic child in need of rescue. Thoreauvian sight contemplates that if the individual consists of these infinite layers of worlds, then the only suitable entity capable of monitoring, adjusting, and governing its vastness is the self. Any attempt to articulate
these infinite and unique layers to a foreign governmental body is an attempt to communicate the vastly unknowable through an unsayable language. As Brakhage asks,

How many colors are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of ‘Green’? How many rainbows can light create for the untutored eye? How aware of variations in heat waves can that eye be?

Imagine a world alive with incomprehensible objects and shimmering with an endless variety of movement and innumerable gradations in color.

Imagine a world before the ‘beginning was the word’. (Sitney xxviii)

Here, colors come to represent variations within the individual as limitless. The depth of versatility and “innumerable” sense of selves, represented by “green,” serve to show the endless subjectivity and possibility of man as universe, not merely as an individual.

Ultimately, the urge to redefine, reinvent, and thus, rediscover oneself through authorship and engagement with art means also to recover, or at least separate, one’s own identity from the entanglements of any mass-psychology and mass-identifications. Thoreau, Brakhage fleshes out one’s single identity into these infinite “variations” of selfhood through the transmutation of language.

Thoreau’s reputation for revealing the simplicity within seemingly complicated constructs is only rivaled by his skill in celebrating the infinite complexities of those things considered most simple. He observes the “gradations” of grass, for example, in illustrate infinite continuum. He states, “A single gentle rain makes the grass many shades greener. So our prospects brighten on the influx of better thoughts” (Walden 2035). Perhaps the ultimate attention to gradation, or gradual evolution, is Thoreau’s understanding of the variance of meaning as it passes from thought to words to written
symbols. As Thoreau states,

The roots of letters are things. Natural objects and phenomena are the original symbols or types, which express our thoughts and feelings, and yet American Scholars, having little or no root in the soil, commonly strive with all their might to confine themselves to the imported symbols alone. All the true growth and experience, the living speech, they would fain reject as ‘Americanisms.’ It is an old error which the church, the state, the school ever commit, choosing darkness rather than light. (The Journal 582)

These “imported symbols” are what Brakhage deconstructs through his imagery through wholesale techniques of subjectivity. Hybrids of painting and film, motion and shudder-variation, super-impositions and dissolves, or the tedious enhancing of lighting gradations might make up fewer than two minutes of Dog Star Man. Yet to experience the revitalizing of this primitive language is a celebration of pre-semiotic experience, the meaning of meaning, through subjective vision in the first person. As Sitney states,

All of Brakhage’s lyrical films operate upon the fiction of a man, the filmmaker, looking upon a natural sight and responding to it imaginatively. The encounter is always conceived as a crisis and the moment of the crisis provides the present tense and ground for the temporal ecstasies. (Sitney 168)
What Sitney refers to as “encounters” is equivalent to what Thoreau defines as “the sauntering eye” and “temporal ecstasies,” Thoreau defines as contact with nature in pre-cinematic terms.

In re-contextualizing how rhythmic, visual, and symbolic language may be, Brakhage replaces the written word. Thoreau’s preference for the visual is most recognizable in his choice of the journal as expressive medium. Like Brakhage’s filmed world, the private nature of Thoreau’s daily observations requires no sound or speech. To Thoreau, visual language is the only full form of expression. He states,

While we are confined to books, though the most select and classic, and read only particular written languages, which are themselves but dialects and provincial, we are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard. (Walden 1930)

Here, Thoreau’s concern with the written word is an appreciation of what is inexpressibly tedious, deconstructed, and unique. Walden Pond’s journalist demotes the written word as he defines authenticity as nonrepresentational, or “without metaphor.” However, if authenticity cannot be delivered through the construct of language, then what is this “language which all things and events speak without metaphor?” To Brakhage, it is the visual, silent world. To many others, especially those of the 1960s counterculture, expressing authentic identity is partially possible through the universal language of music and the oral tradition of spoken word.
Bob Dylan: The Reclaiming of Personal Agency

Just as Thoreau encourages a nineteenth-century America “to live deliberately,” Bob Dylan similarly asks the modern twentieth-century American to combat materialism via transcendental selfhood. As a public icon steeped in folk-tradition, Dylan’s anti-heroic lyrics deal with relevant issues of working class experience. His lyrical emphasis is typically set against ostinato strumming, a repetitious droning characteristic of the troubadour tradition that provides a repetitive, musical canvas for a political tale. The centrality of the narrative serves as an occasion to teach, inform, or unionize. No more than three chords in predictable cyclical patterns, often sufficed, as this was a functional mode tied to a bardic-type tradition, i.e. musical storytelling, which aided in the account and documentation of sung history in the oral tradition. This complimentary strumming is soft, pizzicato, so as to not disturb the melody and sung verses.

Dylan reworks and evolves this tradition, in several ways, as a means of redefining contemporary music and his political surroundings; as opposed to allowing those surroundings define the artist. He borrows the ostinato technique as a source from which to weave colorful and fictional labyrinths and multitudes of symbolic characters in his long catalogue of recordings. Throughout his best works, Dylan displays a unique focus on individual consciousness, of which I have chosen the following trinity: “Desolation Row,” from the 1965 album Highway 61, “Subterranean Homesick Blues,” the emblem of Beat culture’s affect upon the 1960’s zeitgeist, and Dylan’s spoken word poem “Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie”.

For the sake of illustrating the four elements of Thoreauvian tradition, I have
chosen less obvious works definitive of those techniques, as opposed to strict content.

Connecting the student movement's identification with "The Times are a Changin" is a simple enough task. Dylan's lyric, "your old road is rapidly fading...get out of the new one if you can't lend a hand for the times they are a changing," (Lyrics 91) easily links itself to Thoreau's famous quote in Walden "What old people say you cannot do, you try and find that you can. Old deeds for old people, and new deeds for new" (Walden 1876).

Or perhaps, the transcendentalist sense of accountability and individual directness is just as easily visible in Dylan's "Who Killed Davey Moore," a listing of groups and individuals alike that start each line with "not us," shrugging off blame of blood lust in American boxing so closely associated with Western civilization since the days of Roman gladiators. It is just as easy a task to link "Masters of War" as a means to express the concerns of the anti-war movement's directives against the U.S. government's militarization tactics.

Yet, these songs are perhaps too blatant in delivering bushels of messages already flowering in the artist's consciousness, whereas I have chosen those songs that would seem to promote agency from within -- in seed form. In other words, I have chosen works in which Dylan utilizes a sense of solitude as empowerment, individuality as uniqueness, and otherness as a subtextual means of putting the audience in the driver's seat. These are poems and songs that unconditionally promote a sense of self, for better or for worse.

Dylan's "Last Thoughts On Woody Guthrie" is a non-musical, social commentary of commercial culture wrapped inside an elegy to his mentor, Guthrie. Dylan begins with two pages of ambiguous and miserable circumstances with which the listener will relate to a sense of self-alienation. The poem's opening consists of visions of imbalance,
asymmetrical self-doubts, “twisted” and “numb” visions accompanying feelings of being “too old, too young, too smart, or too dumb” (Lyrics 32). The subjectivity created by Dylan’s use of these binaries, old and young, or smart and dumb, rearranges any fixed meaning of the terms and opts to meet the listener, instead, at the moment of its hearing. Underscored by the poem’s exaggerated use of the word “and,” the most sustaining word in the English language, as the opening word of 2/3 of its five pages. Dylan clearly seeks to keep the listener suspended in the moment, as well as eulogize Guthrie as metaphysically immortal and ever-present mentor in “the hereafter.”

Dylan attempts to guide the listener out of these disheartening circumstances toward any sanctity within the present moment, and away from the experience of absolute sensory-contamination. The desecration of the senses is underscored in sum as follows:

eyes... swimmy from tears, trapped tongues...between lion’s jaws...from ever-green valleys... to ...broken down slums and trashcan alleys... hurt ears, ...numb minds, ...twisted heads, ...eyes turned filthy from sight-blindin dirt. (Lyrics 32)

The ambiguity of each diminished sense: taste, sight, smell, touch, and hearing culminate in a collective inability to claim agency in the present moment. Dylan’s glorification of Guthrie tries to resituate the inane struggle to capture the past or future, utilizing an empathetic acknowledgement of this type of dislocated consciousness, (or cognizance of time) by seeking to lead the listener somewhere between “Something you ain’t found yet” (future) and when “you figured you failed in yesterday’s rush” (past)(Lyrics 32) -- the unassuming present. The shift of perspective creates a newness for which self-realization occurs. Dylan states,
You need something to open up a new door to show you something you’ve seen before but overlooked a hundred times or more...to show you that it’s you and no one else that owns that spot that your standing, that space that you’re sitting (Lyrics 34).

As stated in the Brakhage chapter, Thoreau’s form of subjective vision is clearly expressed as a prerequisite to retaining one’s ontological identity, mainly in that the danger of associating universalized meaning to familiar shapes, colors, body parts, etc... is dispelled by an ever-shifting field of vision, or subjective vision. As each viewing engenders new readings, even opposing interpretations, this kind of looking reclaims “that spot you’re standing”, defining the individual self as a source of continuous and multiple understanding (ontological identity) “overlooked” - “a new door”.

The neutrality of the second person “you” and the preference of “something” in place of someone stresses intent to get the listener to contemplate this exploration of singularity, the transcendental fuel through which the poem works. With the ability of redefining the familiar, Dylan engages in that Thoreavian aspect of subjective vision via an athletic sense of looking, and repeatedly looks again with forgetfulness, a process of almost instantaneous learning and forgetting. As Thoreau states on August 1, 1860, in his personal manuscripts known loosely as The Journal,

> It is only when we forget all our learning that we begin to know. I do not get nearer by a hair’s breadth to any natural object so long as I presume that I have an introduction to it from some learned man. I must for the thousandth time approach it as something totally strange. (Shepard 210)

In this context the reclaiming of agency, of “that spot” or “space” requires that subjective
and active vision constantly resituate the position of the individual viewer. Dylan knows he cannot define for his audience the exact location of "hope", as there is no collective, identifiable source known. The transcendentalist dichotomy of "Me" and "Not Me", laid down by Ralph Emerson in "Nature" imagines a universe divided into two essential parts, the soul and nature. He states, "all that is separated from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the Not Me, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, Nature" (Emerson 8).

Like Emerson, Thoreau defines the soul by redefining nature. This rejection of non-authentic, or non-indigenous, influence on the self is underscored amongst each of Dylan's many references to the "not me", or locations, where "you're not going to find it" (Lyrics 34). In "Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie", the term "It" is defined as hope, or inspiration through enlightenment through inner contemplation. Once acquired, hope is utilized as a means for reclaiming a sense of autonomy, agency, or self-realization regardless of confines of location. Instead of prescribing answers to his listeners, the poet shares the collective locations of false consciousness, in which commercial culture alienates its observers from their own truth. These cultural places, animate and inanimate, advertise the Not Me to the individual as socially acceptable ways of being, or cultural policing. Dylan points to these mirages, stating,

You need something to give you hope, but hope's just a word, that maybe you said or maybe you heard....you look an' you start getting the chills, 'cause you can’t find it on a dollar bill, and it ain’t on Macy’s window sill, and it ain’t on no rich kid’s roadmap, and it ain’t in no fat kid’s fraternity house,...and no matter how hard you rub, you just aint
gotta find it on your ticket stub (Lyrics 34)

The internal and indigenous state of being is recovered in the one sovereign location “overlooked a hundred times or more” (Lyrics 34) -the self. The “Not Me” is delivered in “Last Thoughts” with various consumer images of products, conventions, and other social means which perpetuate and promote empirical, as opposed to experiential, consciousness. It is transcendental in that Dylan explores all of these external regions of false consciousness with mantra-like attention, and then transcends those locations through inner meditation.

Like Thoreau, Dylan’s message of social reform seeks to retune the listeners focus through an advocacy of reclaiming individual agency, or “that spot you’re standing” through a process of political and spiritual occupation of the self even in the presence of external persecution. In this sense, the poet becomes a world unto himself, the human as universe. The space is the individual, the subjected, macrocosmic body. The poem explores how this “space” is impacted by events of the encountered world where “yer whole world’s a -slammin’ and bangin’ (Lyrics 32). To occupy oneself in this sense is to be unsheltered from the conventions of commercial culture. Dylan points techniques such as advertising as institutionalizing means of distracting an individual’s self-engagement, perpetuates self-alienation. Generally speaking, commercial culture promotes the glittering world of things found: “…In Macy’s window sill, down a movie star’s blouse, dollar bills, the cover of a magazine, ticket stubs, pimple lotions, road maps, seats of the Supper Club, the golf course …Christmas wrapping” (Lyrics 33). These small items become larger locations of false consciousness, characterized by Dylan
as self-alienating. These people and things are also locations.

The image of the movie star is found in the movie theater, a place of second-hand experience (until the avant garde). The ticket stubs and magazines function in similar fashion, implying that entertainment distracts us from ourselves. Dylan reveals the irony that the desire for these “locations,” or things, is manifest from a desire for social distinction, yet are paradoxically acquired through institutionalized means. Dylan addresses this bourgeois sense of perpetuating a competitive ethos by connecting these images as common causes of alienation, revealing imagery as touchstones for insatiable dissatisfaction with the self. In particular, Dylan tries to awaken the listener’s consciousness from slumber, from those skewed instances “When yer head gets twisted and yer mind grows numb” (Lyrics 32).

As an alternative, the poem offers hope via ever-shifting fields of vision (subjective vision), which do not allow the listener to rest on one calculation of emotion. Dylan’s sense of shared empathy with his audience increases with each discouraging “and”:

And yer sidewalk starts curlin' and the street gets too long
And you start walkin' backwards though you know its wrong
And lonesome comes up as down goes the day
And tomorrow's mornin' seems so far away
And you feel the reins from yer pony are slippin'
And yer rope is a-slidin' 'cause yer hands are a-drippin'
And yer sun-decked desert and evergreen valleys
Turn to broken down slums and trash-can alleys
And yer sky cries water and yer drain pipe's a-pourin'
And the lightnin's a-flashing and the thunder's a-crashin'
And the windows are rattlin' and breakin' and the roof tops a-shakin'
And yer whole world's a-slammin' and bangin'
And yer minutes of sun turn to hours of storm
And to yourself you sometimes say
"I never knew it was gonna be this way
Why didn't they tell me the day I was born"
And you start gettin' chills and yer jumping from sweat
And you're lookin' for somethin' you ain't quite found yet
And yer knee-deep in the dark water with yer hands in the air
And the whole world's a-watchin' with a window peek stare
And yer good gal leaves and she's long gone a-flying
And yer heart feels sick like fish when they're fryin'
And yer jackhammer falls from yer hand to yer feet
And you need it badly but it lays on the street
And yer bell's bangin' loudly but you can't hear its beat
And you think yer ears might a been hurt
Or yer eyes've turned filthy from the sight-blindin' dirt. (Lyrics 32)

This fracturing of the single emotion, i.e. loneliness, into many strands subjectively tunes the listener's attention inward through repetitive observations of external, human suffering and its effect upon the symbolic, individual body. The poem's relentless piling
on of human discouragement illustrates a deepening chasm of personal suffering of ears, hands, heart, eyes, nose. These distorted senses direct a subverted investment of self-worth to the external world. The sense of despair is a spiraling state of depression where inner worth is totally dependent upon outside information. He asks, “Why didn’t they tell me the day I was born” (Lyrics 32). The question asks after a non-existent, external character that is accountable for this culmination of suffering at the moment of personal crisis. It is “to yourself” where inner-dialogues of assertion begin.

Why am I walking, where am I running
What am I saying, what am I knowing
On this guitar I’m playing, on this banjo I’m frailin’
On this mandolin I’m strummin’, in the song I’m singin’
In the tune I’m hummin’, in the words I’m writin’

Opposed to the prior passage’s indexical listings of loneliness, Dylan moves away from metaphoric association and towards an ontological identification. Instead of drowning in the plurality of external circumstance, moving inward initiates the reclaiming of agency through self-comprehension amidst a barrage of external doubt. Dylan reestablishes positive individual consciousness by redirecting the listener toward questions of inner-contemplation. Self-realization and transcendence from this suffering is located:

In the words that I’m thinkin’
In this ocean of hours I’m all the time drinkin’
Who am I helping, what am I breaking
What am I giving, what am I taking
The external world is no longer held accountable for agency. Instead, by awakening the listener to such unconscious subterfuge and encoded subjugation of the commercial world, agency is accomplished through decoding these social pre-hieroglyphics within the self. Seeing and experiencing through this Thoreauvian sense of contact results in resistance to social programming as well as immediate illumination. Finding “it,” or “hope,” involves intuitive contemplation and the urgency with which Thoreau’s ontological process indifferently cuts through circumstantial influence, *counter-* counterculture, eternal doubt, or social complacency. Gathering “hope” can be viewed as a simplification process utilized within the success of the politics of the 1960’s counter culture -- “be here now” and “the revolution will not be televised.”

David Herreshoff’s “Transcendental Politics of the 1960s,” is as close to the mark as possible in describing a common ethos amongst this circle of nineteenth and twentieth- century intellectuals. Herreshoff states,

By transcendental politics I mean revolutionary politics motivated by a generous sentiment of solidarity with the wretched of the earth, and with the victims of all conditions of servitude, of all forms of injustice. It is a politics, which is characteristically freedom now, refusing to postpone the question of freedom under any pretext. It will not give priority to the cause of one group of sufferers at the expense of another, or sacrifice the individual to the group, or the present to the future. It is not a politics of expediency, of compromise, of the possible. (87)

Hope and now-ness as a central, ontological, focus delineates the common political force behind counterculturists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as they transcend all
Self-alienation and solitude, two distinct states of being, are visible concerns common to Thoreau and Dylan. Dylan empathizes with a type of working class alienation, the separation of self from work performed is also an anti-capitalistic concern with monetary accumulation as a means to hinder personal agency by participating in the consumer culture it engenders.

In “Last Thoughts On Woody Guthrie” the poet’s liminality, otherness, and solitude become qualities of empowerment. The absolute lack of “hope” not only resonates in commercial items or commodities purchased from the act of labor, but also in the geographical location of the body itself, where “the chills” (Lyrics 32) can be viewed as anthropomorphic winds of his internal landscape. The “dollar bill” expands into a metaphysical conceit as well, transcendentally enlarged to a labyrinth-like landscape of false consciousness, hopes, and dangling positivisms. The lack of “hope” in these false locations is illuminated, revealed, and displayed from the viewpoint of the reader, expressionistically portraying a loss of faith and direction in the poem’s social microcosms.

The questioning of cultural myths like “Santa Claus” and “Uncle Remus” suggests how sentiment replaces doing and being, suggesting the act of giving has become materialistic and commercially founded. The ultimate goal of the poem is for the reader to differentiate between the external world and himself, a transcendental movement inward, for the sake of restoring the ability to give of the self. Dylan states, “you can find hope in the church of your choice”, which is an empathetic nod to a communal sense of faith. Ultimately, however, Dylan chooses his location of “hope” as
“Brooklyn State Hospital,” a space of individual exchange between himself and Guthrie. The irrelevance of a legitimized location of faith, as Guthrie himself becomes a location to Dylan, is the transcendental theme. In other words, once self-realization is attained, those associations we have to people are carried with us everywhere we go.

Though it seems improbable, it is interesting to insert the edict of the transcendentalist, the “Me” and “Not Me” into Dylan’s conclusion,

your feet can only walk down two kinds of roads, your eyes can only look through two kinds of windows, your nose can only smell two kinds of hallways, you can touch and twist and only turn two kinds of doorways, you can either go to the church of your choice or you can go to Brooklyn State hospital. (Lyrics 36)

These two choices in transcendentalism, “the soul” and “Nature”, are directed through individual sensory perception to illustrate an inner search amidst external strife. Nature expresses to Dylan where he can find hope, from whom, and how. It is not alone, but it is through an internal engagement of interior and exterior experience. “God” and “Woody Guthrie” represent “Soul” and “Nature” to Dylan. He states, “You find them both in the Grand Canyon at sundown” (Lyrics 36). Now Guthrie has become part of Nature as Dylan redefines Guthrie as a visible hope within the physical terrain. Reality and poetry merge as Guthrie becomes a transcendentally distinguishable, and visible, part of Dylan’s vision.

Musical artists of the Sixties such as Donovan described the counterculture’s attainment of revolution with enchanted romanticism, as seen in songs of mythic return and agrarian pastoralism like “Gift from a flower to a Garden”. His lyric “beatniks are out
to make you twitch,” from the 1966 hit “Season of the Witch,” tells of a growing separation in the techniques of hippies and beats. While the choice between “smile on your brother” or “tune in and drop out” seem less contradictory when juxtaposed, the dichotomy of east and west coast countervoice is clearly demarcated as internal vs. external, anti-heroic vs. utopian, and intellectual vs. spiritual -- the balancing of which amounted in what success the counterculture enjoyed. Covering extreme expanses of personalities, from the naïve flower child to the cynical intellectual, the accumulation of political numbers merged with such rapid velocity as to force political change successfully, but also in opposing directions. Both factions realize collectively Thoreau’s contemplation of The Poet who embodies these two distinct poetries -- the higher spiritual and the intellectual-artistic. Dylan straddles this dichotomy by utilizing rapidly shifting imagery to both emphasize the individual and to skewer traditionally held, intellectual views.

Whereas many hippy artists sought to inspire political demonstration as gallantry through legend and myth, many merely reiterated a naïve, Eurocentric idealism by proclaiming temporary social power. For instance, Guinevere was a character central to Donovan and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young’s west-coast ethos of Arthurian romance, which is also central to feudalism. On the other hand, the beats satirized and undermined mythical allusions to recreate images of personal, political meaning, which were often unrecognizable references to larger, and imminent, political groups. These two contrasting personalities within the 1960s counterculture are visible in Dylan’s “Desolation Row,” where “All except for Cain and Abel/ and the Hunchback of Notre Dame/ everybody’s making love/ or else expecting rain” (Lyrics 204). In short, excessive
naivety and cynical secrecy come to define the limitations of the revolution through art. Transcending these binaries was Thoreau’s hope for mankind in his specific vision of “The Poet,” who by his own definition,

Is something more than a scald, ‘a smoother and polisher of language’; he is a Cincinnatus in literature, and occupies no west end of the world. Like the sun, he will indifferently select his rhymes, and with a liberal taste weave into his verse the planet and the stubble (304).

This “indifference” reflects Thoreau’s preference for pragmatism, directness, and frankness more akin to beat poetry, while recognizing the “smoothness” and tonality of lyrical form visible in the west-coast counterculture. While Dylan “told it like it is”, Donovan attempted to project the potential of what could, or should, be. Tomorrows, however, are not entirely conducive to transcendental contemplation.

Like Thoreau, Dylan’s politically charged “listings” of techniques which limit individual agency flourish more organically, with frankness, in addressing 20th century capitalist malaise, rather than addressing it through esoteric language. It is a language written by men and women who are old to enough to participate in a war effort, but too young to buy alcohol. “The communal” did not just mean a positive sense of unity within 1960s counterculture but also existed in “the collective” policemen, riot squads, draft boards, and law makers responsible for the herding, and eventual slaughtering, of American and non-American individuals by the hundreds of thousands. At the family level, patriotism and obedience was fostered and perpetuated by the church. Dylan’s reference to the church is a fleeting acknowledgement of the communal, as the poem itself is a presentation of a natural, individualized gaze. To be a part of the collective is
not “deliberate”, even in matters of citizenship, like voting. As Thoreau states, “All
voting is a sort of gaming, like chequers or backgammon, with a slight moral tinge to it, a
playing with right and wrong, with moral questions; and betting naturally accompanies
it” (Civil Disobedience 1861).

Thoreau’s definition of evil, or “legion,” becomes symptomatic of the rift, which
ultimately separates the counterculture of the late Sixties from that of the Beat philosophy
of Dylan and Ginsberg. Whereas poet-bums illuminate truth from inner-contemplation
and selfhood, the hippie’s brand of revolution also sought to externalize revolution
through techniques of social outreach. This created conflicting methodologies, as to
whether the formation of individualistic, subjective consciousness, or a united sense of
communal cause should take precedence in the counterculture. That is not to say that one
methodology solely defines 1960’s American counterculture. For the sake of this study,
i.e. relating to what extent Thoreau’s individualistic pragmatism, directness, and frank
shock value informs these three counterculturists throughout the Sixties, a distinction
between external and internal forms of resistance has been made.

In his study of American radicalism, Transcendental Politics in the 1960’s,
Herreshoff describes “the New Left” (89) of the 1960’s as “darkly realistic” (89) as
opposed to the consciousness of the 1930’s “optimism of progress” brought about by the
Labor Movement”(Transcendental Politics 90). He rightly states,

The New Left, if it approves of self-culture, does so only with the
modification proposed by Thoreau in ‘Civil Disobedience.’ There Thoreau
suggests that before may properly devote yourself to your contemplations,
you must be sure to ‘get off the shoulders of another man so that he may
be free to pursue his contemplations too' (Transcendental Politics 88)

Dylan’s ability to straddle these polarities, the yin and yang politics of the 1960’s, is well documented from collective to personal. Dylan’s preference to forge a broader musical palate for himself also became a breaking away from unionism, an escape from folk culture conventions, and a poignant quest for self-discovery. Therefore, the “division” of techniques of the counterculture is also clearly visible in Dylan himself. His unhindered interaction in, with, and around human rights, world hunger, and other collective concerns simply dwarf any sense of dedication to his own legacy. And yet, in staying true to himself, Dylan serves the whole as a Thoreauvian model for “simplify, simplify” (Walden 1920) and “Contact! Contact!” (Maine Woods 646) mediating between social iconography inward subjectivity and ambiguity of internal individuality.

To experiment, let us imagine, as Bob Dylan does, the Grand Canyon. We know that it was formed by an ever-constant flow of the Colorado River. Yet, why that truth typically does not entice the literary imagination of the 21st century human is a testament to an overdependence on a narrative explanation of reality. That is not to say that fable, legend, classic literature, fairy-tale, and folklore discredit the imagination to any extent. However, the over-abundance of technophilia in the 21st century rationalizes, for many, an industrialized exploitation of human and non-human life through narrative convention. Thoreau’s anthropomorphisms take back the oceans and rivers from Poseidon, love from Aphrodite, and so forth.

Thoreau is, himself, a literary Prometheus, stealing the power of literary creation from the gods of literature and the educator’s canon to revitalizing the fire of ingenuity in the everyman. Thoreau is defined by his attempts to transfer the perceptive power to be,
see, hear, feel, smell, taste, and do, to humanity through the evolved medium of the journal and nature writing. The Thoreauvian element of subjective vision, its athletic and interpretational ethos, aids in the acquisition of ontological identity via sight, whereas the acquisition of the abstract sense of self results in the undermining of myth. The individual is now nonrepresentational and self realized.

In supplanting myths and replacing them with nature, himself, or the reader, Thoreau redefines and redirects “the protagonist” as the engagement of self and nature simultaneously. In undermining myth, nature too is redefined as a living entity truly and simply personified, as opposed to intangible realities in need of dramatic and mythical contexts. Size becomes irrelevant for Thoreau, as the majesty of the large is found on a small scale, making the entire universe visible to the human experience by studying a small piece of earth. Time itself is also subject to this microcosmic collapsing, as Thoreau states,

The phenomenon of a year takes place every day in a pond on a small scale. Every morning, generally speaking, the shallow water is being warmed more rapidly than the deep...and every evening it is being cooled off more rapidly until the morning. The day is the epitome of the year. The night is the winter, the morning and the evening are the spring and fall, and the noon is the summer. (*Walden* 2028)

The shift to microcosmic observances is intentionally scientific and spiritual, with no need for mythic embellishment. What Thoreau reminds us is that the river, the land, the mountain, the air, gravity, were and are wondrous enough. It did not need superstition to create the Grand Canyon. In truth, to create Bob Dylan’s “natural” church, “the Grand
Canyon at sundown" (Lyrics 36) the catalogue of elements would appear brief- the sun, water, and rock. However, the subjective characteristics of those three elements are innumerable, as are the conditions surrounding its creation. Water itself is a world of rushing, flowing, trickling, evaporating, raining, vapor, hailing, midst, swelling, and springing forth, and cascading down. Rock is crumbling, moving upward, eroding, cavernous, fertile, shelter, lava, minerals, and mountains. Thoreau’s layered consciousness fosters a concept as to these degrees of being, after which are further subjected to temporal placement. After the subjectivity of each thing is explored, Thoreau emphasizes the uniqueness and complexity of each moment of time and "God" becomes subjective now, and can indeed be interpreted by a single individual-you or me, as each is now active in sculpting belief and faith. Experience trumps all other processes, especially superstition.

What Dylan accomplishes in “Desolation Row” is the antithesis of sophistication, or bourgeoisie distinction, heralded in the re-telling of fable. In Dylan’s dystopia, “vision” and “looking” vary between panoptic and self-contemplative fields of vision. Ultimately, the reclaiming of meaning through a lens of anti-heroic mythopoeia is a process of subjective vision. It is the individual scope of observation that is emphasized as central to transcending the lists of limitations described within the social commentary.

Dylan, or the song’s narrator, is located somewhere between the solace of selfhood and the loneliness of imprisonment. Ultimately, it becomes an inner struggle between this binary, a battle to acquire subjective, personal vision. Thoreau subverts images of rugged individualism and reworks them toward an anti-heroic realism Dylan’s dystopic world addresses social ills, including the battle for gender equality.
Cinderella she seems so easy
It takes one to know one she smiles
Then puts her hands in her back pockets, Betty Davis style
And in comes Romeo he’s moaning, “You belong to me I believe”
And someone says you’re in the wrong place, my friend
You’d better leave”
And the only sound that’s left after the ambulances go
Is Cinderella sweeping up on Desolation Row (Lyrics 204)

Romeo, the uncompromising lover, loses his romantic and dramatic luster. “The ambulances” will rescue the legendary and selfless lover, hence, depriving him of his famous drama and tragic fate. The Davis,proto-type of Cinderella is possibly a feminist, or at very least, a strong female character who injures Romeo as a result of his advances. Romeo’s descent from cavalier to clown is underscored by Dylan’s reform of unrequited love. He is unsure of the identity he woos, moaning, “You belong to me, I believe.” As the stranger’s voice announces, “you’re in the wrong place, my friend, you’d better leave,” (Lyrics 204) the listener could easily interchange the term “place” with “time”. It is an anonymous message from an invisible character, informing him that his excessively masculine drama is now irrelevant in the twentieth century.

Cinderella, that legendary peasant-to- princess who acquires social mobility only through heterosexual “true love” is still “sweeping up on Desolation Row” (Lyrics 204) and denied agency in a man’s world. Here, Dylan calls attention to male misogyny that traditional myth perpetuates. Oddly, Cinderella’s very name is derived from a Thoreau-
like observation of natural processes and subjective vision, as

However late it was before the day was finished, she made it a rule to always to sit for a little while in in front of the great kitchen fire, her stool drawn close up to the hearth among the cinders… and in mockery her sisters called her ‘Cinderella’ (*Riverside Anthology* 278). Also, in the original versions, she is “happy by nature, just as by nature a May-tree is covered with leaves and blossom” (*Riverside Anthology* 278).

In the realm of “Desolation Row,” however, nothing will change for Cinderella as of result of male association, save which oppressor for whom she is sweeping up for. A resistance to patriarchy inexorably influences her vision, like Romeo’s. She is portrayed as modern, satirical, and unsympathetic, stating “it takes one to know one”. Dylan fashions her after Betty Davis, who is known for playing non-conventional women who challenge obedience of essentialized female gender expectations. “The only sound that’s left”, the domestic brushing of the broom can be interpreted is societies’ chosen replacement for her authentic voice, which is heard after all the men have left. Dylan’s removal of polarized gender expectations is accomplished by using these undermining techniques, by reclaiming authorial rights to such epic characters as Romeo and Cinderella and shaping them to his satirical, and sub-textual, advantage.

Dylan’s version of Hamlet’s Ophelia discards the etiological story of rainbows found in The Bible:

> And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the
covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the
earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant
between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again
will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. (New International
Version Genesis 9:12-15)

Ophelia’s madness and suicide is conventionally interpreted as a result of two losses; her
 chastity without marriage, and her father’s death by the hands of the man she lost her
 “purity” to. Taken together, the didactic conclusion is that Ophelia has killed her father,
 banished her lover and, later, killed her brother by choosing Hamlet against her father’s
 will. She is a threat to the Christian trinity of the father, the son, and the Holy Ghost. In
borrowing the character, Dylan situates Ophelia in resistance to blind obedience to
patriarchy through the undermining of the Biblical myth in Desolation Row.

Ophelia, she’s neath the window
For her I feel so afraid
On her twenty-second birthday
She already is an old maid
To her, death is quite romantic
She wears an iron vest
Her profession’s her religion
Her sin is her lifelessness
And though her eyes are fixed upon Noah’s great rainbow,
She spends her time peeking into Desolation Row (Lyrics 204-05)
The “covenant” loses meaning to this new Ophelia. She is clearly given “divine” assurance of patriarchal guidance as “her eyes are fixed upon Noah’s great rainbow”. She clearly appreciates her own power of procreation and as a non-dependent entity on the divine. Yet, she chooses to gaze at the spectacle surrounding her. Shyly looking, or “peeking,” she sees the constructs of religion and social programming. Dylan’s Ophelia is aware that her existence is contained to “profession” and devoid of any sense of organic impulse. She performs male chivalry through costume as a response, as “she wears an iron vest” and “to her, death is quite romantic”. Her suicide is simultaneously an imagined engagement in heroic masculinity. The iron vest replaces the flowing, feminine dress of Shakespeare’s tale, yet the outcome is still the same. She dies a victim of gender expectation, modern anxiety, and from a religious shame associated with sexual guilt.

Dylan’s utilization of Cassanova explores the relationship between male ego and maternal nurturing. The legendary lady-killer is infantilized, “spoon-fed,” by the collective mob named “they”. Psychological manipulation, and the origins of male misogyny appear here in “spoonfuls” of egotism, “to get him to feel more assured, then they’ll kill him with self-confidence after poisoning him with words” (Lyrics 205) This is the moment in which the plurality of society permeates the boundaries of the individual, hence, collecting more mass through a social osmosis that attempts to give the illusion of self-realization. In Chronicles Dylan states,

The dominant myth of the day seemed to be that anybody could do anything, even go to the moon. You could do whatever you wanted – in the ads and the articles, ignore your limitations, defy them. If you were an indecisive person, you could become a leader and wear lederhosen. If you
were a housewife, you could become a glamour girl with rhinestone glasses. Are you slow-witted? No worries – you can be an intellectual genius. If you’re old, you can be young. Anything was possible. It was almost like a war against the self. The art world was changing, too, being turned on its head. Abstract painting and atonal music were hitting the scene, mangling recognizable reality. *(Chronicles 90)*

In other words, Dylan’s interpretation of “limitations” helps to define individuality as separate lines or borders. Here, Dylan is reflecting upon a set of commercial techniques given to objectify those “masses” in need of “hope” via images presented in *Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie*. In particular, his observation of a “war on the self” serves to direct the reader’s attention to the very construction of identity. It would seem that the testing grounds of inner-struggle exists for him somewhere between an essential identity and subjective individual agency. The former provides stability, while the latter enables evolution.

Simultaneously, he reduces historical and iconic characters to their “lowest terms” *(Walden, 1920)*. In *Walden*, Thoreau desires “to drive life into a corner and reduce it to its lowest terms, and if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world” (1920). Like Thoreau’s seemingly endless reworking of myths as social commentary, Dylan refashions literary identities to illustrate the “meanness” of modern, American desire. Dylan sums up the American government’s resistance to a collective demand for individual agency in the late Sixty’s counterculture as follows: “The riot squad’s they’re restless/ they need somewhere to go”. This is Thoreau’s description of the “standing army” in *Civil Disobedience*, the
machines of society. The facelessness of all groups, or gangs, of the song reflects disdain for what Thoreau calls "legion". For instance, the "insurance men who go," the "riot-squad," and the "skinny girls" all perpetuate societal dogma.

The insurance men "check to see that no one is escaping to Desolation Row" underscore the namelessness of any figures that do not stand on their own. In contrast, lone figures can suffer by forming inner realizations, of whom the narrator embodies the best example. The final lyric emphasizes the acquisition of authenticity via solitude, stating, "don't send me no more letters no, not unless you mail them from Desolation Row" (Lyrics 206). The location is one of solitary confinement, yet also suggests the possibility of hope, or escape, through a process of individual metamorphosis.

Like those masses in Desolation Row, these are not what Thoreau refers to as "men". The individuals who constitute the "standing army" of Walden, or "the riot squad" are artificial due to inauthentic, or anti-intrinsic, modes of employment. Emphasizing inward autonomy, Thoreau defines "men" as capable of "serving the State with their conscience also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated by it as enemies" (Civil Disobedience 1859). "They" is the third person designation for the masses of society through which injustice thrives. It is "they" whom are "selling postcards of the hanging... painting the passports brown... they've got the blind commissioner in a trance... the riot squad they're restless, they need somewhere to go... then they bring him to the factory" (Lyrics 206)(my emphasis).

The dominance of lone figures vary, taken from a collection of characters from classic literature, legends, and fairy tales such as: Robin Hood, Casanova, Romeo, Cinderella, Ophelia, The Phantom of the Opera, the priest, the blind commissioner, the Fortune-
Telling Lady, and Quasi-Moto.

In each case, Dylan filters these recognizable myths through modern discourse, mostly with anti-heroic, or anti-climactic endings. Through this satirical reworking, Dylan confounds the naïve manner in which popular culture celebrates these figures as each is placed within scenes that challenge storybook notions. Thoreau restores the primacy of nature as heroic, a world where humans act according to what they have learned from nature, not vice-versa. In undermining myth, Thoreau dispels the contrivance of the super-natural, and elevates the natural.

Dylan authors a fictional milieu, which more closely resembles happenings in the world circa 1965; this is a place where fairy-tale endings, or Disney world magic, grind to a screeching halt, crash, and burn. The individual ascetics of the fairy tale are collectively modernized, or so it would seem, until we find out that these are the names given to a group of actual people Dylan has transcended from socially. In this way, the entire poem is a re-cataloguing of mythic to modern, where non-fictional and fictional characters subjectively intertwine.

The transplanting of mythical identities to modern conditions undermines the classical meaning, temporality, and location, of the fables. Keeping with the tradition of Walden Pond’s ascetic hermit, Dylan ecologizes the entire catalogue of “Desolation Row” as iconic figures from literature to reveal a multitude of cultural meaning. As he lays claim to its social history, Dylan undermines mythical universality to reveal a contemptuous injustice, a false consciousness in which myth perpetuates socio-economic hierarchies.

The preposterousness of Ezra Pound and T.S. Elliot engaging in a heroic duel is a
playful depiction, which turns the intellectual poets’ literary mode on its head. The anti-heroic literary personalities, Pound and Elliot, are uncharacteristically “fighting in the captain’s tower,” (Lyrics 206) thus serving the song as a means of displacing reality. The naturalists, musicians and fishermen, deactivate both poets’ somber depictions of urban misery and suffering, rendering their lack of action melodramatic. Perhaps Dylan inserts himself as one of those “calypso singers” who “laugh at them,” or imagines himself as one of the “fishermen” who “hold flowers” (Lyrics 206). Dylan’s somber characters lose dramatic impact by replacing the complex anxiety and dialectic of modern poetry with Thoreau’s naturalist chant, “simplify, simplify!” (Walden 1920).

Dylan pondering of the working class in the location of “the factory” is subtle, yet dense. This industrial location is a producer of nameless and inward suffering where anxiety of mundane productivity, security, and deadlines trump personal meaning. The factory is a metaphoric place devoid of sunlight or illumination of nature, conditions replicated in the individual. An industrial sense of anxiety calls out the Fordist sense of pride with which the modern subject’s focus is perpetually “geared” toward the future, as production is simply a series of daily quotas and deadlines. Dylan exhibits how a once revered 1950’s industrialism cancels contact with ontological identity, where the dread of tomorrow empowers the forces of McCarthyism, the Cold War, and anxiety of apocalyptic fallout. Indeed, this practice is an age-old means of repressing human spirituality, sexuality, and overall self-awareness through fear and mechanization.

In the factory, the authorship of each moment is traded in for a series of repetitive tasks. Thoreauvian subjective vision is surrendered in single moments, to which the listener is being reminded all life is series of. The factory is the place where facelessness
is born, where the working class is offered the illusion, or myth, of social mobility. Ultimately, Dylan’s depiction of industry is that of a dead end street, where prisoner-citizens await execution -- a “Desolation Row.”

The time and existence of industrialized subject is alienated from self-realization, commoditized as labor, and eventually thrown into the fire by the nameless masses—“They’ll bring them to the factory where the heart attack machine is strapped across their shoulders and then the kerosene” (Lyrics 206). Dylan reveals the insertion of fable-myth images as a bourgeoisie means for its perpetuation. The factory, in the Orwellian sense, is symbolically representative of that stranglehold, or the controlling of the means of production. The danger of the myth, the magical story that is traded for self-worth, is well documented in the historically, systematic exploitation of human beings. It is seen in slavery, in colonial, imperial, capital, and other isms, which use human life to build the very systems that, in turn, exploit and destroy human life by building the weapons of war. Industrialism is far beyond the building of material wealth. Most importantly, it is the distancing of man from nature and himself from direct contact with divinity and of the ontological moment.

Dylan’s observational lens criticizes a societal paradigm shift in which the very hope for political change becomes commercialized, and where locations of false consciousness are established to represent, rather than engage in, the reform of popular culture. This inadequate substitution for self-engagement necessitates the ability to distinguish between an insistence of selfhood, and a “myth” of individuality.

Dylan’s “Desolation Row” is not a denial of the possibility of agency, but is simply more realistic in creating direct change through self-reform. Dylan, or the song’s
narrator, is located somewhere between the solace of selfhood and the loneliness of imprisonment. Ultimately, it is an inner struggle between this binary, the battle to acquire subjective vision. In almost every verse of his dystopia, Dylan’s emphasis is on vision. Looking, from panoptic gazes to voyeuristic suggestions, is a multifarious and sub textual focus. The vast range of characters “gazing” disables single interpretation, or any essentially unified, lens of interpretation. The initial context of the “carnival” location is provided from an implicitly elevated, or morally transcendent, position. The narrator introduces himself as a contained entity, possibly imprisoned, from an elevated vantage point, stating “…As Lady and I look out tonight from Desolation Row” (Lyrics 204).

Liberation, even in the location of prison, is a theme interchangeable with Thoreau’s experience inscribed in Civil Disobedience.

Thoreau states,

Under a government, which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. The proper place to-day, the only place which Massachusetts has provided for her freer and less desponding spirits…is in her prisons…as they have already been put out by their own principles

(1864)

Thoreau’s most effective and influential act, his refusal to pay his poll tax, results in his most influential political work. Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jr. to inspire humanitarian utilize the theme of inner liberation during incarceration. Dylan places his narrator in this same condition, insisting upon being what Thoreau refers to as “freer and less desponding.” The direct non-participation in funding the state government is Thoreau’s example for revolutionary change.
If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose. If a thousand men were not to pay their tax bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood.

(Civil Disobedience 1864-65)

In other words, the individual action demonstrates an example to collective society a means to simplify protest. As opposed to escaping, the technique is to not participate in the chase. Rather, just direct, quiet refusal to play along with immoral legislation and social injustice exponentially sends a singular act of inspiration to a grand scale political message. Dylan sought to celebrate non-participation as the answerable means of resistance yielded by transcendental wisdom, much like Thoreau’s decision to walk himself to the Concord jail instead of paying his taxes on July 23rd, 1846. In this way, Dylan also seeks to attain what is perhaps Thoreau’s greatest achievement— the Americanization of pacifism.

The acceptance of restraint is anti-heroic, more like martyrdom, during a time where much literature and film were focused on the theme of an individual’s attempt in escaping a collective mass through any means possible. For instance, in the film version of Joseph Heller’s Catch 22, Yossarian simply climbs into a small raft and makes his way out into the ocean. To what location, who knows? The point is that he is put into a position where his reality becomes an existence of negations. In other words, he no longer yearns to acquire anything he wants, but instead resigns himself to whatever choices are available to him apart from what he does not want. Thoreau’s method refuses this existence of negation by direct opposition, come what may. In the 1967 film, The
"Graduate," Benjamin (Dustin Hoffman) seeks to escape the "plastic" world of the consumer culture, as he struggles to preserve some sense of ontological identity. He escapes from the expectations and confines of family and business when he drives out to California, if only for the moment.

This is the type of logic of those characters "escaping to Desolation Row" in pursuit of personal agency under repressive political and cultural circumstances. Cassanova, for example, "is just being punished for going to Desolation Row" (Lyrics 206) The last bastion of hope is not a location, as with Dylan’s” Last Thoughts On Woody Guthrie”, but simply anyplace in which one is unencumbered, molested, or required by law to engage, support, or carry out activities deemed immoral by that individual. After his incarceration, Thoreau states, “At the request of the selectman, I condescended to make some such statement as this in writing -- Know all men by these presents, that I, Henry Thoreau, do not wish to be regarded as a member of any incorporated society which I have not joined” (Civil Disobedience 1866).

Dylan’s lyric, “I had to rearrange their faces and give them all another name” is a less direct means of protest, more a satirical coping mechanism used to alter his perspective in dealing with societal stagnation. Regardless, Dylan is engaging, and disengaging, in identifiable forms of subjective vision as the vast list of redefined characters come and go with little time to make sense of them. As he “rearranges” his identification to the people in his surroundings, he must reinvent an imagined world.

Another elevated location of hermitage, the bell-tower of Notre Dame, is suggested in the naming of Quasi Moto. His out-cast reputation also affords him an uninhibited, and desolate, view of the carnival scene. Ontological identity is privileged,
as even "the fortune-telling lady has even taken all her things inside" (Lyrics 204). Here, all things become of the moment, not of clairvoyant mysticism. The act of prediction is condemned in the" insurance men,” whose job it is to advertise fear of the future and profit from predicting the cost of imaginary accidents.

The social effects, both foreign and domestic, of massive military employment is depicted in Dylan’s placement of “sailors,” who seek the domestic ritual of spectacle entertainment, a profitable industry funded, and socially perpetuated, by militarism. Hand in hand, the 1960’s draft punctuates the taking of autonomy over one’s own body by the military machine. Subsequently, the promotional tone satirically endorsing prostitution, murder, and the raping of human and non-human entities, points to the imperialistic conventions of the war in Vietnam. The government’s technique of enslaving the “I” for the sake of the “we” was, and is, a means to convert patriotism into militarism and citizenship to soldiers. It is the opposing extreme of a collective consciousness, the commercial culture. It is a pitched battle, at times positive, as when the poetic voice states:

All these people that you mentioned
Yes, I know them, they’re quite lame
I had to rearrange their faces
And give them all another name. (Lyrics 206)

Here is the potential for action via editing, or renaming, based on subjective vision. Here, the narrator has the power to author his reality, “to rearrange their faces”. The battle, however is not over, as the myriad of Dylan’s images point to other aspects of Desolation Row:
The moon is almost hidden
The stars are beginning to hide
The fortune telling lady
Has even taken all her things inside. (Lyrics 204)

Action here seems futile if not impossible. The potential for subjective vision seems to follow. What type of vision, then, is available here? It is the vision obtainable through images, which move through iconic folklore and fairytale as quickly as Brakhage’s lines; quickly and incoherently skewing collective identifications with ambiguity. This type of vision is necessarily subjective, as it is created from the song’s disparate images.

Clearly confronting standard usage of these images, Dylan creates a vision, which is in part a power to critique that which we face in our culture. It enables the reader to develop a critical faculty with which to assess his or her own ontological identity. Just as Thoreau’s insistence of “I” in the opening of Walden brushes off all vicarious experience in favor of self-experience, Dylan’s final lines restores the first person as a place of tedious refuge, stating “Right now I can’t read too good, don’t send me no more letters no, not unless you mail them from Desolation Row” (Lyrics 206). In preferring individuality, Dylan expresses here the multiple interpretations of aloneness from sorrow to epiphany, as singularity is itself subjective. Dylan successfully distinguishes between sight and vision, where “...the blind commissioner” a character whose lack of sight does not keep him from being put “into a trance” by external influence. The shifting of meaning between mediums highlights a subjectivity of expression, from the use of aural words that poison Casanova to the reading of the written words in the letter referred to at the song’s end. Words are simply not enough in comparison to the visual pre-hieroglyphs
accessible in and around one’s nature. The reclaiming of interpretation and readership is heavily emphasized in the closing line to illustrate a preference of the seen world.

Dylan’s contribution of evolving his medium came from his refusal to reduce the length of his music-poetry. If put to the task, few results would surface in locating Desolation Row’s 11:21 song length, especially circa 1965. In *Chronicle 1* Dylan’s states,

I have broken myself of the habit of thinking in short song cycles, and began reading longer and longer poems to see if I could remember anything I read about in the beginning. I trained my mind to do this, had cast off gloomy habits and learned to settle myself down. (*Chronicles 56*)

Much like the avant garde filmmakers, whose length of running time transgressed the industries preferred running time of films; Dylan refuses to limit his artistry to mere modicum of public consumption. Dylan’s own words, in *Chronicles Vol. 1*, adequately illustrate this participation in evolving the medium.

A lot was changing in America. The sociologists were saying that TV had deadly intentions and was destroying the minds and imaginations of the young – that their attention spans were being dragged down. Maybe that is true, but the three-minute song also did the same thing. Symphonies and operas are incredibly long, but the audience never seems to lose its place or fail to follow along. With the three-minute song, the listener does not have to remember anything, as far back as twenty or even ten minutes ago. There’s nothing you have to be able to connect. Nothing to remember. (*Chronicles 56*).
Here, Dylan rails against the notion of art as simple leisure, taking on the Thoreauvian sense of “athleticism” of sight into musical memory, intellectual depth, and spiritual connection to sound. Transcending convention, Dylan now associates subjectivity and ontological identity with an art of hearing, just as Brakhage does with sight, in Thoreauvian fashion. In denouncing the gist of novel, commercial snippets of false consciousness, and an overall prosthetic feel-good advertisement of ideology as surrogate to direct living, Dylan cites the convention of the three-minute song as responsible for “destroying the minds and imaginations of the young”, or at least the listener’s resignation to that convention. The theme of “the youth” is somewhat Edenic in Dylan’s vision as it is something to protect from the establishment. This restoration of innocence dually applies to the work of the poet-laureate of 1960s counterculture, Allen Ginsberg.
GINSBERT: The Restoration of Innocence

If an overarching characteristic of the 1960's counterculture is visible, perhaps it is gleaned from its members' resistance to sacrifice oneself by conforming to a psychological war-readiness in its parents, the American veterans of an extraordinarily necessary WWII. To a large extent, the reclaiming of a lost innocence in the resulting era also means transcending racial suspicion and mediating between ethnic assimilation and cultural acceptance. This general "forgive and forget" ethos became a part of a childish return to innocence in the late Sixties. This is akin to Thoreau's statement in *Walden*, "through our own recovered innocence we discern the innocence of our neighbors" (*Walden* 2035). This reclaiming of innocence is a theme, which facilitates a desire for a naïve return to an Edenic mindset and becomes signified in inner and outer pastoral locations of Ginsberg's "Howl".

Industrialization, a process that defined heroism in domestic American life during WWII, was now being contested as a manifestation of war, a utilitarian system that views individuals as absolute resource. Just as Thoreau describes a composting fate for unwary thinkers in his own time, Ginsberg's "Howl" passionately lists the fate and processes of subjective individuals who become collective, urban carrion merely for the perpetuation of the establishment. Ginsberg's "meat for the synagogue cast on the pavement" (*Collected Poems* 139) echoes Thoreau's organic metaphor of man as blood
The better part of the man is soon ploughed into the soil for compost. By a seeming fate, commonly called necessity, they are employed, as it says in an old book, laying up treasures, which moth and rust will corrupt and thieves break through and steal. It is a fool's life, as they will find when they get to the end of it, if not before. *(Walden 1874)*

Waste, whether pertaining to the urban or pastoral landscape, becomes a metaphysical theme shared by both authors. In the “Reading” chapter of *Walden*, Thoreau asks, “Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life” *We are determined to be starved before we are hungry* *(Walden 1921)*. “Howl” consists of a vast array of singular instances, which reports this same misuse of single human lives, opening with “I have seen the finest minds of my generation destroyed by madness” *(Collected Poems 134)*.

The concern with “my generation” is a reclaiming of autonomy from the madness of the previous -- a natural evolution of consciousness. In illustrating this generational divide, Ginsberg reworks the ancient myth of Moloch to convey the unjust treatment of the youth. In refusing to subject themselves to a universalizing sense of soldiering, counterculturists rejected a perennial designation of citizenship to soldier. For many, the initial battle lies in first resisting a reinforcement of militaristic convention in the family, as individuals. As Michel Foucault points to in *Discipline and Punish*,

One day we should show how intra-familial relations, essentially in the parents-children cell, have become “disciplined,” absorbing since the classical age external schemata, first educational and military, then medical, psychiatric, psychological, which have made the family the
privileged locus for the emergence for the disciplinary question of the normal and the abnormal. (Foucault Reader 206)

Whether as individuals emerging from confinements of the normalized family, university, or work force Ginsberg’s “Howl” cites five pages of these singular entities. Giving circumstantial instances, Howl’s catalogued “minds” march in constant rhythm into the industrial wasteland. Like Dylan’s “and” in “Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie,” Ginsberg constitutes a recurring “who” with each wasted, individual mind. Taken together, both layer a compilation of misery, single bricks which create a collective wall of suffering, transcended in the end through the redefinition of selfhood. In “Howl,” this hurdling transcendence is accomplished through a return of innocence, a redefining of Moloch in the poems finale, which undermines the myth’s traditional meaning. This reworking will be examined at this chapter’s conclusion.

No twentieth-century author is more renowned for forging sacred associations to the personal, and even grotesque, functionality of the body as Allen Ginsberg. His involvement in The Sixties’ Civil Right’s Movement and association with the beat poets resembles the placement of Thoreau within the Transcendentalist circle and Abolitionist Movement. Thoreau’s house was part of the Underground Railroad and he is the only transcendentalist who published his involvement in the freeing of slaves. Ginsberg was the most avid supporter of civil rights of the beat poets, advocating socially what Abolitionist activity had achieved legally a century before. Similarly, and for the first time in this study, both authors utilize the same mediums of expression.

Literary production, public lecturing, and intense advocacy of racial and political issues endear them both to the people of their respective eras. Finally, Thoreau and
Ginsberg emerge most notably from the transcendentalists and beat poets as “poets of the people” and share instances of departure from the cloistered confines of intellectual groups as a means of empowerment; yet they both ultimately honor those circles in isolation. The unabashed manner in which Ginsberg’s *Howl* shares the functions and details of the body are usually attributed to Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. However, Thoreau is the originator on this theme in American nature writing, stating,

I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one, *that* my body might, but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them. What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries! (*Maine Woods* 646)

Although the expressive impact of these words on the 21st century reader is dim at best in comparison with the shock value of the “endless cock and balls” of Ginsberg’s *Howl*, Thoreau is clearly internalizing his natural environment and its inhabitants, in what is an obvious source of Whitman’s overt claim to the poetic and sexualized, natural body. The poetic body as metamorphic, macrocosmic, and microcosmic is attached to Thoreau’s theme of wildness far preceding Whitman. The physical intimacy with nature that Thoreau idealizes is for the sake of, transcending the flesh, even as he revels in “[my] the body”.

Transcending the experience of the sensuous is characteristic of Thoreau’s progressively mystical and Eastern-based devotion to an inner contemplation that flourishes with age. In Ginsberg’s case, subjective vision redefines gender from an essentialized to a dis-essentialized context through visual experience. His participation in
Thoreauvian tradition is interweaved with a deconstruction of gender identity, culminating in the citing of limited fields of vision as a listing of "eyes".

He states, "the one-eyed shrew of the heterosexual dollar, the one eyed shrew that winks out of the womb, and the one eyed shrew that did nothing but sit on her ass and snip the intellectual golden threads of the craftsmen loom" (Collected Poems 136).

These entities are the redefined myths of classical literature; replacing the Fates with "the three old shrews of fate". The craftsmen's loom, or symbolic tools of production, represents a sexual site where the conceptual act, or weaving, is redefined from that of a physical act to a philosophically sexual act that dismisses conventional gender roles.

As with Dylan's contemporary redefinition of Cinderella, Ginsberg's refashioning of the Fates emphasizes how classical, masculine perception limits intellectual creation, those "golden threads", by employing a mythic type of personification to the act of Creation itself. Here, intellectual enlightenment and creative production are portrayed through this personified domesticity, the weaver, perpetuating art and thought through a divine sense of fabrication. This is akin to the African spider Anansi, who spun the earth with her gift of web-creation.

The Fates of Ginsberg's reworking illustrates the prevention to an elevated form of watching, looking, and being. They are the cumbersome characters of didactic allegory in Western myth that Ginsberg illustrates as impediments to subjective vision and ontological identity. In a transcendental manner Ginsberg's higher ideal of the craftsmen, the intellectual producer is offered through a picture of basic creation, specifically weaving. The metaphysical conceit deepens into the weaving of worlds that can be interpreted as a divine sense of artistry. Howl's allusion to the Fates conveys how
intellectual production transcends the dichotomy of the internal me) and external world
(not me) as the two merge.

The artist and craftsmen take part in the merging of the material and idealist
worlds through an intermingling of the self with external materials of nature -- wood,
dye, clay, etc). In refashioning the rawness of nature, what results from the creative
process is the subjective conception of intellectual enlightenment, a sexually transcendent
progeny that evolves through revision. The “snip”, or castration, of the “intellectual
threads” metaphorically aids in retaining gender convention by disallowing this higher
sense of intellectual creation; for “the one eyed shrew of the heterosexual dollar”
reinforces a femininity reduced to a single eye, to the role of physical fertility alone. This
essentialized feminine body is now merely materialistic, and of a lower consciousness.

In this distinctly freer verse of the twentieth century, Ginsberg’s version of “the
Fate” is not empowering, but confining. Much like Thoreau’s critique of classical
masculinity in his remark of Atlas’ lack of “compensation”, the Fate is not so much
revered for strength as much as mocked as a caricature of stagnant social perspectives.
She is “sitting on her ass”, passively awaiting a docile form of fertility and disengaged
from any sense of assertion, or agency. This type of vision is policed -- externally and
internally -- reinforced through social alienation and monetary exclusion via “the
heterosexual dollar.”

The social value of Ginsberg’s monetary crone is “one-eyed,” serving as a
polarized image of monolithic power, specifically Catholic sexual repression. The
heterosexual dollar is panoptic, as its imagery seeks to ultimately induce a self-
disciplinary form of conformity by the fear of individuals being watched. The pyramid on
the one dollar-bill, and its separated summit, is itself an image of visual dominance and
separated equality. This external eye suspended above the pyramid on American currency
implies a vertical hierarchy via optical privilege, the antithesis of horizontal, or
ecological, social latitude.

The disproportionate relationship of citizen-to-state implies a social-warfare to
acquire vision in which each participant seeks to topple over the last climber. Thoreau's
passive and internal technique, stern nonparticipation, celebrates an ever-extant,
horizontal vision located in each individual, in which a holistic and indigenous sense of
self may resist external governing. Thoreau's preference of imprisonment for refusing to
pay taxes utilizes economics as a relatively direct means of self-representation in lieu of
voting. The technique is a nonparticipation in funding a trajectory of ethical values not
representative of transcendental ethos, of personal volition. Thoreau's chief concern, the
expansion of slavery as a result of the Mexican War, is delivered through a singular sense
of consciousness.

Practically speaking, the opponents to a reform in Massachusetts are not a
hundred thousand politicians at the South, but a hundred thousand farmers
and merchants here, who are more interested in commerce and agriculture
than they are in humanity, and are not prepared to do justice to the slave
and to Mexico, cost what it may” (Civil Disobedience 1860).

Thoreau does not seek to petition the top level of the hierarchy, but rather chooses
horizontal equality in his activism.

Both authors commonly draw connections between currency and citizenship by
reminding the reader of simplicity, rawness, and wildness predating currency:
We need the tonic of wildness, to wade sometimes in marshes where the
bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to
smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary
fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the
ground. (*Walden* 2026)

What is without economic anxiety is naturally at rest, suspended in ontological
being, and transcendent. Thoreau is urging us to keep our “bellies close to the ground,”
closer to the earth. Obstacles to this task are collectively listed in “Howl’s” mythic
allusion to "Moloch, who frightened me out of my natural ecstasy" (*Collected Poems* 68).
Moloch is a titan-like deity, which ultimately depletes vision through internal doubt and
external support of that doubt. He is a capitalistic vacuum of “unobtainable dollars”
(*Collected Poems* 139). Moloch is an ever-penetrating force, which devours nature, and
is an oppressive environment in and of himself. The metaphysical description is as
follows:

Moloch whose blood is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies!
Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo! Moloch whose ear is a smoking
tomb! Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows! (*Collected Poems* 139)

Clearly, Ginberg’s concern is with the distortion of the senses, as each of Moloch’s
sensory discernments consists of polluted defects of the poetic body. Moloch’s sight is a
depiction of spiritual emptiness and lack of vision, “blind windows”. The sense of touch
is myopically reduced to one interpretation of feeling-violence. The silence of the
hereafter replaces hearing, while taste is replaced by the experience of being devoured in
cannibalistic bloodlust. The contamination of the senses is underscored in part III of “Howl,” “where the faculties of the skull no longer admit the worms of the senses” *(Collected Poems 140).*

Moloch’s anthropomorphic identity depicts this perverse perception, in sum, as a sacrifice of innocence. Moloch, a Hebrew myth about the devourer of children by the will of their parents intersects with Thoreau’s association between innocence and sense perception. In his personal journal he states, “A child loves to strike on a tin pan or other ringing vessel with a stick, because the child’s ears being fresh, sound, attentive, and perciipient, a child detects the finest music in the sound, at which all nature assists” *(Shepard 90).* The de-sensitized Moloch is Ginsberg’s illustration of the inversion of innocence via sense-distortion. This expresses a large part of the American experience during the late 60’s in which numbness to the war in Vietnam symbolizes a loss of innocence mandated by the preceding generation. According to Peter J. Fast, in *Moloch: An Appetite For Children,*

Moloch, is a Semitic term that derives its root meaning from the word, ‘king.’ As a god, Moloch was part of cult worship, which revolved around a kind of propitiatory child sacrifice system where the children were offered by the parents themselves in an honour ceremony to the god. This kind of sacrifice was void of any edged knives or weapons, but instead gave homage to fire, which was connected with Moloch. Thus, for what we know about this cult, the children (male and female- 2nd Kings 23:10) were offered to Moloch by being consumed by fire. (Fast)

Ginsberg’s urban landscape, as Moloch, is a place devoid of any positive, direct,
or internal experience. Moloch is the symbolic factory, “whose mind is pure machinery” (Collected Poems 139). Thoreauvian resistance to “industrializing existence” is clearly visible in Ginsberg’s glorification of natural landscapes and demonic portrayal of industrialism. The mythic allusion has now become an urban landscape alive, “a sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imaginations” (Collected Poems 139).

The sphinx is mythicized an intellectually oppressive beast who devours those who cannot find an answer to her riddles. In alluding to “the sphinx”, Ginsberg implicitly links the ancient Egyptian keeper of the gates to the modern, urban “skyscraper’s standing in the long streets like endless Jehovahs! Moloch whose factories dream and croak in the fog! Moloch whose smokestacks and antennae crown the cities!” (Collected Poems 139). Thoreau’s use of myth to merge the ancient and modern is well documented. As Gerrard claims in Ecocriticism, this bridging exemplifies techniques utilized by the transcendentalist writers in that “American literature, emerging in the nineteenth century in the midst of massive industrialization, can attempt to mediate between rural myth and technological fact” (55).

The “antennae crown” portrays a technologically dominant monarchy ever preparing for war and ever perpetuating mechanized forms of factory specialization. The demonic representation of industrialization is comparable to Thoreau’s railroad, or Dylan’s factory-like “heart attack machine,” a site where ontological experience dissipates with the abandonment of the present moment. In Walden, Thoreau states, “we do not ride on the Railroad; It rides upon us…as for work, we haven’t any of consequence. We have the St. Vitus dance and cannot keep our heads still” (Walden 1921
emphasis original). Here, Thoreau underscores how homogeny is anything but expedient in human terms. The “St. Vitus dance was a term for a nervous condition medically characterized by jerky motions” (Walden 1921).

Just as Ginsberg anxiously envisions himself in an urban world of mythic and modern demons, Thoreau uses classical myth through his observational engagements in the woods. In comparing himself to Apollo, Thoreau reveals the desire for an elevated sense of autonomy and vision. Particularly through this elevated placement, Thoreau’s singularity enables him to imagine encompassing heavens and the universe. As the chariot master of the sun, Apollo’s field of vision is limitless. This creates a new sense of subjectivity and broader understanding as a means of decentralizing a former relation to visual reality.

Indeed, Thoreau’s use of Apollo circumvents traditional readership as he calls attention to the underpinnings of mythical, etiological explanation. In the myth, Apollo and his team of divine horses carry the sun across the sky providing varying degrees of light at different times throughout the planetary system. This “quest” explains the process by which the layering of light comes to be across the earth’s atmosphere. Simply put, the myth’s narrative is an explanation to the ancient question: Why, how, where, or when does the sun move through the sky. The answer, Apollo lights the heavens with his chariot of fire, does not suffice, as “the sun is but a morning star” (Walden 2046). Thoreau’s more modern use of Apollonian sun imagery provokes a contrasting human imagery of:

The teamster on the highway, wending to market by day or night; does any divinity stir within him? His highest duty to fodder and water his
horses! What is his destiny to him compared to the shipping interests? The
grand necessity...for our bodies, is to keep warm, to keep the vital heat in
us. (*Walden* 1878)

In the subhuman, quietly desperate, mechanical, mean, and frivolous world of
industrialized society, we see a fallen Apollo. The “teamster” has no individual agency to
determine divine worth. The cargo is not the lamp of the heavens, but is sadly more
valuable than the driver Thoreau envisions delivering mortal goods to market. This is the
image of the 19th century truck-driver, or taxi. This fallen Apollo further contradicts his
ancient predecessor in that he drives by “day or night”. The driver is solely materialistic
in his actions, not divine. In redefining the context of the sun’s revolution, Thoreau
moves from a divine pilgrimage to the mundane and perpetual drudgery of materialism.

The representation of the driver who feebly mimics, at best, Apollo’s horses’
daily canter lacks subjective vision in that his vision is limited to “foddering and watering
his horses”. He has no ontological identity as “shipping interests,” which consist of the
economic looking to future prospectus, compromise processes of illumination. The driver
is the ironic prediction of the 20th, and 21st century human that ceases to possess the
ability to rest self-contextually, in the present moment.

The day after Thoreau arrives at Walden Pond, he writes, “Yesterday I came here
to live. My house makes me think of some mountain houses I have seen, which seemed to
have a fresher auroral atmosphere about them, as I fancy of the halls of Olympus”
(*Journal* 28). Thoreau’s utilization of Western mythology is an attempt to court the
nineteenth century reader’s attention with classical allusion, a standard building block of
Harvard’s canon. Yet, Thoreau redirects the reader to the construction of myth itself as a
quest for self-intervention, or self-insertion, as a means of promoting active engagement in one’s own writing and being. This reflexivity and inter-textual method calls attention to the fictional constructiveness of both myth and journal in *Walden*.

Ginsberg’s calling out to the constructiveness of Moloch simultaneously unravels the creature’s potency by restoring the senses to their former purity. As Thoreau states, “As you see, so at length you will say” (Shepard 64,). Simplistically, the multitude of horrors and suffering attributed to Moloch are wiped away with each chanting of the word “Holy”. “The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy! The nose is holy! The tongue and cock and hand and asshole are holy! Everything is holy! Everyone is holy!” (*Collected Poems* 142). The senses become baptized in a washing away of the body from shameful association. The senses are restored from previous numbness, restoring sound to the “catatonic piano” (*Collected Poems* 141) to the innocence of all-accepting grace. Ginsberg’s unraveling of Moloch moves from the macro through to the micro, beginning with “the world” and ending in the interiority of the individual, within the very senses. This restoration resituates evil as sacred through subjective perspective, acknowledging the “Holy the Angel in Moloch” (*Collected Poems* 142). The chanting is a reconstruction of language which transforms those same “blind windows” into “Holy the visions... Holy the eyeball” (*Collected Poems* 142). The reconstruction fulfills the poet’s aim

To recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose and stand before you speechless and intelligent and shaking with shame rejected yet confessing out the soul to conform to the rhythm of thought in his naked and endless head. (*Collected Poems* 138-9)
And yet, this linguistic means of catharsis is a reclaiming of innocence initiated by re-envisioning himself through a lens of self-autonomy, from that Apollonian height where he has a singular relationship to all things.

In addressing Carl Solomon, the poem moves from the stagnant vision of Moloch towards an inward transcendence. The chant preceding each line of “Holy, Holy, Holy”, is the repetition of the lines “I am with you in Rockland” (Collected Poems 140). Ginsberg utilizes the first person to illustrate a regrouping of the senses from which he will transcend into “holy” ecstasy. Thoreau goes to great length to stress a sense of self-accountability in authorship, stating,

In most books, the I, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking.

(Walden 1873)

Inner-divinity becomes heavily pronounced through self-empowering words “I am”, which transforms Carl Solomon’s status to biblical proportions. He states, “you will split the heavens of Long Island and resurrect your living human Jesus” (Collected Poems 141).

This third section of “Howl” is an occasional speech intended to empower the individual, Carl Solomon. As the reader is given access to the relationship between Ginsberg and Solomon, it is clear that its transmission is meant to amplify this restoration of innocence to the collective. Essentially, Ginsberg is saying that a living religion exists within each of us. You can forgive your self now, if necessary. You no longer need
mythic characters in stories, narrative museums, or historical cemeteries. Essentially, you are your own “living Jesus from the superhuman tomb” (141).

The poem redefines the terms “solitude” and “loneliness” by expanding it into a broader, transcendental motif. The ecological impossibility of loneliness that Thoreau suggests in comparing himself to “the loon in the pond” is reiterated in Ginsberg’s line of inescapable understanding “…Ah Carl, while you are not safe I am not safe” (Collected Poems 138). Ginsberg can simply acknowledge a commonality of suffering found in the collective, but retreats in solitude to write poetry. The poet recedes from the collective long enough to fashion an understanding and publish it back out into the world. Like Thoreau, Ginsberg is “No more lonely than the loon in the pond that laughs so loud, or than Walden Pond itself. The sun is alone, except in thick weather, when there sometimes appear to be two, but one is a mock sun” (Walden 1944).
Conclusion

Individual consciousness is a means, and location, by which it is possible to initiate, or restore, resistance to the culturally prevalent consumer mentality. In such a culture the individual finds personal identity by shopping, and the purchaser creates his "identity" by choosing from options provided by bourgeois society. This limiting of possibility is the antithesis of active vision, which seeks to diminish the individual's innate productivity. The exchange between innate and provided identity becomes a form of political warfare where each person chooses between a materialistic breeding ground of the masses, or self-empowerment through a less tangible frugality.

For Thoreau, action is celebrated, not discourse or convention. The politician, actress, musician, athlete, super-hero, or religious myth does not suffice to represent the individual. He implores us to be wary of trading individual consciousness for fictional daydreams, especially those of the consumer culture. It is a warning to effectively mediate between personal agency and provided identifications in the seen images of the everyday. In a world where politics shows an increasing likeness to sporting event commentary, Thoreau's nineteenth-century wisdom reminds us that political action can be silently asserted. As the saying goes, "the emptiest barrels make the most noise".

What is emphasized then is a local, versus a global, perspective of change that Thoreau's transcendentalist approach informs. Using Andy Dirlik's traditional definition in Local Global, Thoreau rightfully locates certain forms of "development as maldevelopment; adjustment to nature against the urge to conquer it; the porosity of
borderlands against the rigidity of political forms” (Dirlik 27). The social, political, and environmental effects of global capitalism are always immediately identified within these three discourses. The goal of government and capitalism is simply to perpetuate government and capitalism, thereby forging itself as a tradition. Therefore, tactics used by some Sixties counterculturists remain in exact opposition to that edict by calling for self-autonomy.

In *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau states, “This American government—what is but a tradition, though a recent one, endeavoring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity, but each losing some of its integrity...has not the force of a single living man” (*Civil Disobedience* 1857). The dichotomy between individual uniqueness and over-reaching homogenization in this opening line exemplifies the ways in which the multitude of binaries can be transcended by individual consciousness. Indeed, in privileging “the individual” as a more favorable locus of agency, the relationship between the aware citizen and every other person, institution, living being, or non-living being is rigorously tested. Most importantly, individual agency is something assumed, rather than being a gift given by local or federal branches of government.

That is not to say that Thoreau attaches any assumption of essentiality upon individual identity. In fact he does not rest upon an assigned identity at all, and instead privileges the subjective individual will to an entire ruling formation. Furthermore, this is not a form of rugged individualism portrayed by modern action-heroes, but rather a conviction of the value of human beings as paramount to culture, commerce, religion, or law in which each is, ultimately and reluctantly, a part of. In fact, Thoreau undermines the mythical figures in his work to illustrate anti-heroicism.
Yet, when the late-nineteenth century literati ultimately deemed Henry David Thoreau as canon-worthy, none could come to know the true versatility of his work until almost a century later, during the revolutionary period commonly referred to as the Late Sixties’ counterculture. As much of Thoreau’s concerns about cultural expediency became reality by this time, his work became fused with counterculture to the point of near excess and iconography. Yet, the transcendental theme of being simultaneously of the collective, and yet also engaged in identification with the self as an individual, is undeniably present in that era’s social activism and choice of personal expression.

Commercial consciousness masks the existence of individuals in such ruling organizations that we have come to call “Big Business” or governments. This has come to be identified as a technique of late-capitalism, where local countervoices lack a physical entity from which to bring dispute. This is a technique where the use of mass identity skews individual responsibility, and removes moral obligation through anonymity. Without available individual identities, hidden agents of late-capitalism are not held accountable for mass exploitation of people and places.

Thoreau, in Walden and Civil Disobedience points out those tactics for us in a manner, which shows how to deactivate this “mass logic,” through the self-evidence of individual conscious within ecological associations. The meditation of ecological interconnectedness removes the very possibility of cloaking late-capitalist subterfuge -- its shrugging away of injustice as a result of the overwhelming largeness. In other words, the spread of individual consciousness illuminates those hiding places, which disallows agents of late-capitalism from escaping accountability.

Thoreau rewrites heroism as literary, redefining observation from that of the
poet's role of oral-historian, bardic entertainer, and ancient broadcaster of cultural ethos toward an imagined symmetry. The separation of heroism between the doer of deeds and the seer of deeds no longer holds up in the world of the hero-bard-god-insect of *Walden*. In this ecology, each life possesses a kind of integral autonomy representative of all life, or infinite heroism of all beings. Thus, distinction through this sort of autonomous collective is as relevant, or negligible, as its ecological circumstance demands.

For all four authors, this activation of selfhood through the simplest form of contact is published, and therefore public, as it practically aims to inform a positive sense of individual consciousness. It is similar to issues of twenty-first-century globalism in that

> There will never be a really free and enlightened state [world] until the state comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly. (*Civil Disobedience* 1872)

Ultimately, social reform is more a harmonization than a melody chanted in unison, something that requires the fullest sense of self and community in order to be achieved. The Sixties counterculture focuses on the necessity for the coalescence of singular potential, where the pinnacle of political resistance is only reached as each person becomes self-consciously in anticipation of, and resistant to, exploitation.

Removing the emphasis from the world to the self changes the world by changing the moment. It is the constant practice of reclaiming choice by redirecting the unpredictability of each moment. This is where an ecological form of vision becomes political, offering equality as a characteristic of scientific fact, the antithesis of eugenics.
As opposed to Darwinism, it is not the survival of the fittest, as there is no such superlative in ecological studies, but rather an interdependency of equal species.

Uniqueness, in this ecological state of connectivity, begs the question as to how comparable the 1960’s counterculture can be to their elder transcendentalists. Can the works of these twentieth century makers of vision be considered evolved forms of Thoreauvian technique? Certainly, the historical conditions are similar. Perhaps, the closest answer to this question is that if history does not repeat itself, it at least rhymes.
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