OFFBEAT ON CAMPUS

John Cohassey

From hippie urban and rural communes emerged a lifestyle imitated on college campuses, in dorm rooms and rented houses decorated with concert bills and art nouveau-influenced poster art, and filled with various musical sounds. Years before Main Street and movies began spreading the counterculture, large numbers of college students thrived on art and experiment.

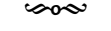
In *Dharma Bums* (1958) Kerouac's semi-autobiographical character Ray Smith condemns colleges as "nothing more than grooming schools for the middle class non-identity." No longer exclusively upper-class places of higher learning, post-World War II universities provided interaction between creative people and became battlegrounds for youth protest and countercultural activity. As sixties activist Jerry Rubin observed, the university was "a fortress" besieged by a drug-using hippie contingent "who were using state-owned university property as a playground." Yet there were students who engaged in serious campus cultural activities at a time when the arts—not just popular music—were central to their experience.

Where once small bohemian enclaves had existed in off-campus communities, by the close of the twentieth century countercultural lifestyles became a norm in and around universities. The counterculture moved into college towns like Berkeley, Madison, and Ann Arbor, places rife with bars, coffeehouses, and dance spots. There offbeat people, some dropouts or older hangers-on, lived in an atmosphere receptive

to bohemian-style living and modern artistic expression. Members of this defiant trend—Bob Dylan, Jim Morrison, and Janis Joplin—left behind their studies to become rock music icons.

Whereas Kerouac remained apolitical, his beat companion Allen Ginsberg moved into the protest movement as oppositional politics infused the sixties counterculture. Emerging out of the civil rights movement and opposing the Vietnam War, the counterculture redefined the college campus experience. As early as 1960, the Student for a Democratic Society, which largely defined the sixties New Left, championed racial and economic equality. SDS established small campus chapters across the nation that grew in number and membership in reaction to President Johnson's 1965 escalation of the Vietnam War. This more youthful contingent brought with them countercultural lifestyles that transformed the look and consciousness of New Left politicos.

New Left politics intermingled with new music and the drug experience, making for a heady whirlwind of alternative culture. Students' record collections included music from Bach to Boulez and the avant-garde jazz of John Coltrane and Miles Davis' electric explorations, along with those of folk, blues, and rock. Numerous college students read modern literature, held independent film festivals, and listened to the avant-garde music of John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen. Campus modernist jazz concerts billed the "cosmic jazz" of Sun Ra and Archie Shepp. Rock's boldest and most enduring music drew upon elements of American and European modernism and the jazz avant-garde, as it lyrically, musically, and technologically produced new sounds far different from 1950s rock and roll pioneers.



After World War II the G.I. Bill of Rights (1944) allocated thirteen million dollars to veterans' education. By the fifties expanding university enrollments produced institutions with as many as thirty thousand students. Increasingly bureaucratized

universities were saddled with diverse roles and functions; they were expected to serve the interests of government defense and intelligence programs. Thus universities came to be derisively labeled by critics as "multiversities." Middle and upper-class students increasingly viewed these mass centers of learning as impersonal institutions—a root cause of their disaffection. Originally a Marxist term referring to the impersonal, exploitative relationship between an industrial worker and his labor under capitalism, the term *alienation* was appropriated to describe a "new alienation" affecting all classes, including a restless segment of late 1950s youth.

Psychologist Kenneth Keniston's *The Uncommitted: Alienated Youth in American Society* (1965) observed a growing sense of alienation among Harvard students who viewed their university's main goal as molding them into employable, conformist adults. His subjects rejected their parents' affluent society that, ironically, allowed them to have a university education in the first place. First witnessed among affluent white youth of the 1920s, this generational antagonism spread to the postwar youth population. In traditional bohemia's shadow young people pursued what Erick Erikson termed an "extended moratorium on the way to adulthood." By the sixties the affluent society's offspring seemed to have pushed away the full plate offered them, and, at least for a time, rejected the traditional American Dream.

The postwar university experience intensified a sense of alienation. For undergraduates the one-on-one teaching experience had largely disappeared, as the universities focused increasingly on graduate-level education. Professors gave lectures in large halls, and assistants did the grading. Though seen as impersonal, these institutions still played the role of loco parentis, enforcing dorm rules suited to earlier times that were either becoming unenforceable or increasingly defied by students.

Strong ties between the universities and government defense industries fueled the protests of left-leaning, liberal-minded students radicalized by the civil rights movement. Before the escalation of the Vietnam War, student protest

centered on nuclear disarmament, poverty, racism, and the multiversity. By 1959 Harvard sophomore Todd Gitlin heard in coffeehouses and student unions, "beat talk, pseudobeat talk, avant-garde talk, political talk, sex talk, and literature and art talk . . . buzzing and mingling, not always logically."

Rejecting Cold War liberalism and searching for political alternatives, Gitlin read Paul Goodman's *Growing up Absurd* (1959) and enjoyed "its way of groping for analysis." Published before the emergence of the New Left and the counterculture, *Growing Up Absurd* influenced politicos and non-politicos alike. For Goodman—an anarchist, social-utopian theorist, and writer—university-trained "experts" ruled an America made up of citizens living in impersonal cities and suburbs, caught in the dullness of expected roles and "rat race" careers of little human value.

To Goodman, America produced either automatons or marginal figures living beyond the pale. At every level of society, university-bred experts made for a closed system that thwarted creativity. Gone were the days when the upper class produced and promoted culture that appealed to the average American, especially the young. He further pointed out that "the strongest advanced guard artists move less and less in upper or middle class circles." This cultural divide distancing youth from high modernism led them, in the era of a folk revival and the popularity of beat literature, to veer toward a bohemian way of life. Though questioning bohemia's legitimacy, Goodman and some of the New Left saw, like '30s leftwing thinkers, this "disillusioned hip" as a potential force for opposing bourgeoisie values.

Growing Up Absurd found a large university-age readership, and its author ventured beyond his vocation as writer, giving numerous university lectures. Under Goodman's and Herbert Marcuse's influence, students viewed the university as a training ground for "the technocracy" and sought alternatives for social and political change. Radical students increasingly viewed the Old Left as a spent movement too closely linked to the Soviet Union. From wealthy suburbs rather than the working class came defiant student youth contemptuous of the traditional

roles expected of them. As John Diggins explained, "The historic context of the Old Left was the abundance of poverty, that of the New Left the poverty of abundance."

Goodman's work indelibly influenced the New Left's conception of participatory democracy. Consensus and community, the hallmark of New Left politics, allowed for individuals to have an equal voice in the decision-making process. Participatory democracy became a means by which to regain lost democratic values while promoting grass-roots changes beyond the university campus. In 1960 the student arm of the League for Industrial Democracy, a leftist but anti-communist organization, created a semi-independent organization, the Students for a Democratic Society, dedicated to grassroots participatory democracy. In its influential 1962 Port Huron Statement, SDS outlined its political aims and foresaw the college campus as a place to "confront the establishment." The document asserted that "A New Left must start controversy across the land, if national policies and national apathy are to be reversed. The ideal university is a community of controversy, within itself and in its effects on communities beyond."

Though as committed politicos SDSers initially lived in voluntary poverty, dressed conventionally, and did not use drugs, by 1964 a shift had occurred when SDS recruited a "new breed" of university and high-school students. Less educated, though not anti-intellectual, these young people were given to fiery arguments and tough-knuckled anarchism. The new breed's "proto-hippie attitude" of drug use and communal living was justified because it defied bourgeoisie life. The new breed wore Pancho Villa mustaches, blue work shirts, and denim jackets. As Tom Wolfe pointed out, "The costumery tended to be semi-military: non-com officer's shirts, combat boots, commando berets—worn in combination with blue jeans or a turtleneck jersey, however, to show that one wasn't a uniform freak." These youths, noted Kirkpatrick Sale, had already abandoned the civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome" for Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind."

For the radical activist and non-politico alike, Dylan cap-

tured a new audience that had tired of innocuous dance tunes and pop songs. Dylan's dark lyrics—influenced by Woody Gutherie, Rimbaud, and beat poets—attracted students who identified with the civil rights movement and viewed cynically the American Dream. For poet Kenneth Rexroth, "Dylan was the first of his kind in America. . . . in the new leisure society of barefooted boys and girls, poetry is dissolving into the community." Dylan's snarl and sardonic stance, "was a perfect example," noted Morris Dickstein, of "ugliness that's one key to every modern avant-garde since Wordsworth and Coleridge. . . . Dylan's songs not only looked like modernist works but set into motion another twist in the modernist spiral of innovation and decay."

First billed in the early 1960s with Joan Baez, Dylan performed on campuses at a time when students still had reverence for modernist poetry. Between 1963 and 1965 Dylan augmented his concert and coffeehouse appearances with performances at Yale, the University of California at Berkeley, Brandeis, Emory University, and the University of Michigan. In 1963 he met Allen Ginsberg, and not long after invited the poet to his concert at Princeton University.

While Dylan moved away from the college circuit and toward international fame, Ginsberg stayed close to the student counterculture. "If Dylan was beginning to provide the soundtrack for the counter-culture," observed Graham Caveney, "Ginsberg gave it both the face and the networks, which were essential in sustaining its momentum." By the late 1960s Ginsberg read poetry and lectured at universities including San Francisco State, Oberlin, and Boston University.

Ginsberg lectured informally on poetry, abnormal psychology, and consciousness-altering drug use. While teaching at U. of C. Berkeley's English department, he extolled the poetic virtues of Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams and sang Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience,* emphasizing that such works made it "possible to transmit a message through time."

By the late sixties Ginsberg appeared ubiquitously at

anti-war rallies and concerts and in 1965 was proclaimed the founder of "flower power," when he urged Berkeley peace marchers to confront the authorities with flowers and messages of brotherly love. Berkeley protests captured the spirit of SDS' new recruits and thousands of students nationwide. As San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district became the model for the hippie counterculture, U. of C. Berkeley epitomized student protest against the multiversity, and its off-campus student colony, Telegraph Avenue, became a model countercultural center. In the later 1950s Peter Collier described Berkeley as a clean and well-lighted "city with a feel of a town." It represented "a liberated zone" that "conveyed a sense of space . . . within the squareness of the state." Not long after, numerous Berkeley dropouts lived around Telegraph Avenue's five-block-long stretch of bookstores, underground movie theaters, cafes, and "head shops" that sold posters and drug paraphernalia.

Young people drawn to the arts found kindred spirits on campus. To the disappointment of instructors who valued rationalism, these young people embraced a neo-romanticism identifying with a non-analytical aestheticism that celebrated with cult-like devotion art inspired by irrational mental states. This mood of celebrating creative mystery and madness sparked interest in two surrealists cast from Andre Breton's circle, Salvador Dali and Antonin Artaud. This correlation between madness and genius was intensified by drug use. For students and others the LSD experience provided a mystical union with art and music, producing the creative experience.

Students drawn to this neo-romanticism embraced numerous artistic avant-gardes. As early as 1964 author Lawrence Lipton taught a UCLA avant-garde writing extension course. A U. of C. Berkley course, "The European Avant-Garde from 1885 to the Present," exposed students to projections, the playing of tapes, and automatic writing. Commonly appearing in underground publications, the term *avant-garde*, though often used to describe folk-based works or pop-forms exhibiting little experimental quality, made for a voguish catchword suiting the defiance of the time.

Along Telegraph Avenue youths typically read a book or more a week, usually contemporary fiction like Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.* Harvard students at the time tended to prefer "Sartre to Kant, Ginsberg to Elizabethan lyrics, and Wilhelm Reich to Pavlov." In this national trend students lost interest in Hemingway, London, and Fitzgerald, preferring instead Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Hesse, Sartre, and Camus, and were likely to be interested in performance art, the theater of the absurd, and the art of Van Gogh, Munch, and Dali.

To stay informed, students read underground papers. In the little magazine tradition they printed independent campus-based weeklies or monthlies. Whereas established university papers relied on journalism students and campus editorial offices, underground periodicals avoided administrative censorship by operating off campus, or making their on-campus publications mobile, capable of being quickly relocated. Berkeley provided the most widely read West Coast underground paper, The *Berkeley Barb*—its front-page masthead depicting a stark drawing of a skeletal Don Quixote mounted on a fleshless horse. The *Barb*'s founder, middle-aged radical activist Max Scherr, launched the paper in 1965 and eventually gathered a staff of forty and a readership of 90,000. A forum for the New Left and New Left bohemianism, the paper covered local protests, police clashes, drugs, and sexual freedom.

In March 1967 members of twenty-six papers, following a plan of the *East Village Other*'s staff, met in San Francisco to form the Underground Press Syndicate (UPS) that boasted a combined circulation of over 30,000 readers. That same year *Esquire* reported: "By now underground papers are an accepted part of the scene, by campus hippies as well as campus 'straights.' In bookstores and newsstands they are right up there with *The New Republic*, *National Review,* and *Life*." Short-lived in their efforts, underground papers were typically amateurish, yet served to publicize artistic events and communicate controversial issues.

Underground papers offered discussions and reviews of alternative films. In 1965 a *Berkeley Barb* writer castigated popular

movie culture, particularly its teen beach movies. "We have been starved," he stated. "So we put our hopes in the New American Cinema, or Expanded Cinema, of the Avant-Garde, or Uncle Jonas, and our hopes remain distant like a rainbow when you run to it." Youths visiting Telegraph Avenue saw two to three movies a week, and Berkeley professor Henry May, explained that it was "easier to find Italian, French or Japanese movies than Hollywood products near the University."

By 1965 4,000 film societies around college campuses drew a yearly audience of nearly 2,500,000 moviegoers; about 250 to 300 films were screened annually by the University of Michigan's Independent Film Festival. Easing distribution and projection, 16mm prints were far more accessible than obtaining and showing 35mm commercial films. Thousands of college students attended films by avant-garde European directors like Truffaut, Goddard, Resnais, Cocteau, Antonioni, Bunuel, and Fellini, while showing renewed interest in classic films—Griffth's *Intolerance*, Stroheim's *Greed,* Renoir's *La Grande Illusion*, and Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible.*

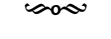
Campus alternative film societies were often involved promoting avant-garde music concerts as well. In the 1960s avant-garde jazz bassist Beull Neidlinger reported that, "The avant-garde is growing by leaps and bounds in the universities." By mid-decade about 1100 colleges presented jazz concert series and prompted *Down Beat* magazine to include in each issue a "Jazz on Campus" concert date list.

Following the same path into established educational institutions, music of the electronic New Music composers had by the 1960s found a home at many universities. In 1965 Calvin Tomkins opined that John Cage's ability "to shock, enrage, stimulate, and influence others has never been more evident than in the last few years," and "college students throughout the country no longer react with incredulous laughter" when attending Merce Cunningham and John Cage's collaborative performances. In 1969 Cage was an artist-in-residence at the University of California, Davis. In May of the same year, thousands attended Cage's performance of *HPSCHD.* Under the

University of Chicago's Assembly Hall dome, the audience was barraged on all sides by fifty-two channels of sound. In attendance, cultural writer Richard Kostelanetz met familiar faces; some he had seen at Central Park be-ins.

Open to many aspects of the avant-garde, students attended and even staged experimental theater productions. In 1967 the controversial San Francisco Mime Troupe toured Ivy League schools. Late in 1968 and early 1969, after returning to America from a forced Europe exile, Julian Beck and Judith Malina's thirty-four-member Living Theater made a nationwide campus tour. The Living, as it was often known, performed *Mysteries, Frankenstein*, *Antigone*, and *Paradise Now* at Yale, MIT, Brown, Princeton, and the University of Michigan. When the tour reached California in 1969, Jim Morrison attended every Los Angeles performance of *Frankenstein* and *Antigone* at the UCLA's Bovard Auditorium. Utopian in its ends, Beck and Malina's most controversial work, *Paradise Now*, sought with each performance to challenge sexual repression, hoping to create anarchistic cells from which a new social order would arise.

Whereas students' reactions to *Paradise Now* varied, it outraged campus authorities. The police were often called in reaction to the final scene when audience members voluntarily joined the bikini-wearing, g-stringed cast in forming a body pile, then, chanting anarchistic slogans, took to the streets. At San Francisco's Nourse Theatre, Jim Morrison and beat poet Michael McClure attended a performance, enthusiastically joining the onstage body pile.



Promises of life-changing cultural values seemed to be everywhere in the sixties. It may well have at times promoted a shallow aesthetic eclecticism, but the decade did have gifted creators. Amid the carnival drug trip in the park, more serious youths took part in learning and attending cultural performances and events. It is easy to blame the decline of high culture solely on the bearded and beaded ones.

Before rock music, rap, and movies became American youths' arts of choice, there were those, especially college students, who read for pleasure and took seriously a variety of artistic expression. Most importantly, they were exposed to forms of modernism rooted in earlier traditions. Around the country culturally oriented students embraced modernist elements and found heroes in artists of earlier times, like William Blake and Walt Whitman.

If today's youth are to lose themselves in private screenworlds, it would benefit them to learn from what jazzman Sun Ra termed "the unmanufactured avant-garde"—its sounds and symbols, past and present, stationary and in motion. Today when art and entertainment are seen as synonymous, it is crucial that Americans explore creative expression that challenges, or that had once challenged, a technological world advancing at a rate that would have awed the twentieth-century futurists.

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