Bears and Flags: The Grateful Dead's America and Bohemian Nationalism

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John Prine's anthem "Your Flag Decal Won't Get You into Heaven Anymore" earned its power as an antiwar song because it equated a simple-minded love of flag with love of country and thus with an unthinking support of the Vietnam War. A friend of mine—and I imagine he was one of thousands—used this kind of patriotism for his own nefarious ends. He put flag decals on the bumper of his station wagon and made periodic drives from the University of Kansas to Chicago, carrying hundreds of kilos of marijuana. He never got caught, and that flag decal apparently worked, not as a talisman, but as a kind of identification badge; this was a driver who not only supported the war but also obeyed all laws and was a good citizen. Now consider one of the ways the Grateful Dead used the flag.[1] When they played the 1968 Sky River Festival—and do I need to emphasize the significance of that year?—a large American flag hung behind the stage. Clearly, the combination of band—whose members, it almost goes without saying, had used, were using, and would continue to use illegal drugs—and flag did not signify either the support of America and its war or the satiric use of that signification for the success of the underground drug trade. Deception doesn't work when you are dressed like hippies and play hippie music in front of thousands of hippies smoking weed and high on other drugs. This essay, then, attempts to explain what this alternate use of the flag meant by first locating the Grateful Dead within a long tradition of California bohemianism and then by showing what the Dead risked by employing the flag and how they formulated new ideas through their music and iconography regarding what it could mean to be an American and still retain bohemian values. They sought to replace the nationalist/imperialist conception of homeland with a new national understanding of home.

It is crucial to understanding the nature of the Grateful Dead and the hippie experience as another manifestion of Californian bohemianism not just to locate them geographically—and we will see how important a sense of space is to bohemianism—but also to show how much they are organic Americans (even if some individuals were immigrants or sons and daughters of immigrants; nativism has nothing to do with this definition). That is, they are undeniably, inescapably a part of the nation. Thus, again as we shall see, they were socially and culturally determined to use the American flag and the California state flag as a part of their iconography. But they were politically determined (now used in both senses—unconsciously and consciously) to reinvent it. Just

[1] The choice of the Grateful Dead as an exemplary sixties bohemian musical group is far from arbitrary. As Nicholas Meriwether shows, "Of all the American bands to emerge from the heady ferment of the 1960s, the Grateful Dead cast the longest cultural shadow" (Nicholas Meriwether, "Grateful Dead," in *American Icons: An Encyclopedia of the People, Places and Things That Have Shaped Our Culture,* ed. Dennis R. Hall and Susan R. Hall, 3 vols. [Westport, Conn., 2006], 1:277.) Chris Gair has a somewhat different take on the band's legacy, but agrees with Meriwether on their iconic status, using the death of Jerry Garcia as a starting point for the second half of his book: "The '60s had been over for a quarter of a century, but the death of the best-known member of the quintessential countercultural band of the era made the national news and seemed . . . ironically to show that nostalgia for the spirit of the decade lived on" (Christopher Gair, *The American Counterculture* [Edinburgh, 2007], p. 120).

as it is crucial to remind ourselves that the hippies were Americans and that they were quite aware of their geographic, cultural, and social nationality, it is crucial to show how they became a nationalist movement. Such an analysis shows how they existed apart from, but next to, juxtaposed with America's hegemonic culture. If we didn't understand the hippies and bohemians as a nation we would fall into the easy analysis of seeing them as simply a rebellious youth movement, a digression or inconsequential escape from "real life." It would deny, repress, and be unable to explain the long history of American bohemianism.

When Jon Pareles, in his obituary for Jerry Garcia, claimed that the band was an icon of the sixties, he meant that part of the sixties defined by what he calls the counterculture.[2] However, I want to stay away from the term *counterculture.* I prefer to use a related term: *bohemia.* The former term is period-specific whereas the Dead, given the historical circumstances of their origin and growth, need a much broader term to classify it. For example, Dennis McNally begins his "inside history of the Grateful Dead" with the founding of the city of San Francisco in 1776, and though he does so only to contextualize the immigration of Garcia's grandfather, the place of the Dead is crucial to its understanding.[3] San Francisco (or the Bay Area) is almost synonymous with bohemianism because of the multiple waves of antiestablishmentarianism that have manifested themselves there. The Grateful Dead fit into a long line of Californian bohemian thought and life that begins almost immediately with the first years of statehood. Bret Harte, Ambrose Bierce, and others were authors and newspapermen, not musicians, but their art took the form of fiction, and their lives centered around, not the concert hall, but in magazines entitled *The Overland Monthly* and *The Californian.* These bohemians set themselves against the state boosterism of the industrialists and the middle class and their infatuation with the saintly pioneer and miner. Bohemians of that era were united in a critical appraisal of California in order to distance themselves from widespread boosterism, and one way to do this and to promote their own art and learning was—and this may strike us as odd today—to embrace the French–the language, the cuisine, the literature. When in 1864, Harte and Charles Henry Webb discussed the possibility of founding a new journal, *The Californian,* "Harte suggested that it be published entirely in French to give it tone." Here then is an attempt, however comical or wry, to appeal to a foreign culture in order to reform their own. In *The Californian*,

> the editor openly attacked the cult of "the honest miner" and the pioneer, questioning "whether the individual who contributed a find of impious slang to the national vocabulary was peculiarly estimable as a moral teacher."... [The magazine's] sophisticated journalists were trying to destroy the pioneer's confidence in the fundamental principles of the pioneer's credo. Not only did the critics suggest that California might not have the best climate and finest scenery in the world, but they went deeper still; they implicitly hinted that hard work did not always bring success and that virtuous living did not always bring a reward. The institution that suffered the first barrage was the time-honored Sunday-school story. The *Californian* published a series of sketches by Inigo [Webb's

[2] See Meriwether, "Grateful Dead," p. 277.
[3] See Dennis McNally, *A Long Strange Trip: The Inside History of the Grateful Dead* (New York, 2002).

> pseudonym], Bret, and Mark Twain ridiculing the moral lessons found therein and throwing doubt on the first law of moral economy. Heresy was in the air.[4]

In their effort to set themselves apart from that which they found fault, heretics seem always to set themselves apart from the world as a whole. These heretics clothed their reforming impulse in humor, satire, and a love of the foreign and thus were mistaken as antisocial. These were tactics that the Grateful Dead, as Californian bohemians, would eschew.

Forty years later, a magazine and its staff still offered a perfect environment for a bohemian way of life, and *The Lark,* a San Francisco periodical of the turn of the century edited by—principally—Gelett Burgess, is a perfect example. Of short duration and youthful, almost hippy temperament, the magazine "was named in a baptism of *vin ordinaire,* . . . the common wine of the country. . . . With all [its] eccentricity, and in spite of it, I know that flavour to be there, and in the two years of LARKS I see the unconscious demonstration of the idea that is native to the earth and air of California–the idea of sloughing old coats of tradition and restraint, and starting unencumbered in the race–and with the face full front ahead, rather than half over the shoulder."[5] It is no accident that Burgess and his fellow writers and editors couched the beginnings of their project in religious, though winey, terms. For a fourth element sustains bohemianism, and that is a certain spirituality and definite sense of higher purpose. As Burgess said in his own farewell to his folding magazine,

> If [these pages] have been sincere and spontaneous and faithful to an honest motive, played as clearly and as truly as we could flute it,–not without discords and false notes,–for the eye of youth oft wanders from the score,–this phase of life may fall in with the deeper truths and find its place in the Symphony. . . . It is the Presto movement,–short and gay,–timed to the beating of hearts not yet slowed down to the swing of larger duties and desires, quickened by the joy of life and the beauty of Nature, the mother; pulsing with the hope and promise of the West, impatient of restraint and convention, yet tempered by the uninsistent accompaniment of a serious purpose that subdues the thoughtlessness of pure abandon.[6]

Burgess's bohemian ideals even determined the magazine's layout–unpaginated, ragged-right margin–and its construction–Hong Kong bamboo paper.

But the turn of the century also saw the rise of a bourgeois, though progressive, anti-imperialist antibohemianism, also centered around a periodical. The second series of *The Overland Monthly* was edited by Milicent Shinn, the first PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. She was dedicated to avoiding the twin pitfalls of conservativism, as represented by the military take-over of Hawaii, and bohemianism, as represented by people like Beirce and Burgess. But giving new life to an institution like *The Overland Monthly* was difficult and she wrote that "I think from the first there was a certain jealous

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[4] Franklin Walker, *San Francisco's Literary Frontier* (1939; Seattle, 1970), p. 182.
[5] Bruce Porter, "My Dear Frank Burgess:–," *The Epi-Lark,* no. 25 (May 1897): [1].
[6] Frank Gelett Burgess, untitled memoir, *The Epi-Lark,* no. 25 (May 1897): [7].

and unpleasant feeling toward us in San Francisco newspaperdom and Bohemia."[7] She attributed the ill will in part to her gender, and, as Chris Gair points out, Diane di Prima and other women in the Beat Generation found that "the rejection of a culture of consumption by male Beats tended not to be accompanied by similar rejection of that culture's patriarchal values."[8] She was a Quaker and believed in Californian exceptionalism—that is, she was not mainstream American in religion or state identity; some, perhaps many, Californians looked East for superior art, at least—but her magazine would have nothing to do with French-flavored fiction or *vin d'ordinaire.* Given her progressive politics and commitment to art, however, she had more in common with the bohemians—whose writing she actually could admire without promulgating—than with, say, conservative critics of the Beat Generation like Lionel Trilling and Norman Podhoretz. In this way, she was similar to someone like Ben Hecht, who sympathized but ultimately rejected the bohemianism of Jack Kerouac in favor of Left politics.

Kerouac probably never heard of Milicent Shinn, but he had read Jack London and included his ghost in *On the Road.*[9] London, his closest friend George Sterling, and others exemplified California bohemianism in their time, and certainly it was their lifestyle as much as it was London's seafaring ways that attracted Kerouac to him. In fact, London's spirit lived on into the sixties as Tom Wolf, in a characterization of Ken Kesey, called him a "Jack London Martin Eden figure."[10] Bohemia in turn-of-the-century California took traditional forms, especially in the Piedmont Heights above the Bay, where Jack London owned a home, or in Carmel, where George Sterling lived, and where artists, poets, newspaper writers, and others played. There was fencing, boxing, music, kite-flying, poetry readings, costumes, parties, and woodland masques, all insignia of bohemianism like the beret, goatee, and bongo drum of the fifties. Sterling, whom many thought of as presiding over this subculture, wrote a masque entitled "The Triumph of Bohemia." Performed by members of the San Francisco Bohemian Club in Bohemia Grove in 1907, this play combines the bohemians' love of nature and the natural–which takes shape in this play as a recognizably modern ecological consciousness–with classical sources and drama. The tree-spirits (who open the play with the cry, "Time is our slave") are attacked by their worst enemies: the four wind-spirits, Father Time, and the Spirit of Fire (an especially potent figure given that the San Francisco earthquake had occurred just the year before). Having defeated them, the tree-spirits are attacked by woodsmen, who sing the Care-Song: "Tho' I wander far and wide,/Care, a shadow at my side,/Still shall claim his worship due,/Still shall know me and pursue." Only the Spirit of Bohemia, "a naked youth" (played most likely by Sterling himself) saves the spirits and their trees, persuading the woodsmen that they may have enough lumber for their homes and still

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[7] Quoted in Grant Skelley, "The *Overland Monthly* under Milicent Washburn Shinn, 1883-1894: A Study in Regional Publishing" (Ph.D. [in librarianship], University of California, Berkeley, 1968), p. 65.

[8] Gair, *The American Counterculture,* p. 25. Tom Wolfe, in his *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* calls Ken Kesey a "Jack London Martin Eden figure" (Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* [New York, 19XX], p. 000).

[9] See Jack Kerouac, *On the Road,* p. 000. Thanks to Gair for pointing this out.

[10] Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York, 19XX), p. 000. Martin Eden is the semi-autobiographical sailor/writer protangonist of London's novel *Martin Eden* (1909).

preserve the tree-spirits' grove.[11] Bohemia, defeater of Care, must then defeat Mammon, who arrives in the grove to tempt the woodsmen with gold coins. Their battle is decided by the gods above, who send as a sign of their decision, a great owl by whose touch Mammon dies. The play ends, and though presumably the woodsmen will go off to log the rest of the state but save Sonoma County, the play intends to sting the consciences of the Bohemian Club's businessmen.

Harte, Beirce, Burgess, London, Sterling, and others all lived beyond the norm, in a bohemian culture. These are men and women who lived their lives fully, in excess of other more conventional lives, but, at least for some amount of time, without excess becoming waste. The spirit of bohemia is notoriously difficult to pin down, but it found perhaps its most poignant, if obscure, expression in a third wave of bohemianism, the Beat Generation. In *On the Road,* one of Dean Moriarty's hallmark sayings is, "Go, go, go"; there is no subject or object to the verb. Or, rather, the subject and object are both IT, in capitals to signify its loudness as sound and its profundity as spiritual concept. When Sal Paradise and Moriarty hear the tenorman in San Francisco blow his choruses, they say that he has IT, he has reached IT. But IT is not the end of a process; IT is the process, and the object is to extend the process as long as possible and, no less important, to transmit IT to others. Paradise describes what lies ahead for all of them as "the ragged and ecstatic joy of pure being."[12] The searching soul—spontaneous, receptive, innovative, improvisational, high on drugs—this is another way to describe bohemianism. Or, as John Clellon Holmes's square protagonist in *Go* says, critical of his bohemian friends but accurate in their characterization, they "lacked any caution. . . . They made none of the moral or political judgments that he thought essential; they did not seem compelled to fit everything into the pigeon holes of a system. . .; they seemed to have an almost calculated contempt for logical argument. They operated on feelings, sudden reactions, expanding these far out of perspective to see in them profundities which Hobbes was certain they could not define if put to it."[13] How like the hippies at the 2008 Rock the Change concert when asked by Steven Hurlburt, a deadhead himself, to explain what the phrases from Grateful Dead songs like "box of rain," "roll away the dew," and "eyes of the world" meant.[14] A large majority knew—they knew!—but they couldn't put it into words. Hobbes thus stands in the middle of a long line of sympathetic but ultimately condemnatory antibohemians, with Milicent Shinn before him and, as we shall see, Abbie Hoffman ahead of him.

From their long-term and meaningful association with Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassidy, and others the Dead have rightly been identified as cultural workers in the Beat tradition; the only mistake in such a cultural analysis is the presumption that bohemianism in Californian started in 1946. In any case, when Jerry Garcia was asked to define the word *hippy,* he didn't turn to its denotative meaning, something probably only a square would do, though the *OED*'s definition is helpful in showing how there is some amount of continuity between the Beats and the hippies: "A hipster; a person, usually exotically dressed, who is, or is taken to be, given to the use of hallucinogenic drugs; a

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[11] George Sterling, *The Triumph of Bohemia,* pp. 000.
[12] Kerouac, *On the Road,* p. 161.
[13] Quoted in Gair, *The American Counterculture,* pp. 41-42.
[14] See Steven Hurlburt,
http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Roll+away+the+dew&search_type=&aq=f

beatnik."[15] (Still, squareness has its drawbacks. No beatnik did acid. No acidhead would be called a beatnik. He or she would be called a hippie.) Garcia's ad-hoc (spontaneous, bohemian) definition overlaps with both the *OED*'s and with Kerouac's exposition of IT: "somebody who's turned on . . . who's in forward motion, uh, they might have been called progressive at one time."[16] One of the great moments of hippie bohemia came on 14 January 1967, the day of the Human Be-In on the Polo Fields of Golden Gate Park. Garcia described it this way: "When there was the Be-In up here I'd never seen so many people in my life. . . . It was a totally underground movement. It was all the people into dope of any sort."[17] Robert Spitz, in his history of the Woodstock music festival, also traces a direct line between the bohemia of one generation and that of another: Sometime before 1967 "Hippies had run the Beatniks off MacDougal Street [in the Village] with unpardonable reproof. They replaced that dark era of black turtleneck sweaters and bongo drums with rainbow gaiety, strobe lights, and a softness of dress and emotion never before exhibited by Village inhabitants. Rock usurped jazz, drugs supplanted alcohol and adolescents swarmed in from parts unknown. Michael [Lang, the main character in Spitz's history because he was the festival's executive producer] plugged himself into the eye of the hurricane with a tireless enthusiasm."[18] Despite that final mixed metaphor, and whether or not we accept the claim that hippies rudely tossed the beatniks out, we see vividly how a locale, whether the Village or North Beach, provides an environment for evolving notions of bohemian life and thought. Though the drugs changed from *vin d'ordinaire* to LSD, one can thus posit a line of Californian bohemian thought and life that runs from the work of Bret Harte and Ambrose Bierce in the 1860s through Gelett Burgess's *The Lark* to Jack London's autobiography *John Barleycorn* (1912) to Allen Ginzburg's reading of *Howl* (1956) to the Grateful Dead's "Truckin'."[19]

So, even though bohemianism can be treated as it might treat itself—vaguely, careless of boundaries—there are at least four easily identifiable elements: writing, travel, drugs, and communal living/existence, usually centered around a common artistic endeavor, sometimes concrete like a periodical, sometimes more fluid like a shared conception of what art is. Other artistic persona—the romantic genius, the avant-gardist—may overlap with the bohemian to a degree, but whereas the romantic tends toward isolation—we think of the isolated German romantic poet standing on the edge of a cliff—as does the avant-gardist—here we recall Frank Zappa alone in his Laurel Canyon house, composing at night, forcing even his daughter Moon to communicate by notes—the bohemian favors community, and a bohemian's writing, travel, and drug use are characterized by their communality. It is this last element that brings to mind a more theoretical definition of bohemianism and so helps begin the exploration of the Grateful Dead's entanglement with the iconography of Americanism.

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[15] *Oxford English Dictionary* [online], s.v. "hippy."
[16] McNally, *A Long Strange Trip,* p. 186.
[17] Quoted in Meriwether, "1/14/67," in *The Deadhead's Taping Compendium,* ed. Michael M. Getz and John R. Dwork, 3 vols. (New York, 1998), 1:130.
[18] Robert Stephen Spitz, *Barefoot in Babylon: The Creation of the Woodstock Music Festival, 1969* (New York, 1979), p. 36.
[19] Gair closely analyzes the transformation from Beat to hippy in terms of a generalized conception of counterculture in his *The American Counterculture,* esp. pp. 139-44. Gair's starting point is crucial for all further studies of the sixties: "There are both ruptures an continuities between the Beat Generation and the countercultural fiction of the 1960s" (p. 139).

If, as Benedict Anderson famously defined it, a nation is "an imagined political community," then bohemia, given its notorious indifference to the affairs of state, can be defined as simply an imagined community.[20] Bohemia, of course, has its material manifestations—the slouched hat, absinthe, the bare foot, and so on—which will figure in important ways later in this essay. But to define bohemia as an imagined community means that it does not exist until a group of people insist on their commonality as outsiders without recourse to what historically binds people together—kin, language, religion of the book, or geographical boundaries. In the sixties, one form that this insistence took was continued participation at musical concerts given by one particular band or form or genre of music. The music of the Grateful Dead and more generally of the San Francisco scene provided people with one way to come together as a community. There were other ways, and the totality of these ways defines an American bohemia. But at the same time the Dead and others insisted on borrowing traditional nation-state iconography to seemingly identify themselves as, not bohemian in the traditional sense, but as citizens of a particular nation. The question I want to address is why did the Grateful Dead put the word *political* into the definition of *bohemia* and so transform it into a kind of nationalism. In more general terms, we might ask, When does community become citizenship, and why did the Grateful Dead insist on being citizens of the state of California and of the United States of America?

By 1967 mainstream cultural figures had identified a larger social phenomenon than just a few enclaves of bohemianism in San Francisco and New York City, and they used words like *hippiedom* and *hippieland* to name it. Hippies themselves knew that the creation of a shared identity was taking place across the country (part of the stated mission of the 1964 bus trip by Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters was to link up with Timothy Leary and others at Millbrook), and when Woodstock took place in 1969 they discovered only how large their numbers had become; Abbie Hoffman first used the term *Woodstock Nation*, though this act of naming came several years after the fact and was a confused attempt to give a name to a "ethnic," national group. This collectivity of sixties bohemians shares the four elements of the complete definition of *nation* that Anderson uses: "it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. The hippie nation was limited, and to paraphrase Anderson, not even the most messianic hippie "did not dream of a day when all the members of the human race" would become hippies. It was sovereign, and just as the nation came into being as cultural and socioeconomic forces destroyed "the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm," so too hippiedom found itself as institutionalized hierarchies fell apart. The patriarchical family and society was losing its legitimacy. The justifications for the supposed superiority of one race over another were exposed as fallacious and malicious. And the inherent authority of officials of the federal and state governments was being not only questioned but also challenged and refuted. In the face of these decaying social systems, hippies dreamt of being free.[21]

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[20] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* rev. ed. (London, 1991), p. 6. The literature on nationalism is vast, but plucking Anderson's book out of the mass is not an arbitrary act. Despite the critiques of his book, which mostly center on his misreading of postcolonial states, Anderson's definition is an excellent guide for the study of nongovernmental, cultural-based communities.

[21] Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* pp. 6, 7.

But I want to focus on how sixties bohemians imagined their community. Perhaps surprisingly, the imagination of their nation came about in similar ways to how first nations came to be realized. According to Anderson, "the novel and the newspaper . . . provided the technical means for `re-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation."[22] During the sixties, in America, the novel did not undergo a significant enough change to be identified as a new nation-forming event. But the newspaper, the broadsheet, the music concert, the rock poster, and the album did. These material events enabled the imagination of a single community by people otherwise unknown to each other. A crucial component in the understanding of the concept of nation is this fact of people not knowing each other. It shows how, despite being strangers, people can be united as a nation. Thus, when Anderson says that just as characters are "embedded" in the society of a novel so too are people embedded in the society of a nation; "these societies are sociological entities of such firm and stable reality that their members can even be described as passing each other on the street, without ever becoming acquainted, and still be connected." Further, in a novel characters are united by being triangulated with "omniscient readers." So too in a nation strangers in a "stable reality" are united by being known by a third person in that society: "An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his . . . fellow Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity."[23] I'm perhaps belaboring this point of the unification of strangers because I want to focus on how relatively new art forms in sixties bohemia acted in ways that the novel and newspaper did in the early history of nation formation. These art forms created what Anderson calls a "community in anonymity."[24] Hippies knew each other as hippies, and not as persons, through the knowledge that each was simultaneously reading, say, Robert Crumb's latest comic. They knew each other through the knowledge that each was reading the *Berkeley Barb* or the *L.A. Free Press,* in the same way that earlier Californian bohemians knew each other as they all read the latest issue of *The Lark* or *The Overland Monthly.*

More significantly for the specific purpose for an essay focused on a musical group, hippies or heads or freaks were united by the album they all were listening to or by the music they heard simultaneously within a concert hall. More often than not the shared experience of, say, a Grateful Dead concert is posited, and rightly so, as a joint spiritual enterprise, an elevation of a mass consciousness. But there is this other way that sixties bohemians became identified with each other. Print-capitalism had joined with sonic-capitalism to become vehicles for the imagination of a new bohemian nation. When the audience members left the concert at the Fillmore or the Avalon Ballroom and walked out into the neighborhood, they felt that world inside the concert hall had fused with the world outside. This experience exactly parallels the experience Anderson discusses of readers of Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* in 1887 or of Jose Joaquin Fernandez de Lizardi's *El Periquillo Sarniento* (1816): "Here . . . we see the `national imagination' at work in the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside."[25] Consider the experience of

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[22] Ibid., p. 25.
[23] Ibid., pp. 25-26.
[24] Ibid., p. 36.
[25] Ibid., p. 30.

listening to "Truckin'," say, in its first incarnation 18 August 1970 at the Fillmore West. There are two important thematic elements to this song, and both played crucial roles in defining this bohemianism, linking it both to it own historical specificity and to its roots in earlier American bohemianism. As a preliminary note, I want to point out that although the lyrics of the song make no explicit mention of a musical group, let alone one called the Grateful Dead, many listeners take this song as pure autobiography. One of course cannot help do so, given the mention of a bust in New Orleans and the link between the band's constant touring and repeated allusions to travel; I only want to insist that an autobiographical reading taken as fact can obscure other meanings, especially those that posit a different characterization of the protagonist of the song. In any case, the first thematic element is the interplay between home and the road. In classic bohemian fashion, the protagonist in the song is on the move. The word *truckin'* works synonymously with words and phrases such as *The Road, Go,* and O*n the Road,* all titles of classic bohemian texts by Jack London, John Clellon Holmes, and Jack Kerouac. At the same time, the protagonist expresses a longing for remaining home, a place to "patch my bones" or "to settle down." Unlike the place one travels, the world outside, home is where "they" aren't. Home is safe from search warrants, where you aren't worn thin, where you simply can be—as opposed to New York, which "just won't let you be." Home, unlike the road, is unnamed; it is not given a specific location. But neither is it simply a state of mind; otherwise one could be at home on the road. No, home is a geographical space, but it could be anywhere, anywhere, that is, where likeminded travelers congregate, read underground comics, and go to concerts to hear music like "Truckin'."[26] The world of the song has fused with the world of bohemian life, of the bohemian nation.

The second thematic element is the unidentified nature of the protagonist. This person has—and for a moment lets keep the metaphoric content of his or her life alive—has played his or her cards and now has cashed in his or her chips and is on the move. From one city to the next, exploring and testing environments, our character discovers both how unsatisfactory the outside world is and how necessary and right it is to find this all out; the song is very much of a sonic, modernist *bildungsroman.* In fact, the song not only relates the protagonist's experiences—the twin bummers of getting busted and of having a friend, "sweet Jane," fall apart, the drawbacks of a number of American cities—but also advises the listener on how to deal with a life so filled with negative experiences. (For an anthem of the "flower generation," it's surprising to rediscover how depressing this song is, despite its up tempo sound.) And in dealing out this advice, besides illustrating how crucial having a home is, the protagonist, secure in the knowledge that the power of the advice will keep one living a good life, invites the listener to join this life, to join bohemia: "Get out of the door—light out and look all around."[27] Here is the quintessential bohemian call to action. Seize the day! Go! Find IT! Keep truckin'! It's important to keep the universality of this call in the forefront, for, as Anderson points out, one of the hallmarks of nationalism is naturalization. Unlike racism, which disqualifies people by blood, nationalism offers membership even if one is imperfect in a nation's language. Although the Haight suffered because of it, and there were certainly posers among the hippies (the Dead's "Cosmic Charlie" is to some extent about the phenomenon

[26] Robert Hunter, *A Box of Rain: Lyrics, 1965-1993* (Harmondsworth, 1993), pp. 230, 231.
[27] Ibid.

of the weekend hippie), anyone could become a freak. That universalistic call is to a large extent what made "Truckin'" so popular. The unnamed protagonist could be you. "I guess that can't revoke your soul for trying."[28]

The anonymity of membership that "Truckin'" celebrates is crucial in another art form and will take our discussion of bohemian nationalism to another level. Broadsheets, as well as music and comics and newspapers, played an important part in this new independence movement, and the Diggers produced one in particular that bears close examination, for it marked both an end and a beginning in this history of Californian bohemianism. The Diggers, a San Francisco-based collection of social and art activists, in fact embodied the bohemian anonymity and universalism. "Digger activists used made-up names in order to encourage the idea that hippies were new people who, in adapting new identities, were ridding themselves of their past."[29] On 6 October 1967, the year of the Summer of Love and the Monterey Pop Festival, the Diggers (now known as the Free City Collective), held an event called the Death of Hippie Ceremony. By the fall of 1967 the word *hippie* had changed or become threatened so much by interior and exterior forces that its funeral was advised. It was held on the first anniversary of the day LSD became illegal. Although various accounts differ as to what actually happened, and photographs that claim to be of the event show two different coffins and two different groups of people, at the very least a march through the Haight district occurred. People carried a coffin that symbolized the death of the hippie. Candles were burned. Little American flags were held. The crowd dispersed, the coffin disappeared. Given that Woodstock, to name just one event, occurred two years later, it is impossible to say that the hippie movement ended with this funeral.[30] It is possible to say that some kind of pure, uncommercialized version of the hippie ended that fall in San Francisco, but certainly there were many sincere, committed, and unaffected hippies who came later. So, using Anderson's understanding of nationalism given, now, that we can understand the hippies as a nationalism, we can see this event as an important nationalistic marker. Perhaps the most crucial characteristic of nationalism, according to Anderson, is that people are willing to die for their country or "country." After the community is imagined it stays in the imagination because "it is this fraternity that makes it possible . . . to die for

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Marty Jezer, *Abbie Hoffman: American Rebel* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1992), p. 86.

[30] Jezer, in a mean-spirited analysis of the Death of the Hippie, writes that it was simply an event to serve the Diggers best self-interest: "When the hippie movement in San Francisco became too sordid to defend, they [the Diggers] simply created a ceremony in which they buried the hippie and declared themselves `free men' (Jezer, *Abbie Hoffman,* p. 86). And certainly the Diggers did not stop their activities; according to Jezer, they only became more influential, visiting New York in 1967 and transferring many of their ideas and principles to Abbie Hoffman and others (ibid., p. 87). By "sordid" I am guessing that Jezer is pointing to the increased numbers of people—not just youth—who migrated to the Haight and the coincident increase in hard-drug use. But this explanation—overpopulation and "wrong" drug use—is simply another mainstream, hegemonic attempt to dismiss the reality of bohemianism. Somehow the overpopulation of hippies in 1967 in the Haight has become a sign of hippie deterioration whereas the overpopulation at Woodstock has become a sign of hippie viability and vitality, only to be eradicated a few months later with the so-called real death of the hippie at Altamont. Hippies themselves saw the overcrowding in the Haight and at Woodstock and the fisticuffs and death at Altamont as a bummer, a downer, a bad trip—like "sweet Jane" "losing her sparkle" and the bust in "Truckin'." In "New Speedway Boogie," the Dead sing, "Do we keep on coming or stand and wait?" The answer is to keep trucking (Hunter, *Box of Rain,* p. 158).

such limited imaginings."[31] The coffin that held the Unknown Hippie—no matter that there actually was no body—is the sixties bohemianism's version of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the "most arresting emblem of the modern culture of nationalism." "The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely *because* they are deliberately empty or no one know who lies inside them, has no true precedents in earlier times [meaning, for example, ancient Greek culture]. . . . Void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings."[32] The broadside that the Diggers printed and circulated to mark this occasion spells out their nationalistic imaginings in an explicit, though, of course, disorganized, fashion. The broadside begins with the announcement that the hippie has become a media creation: "MEDIA CREATED THE HIPPIE WITH YOUR HUNGRY CONSENT. BE SOMEBODY. CAREERS ARE TO BE HAD FOR THE ENTERPRISING HIPPIE. The media cast nets, create bags for the identity-hungry to climb in. Your face on TV, your style immortalized without soul in the captions of the Chronicle. NBC says you exist, ergo I am. Narcicism, plebian vanity. The victim immortalized."[33] The alternative is to become "the FREE MAN [who] vomits his images and laughs in the clouds because he is the great evader, the animal who haunts the jungles of image and sees no shadow, only the hunter's gun and knows sahib is too slow and he flexes his strong loins of FREE and is gone again from the nets. They fall on empty air and waft helplessly to the grass. DEATH OF HIPPY END/FINISHED HIPPYEE GONE GOODBYE HEHPPEEEE DEATH DEATH HHIPPEE."[34] Though there is no difference between the act and being of a hippy and the act and being of a "free man," it was important to jettison the name hippy before its cooptation by the media began to determine how the hippies lived. Of course *free man* just doesn't have the linguistic power of a word like *hippy* and so it never caught on, and perhaps Peter Coyote and others intended to steer people back to the original meaning of the word and remind their audience of the essential connection between *hippy* and a very traditional understanding of American *freedom.* The broadsheet ended with a beginning, a familiar proclamation of independence and freedom: WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT, THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.-That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.-That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."[35] This early art-political action predated by over two years Abbie Hoffman's call in *Woodstock Nation* for the prevention of cultural cooptation by "Pig Nation," but the quotation from the Declaration of Independence indicates that they wanted more. This broadsheet and the funeral helped further define who lived within the new bohemian nation. Just as Venezualan revolutionaries in 1811 "saw nothing slavish in

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[31] Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* p. 7.
[32] Ibid., p. 9.
[33] http://www.diggers.org/free_city_news_sheets.htm
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

borrowing verbatim from the Constitution of the United States of America," so too did the Diggers turn to an earlier, successful model of nation formation.[36] One cannot help but link the proliferation of broadsheets and underground press to the early history of the US and especially to Benjamin Franklin, who as Anderson points out, because of his key role as "printer-journalist" "is indelibly associated with creole nationalism in the northern Americas";[37] and one only has to think of the Dead's "Franklin's Tower" and Robert Hunter's intentional, though, vague (bohemian) association with Franklin in that song to see how the hippies nationalism took on aspects of modular nationalism.[38]

The Dead's iconography functioned in the same way as the Diggers's broadsheets, especially their borrowing of the American flag and their use of skeletons. The name of the band itself, so obviously linked to the icons of skeletons, can be seen as as an artistic act of nation formation, a shared imaginative bond. Given the importance of the dead to a nation, the Grateful Dead performed a kind of living tomb to the Unknown Hippy. Like the eternal flame of the Unknown Soldier's grave, the Dead, by touring almost constantly throughout their career, kept the memory of bohemian nationalism alive. Like the circulation of the music the circulation of the Dead's skeleton acts as a nationalizing artistic force, especially given how often the skeleton is pictured with an American flag. The cover of *Grateful Dead: The Illustrated Trip* exemplifies this force. It shows the skeleton from the waist up, crowned with American Beauty roses, holding a banner on which the title of the book is written. The red of the roses, the blue of the banner (decorated with white stars), and the white background emphatically place the Dead within the hippie nation-state. Or take the skeleton figure from *The Grateful Dead Movie.* A motorcycle riding, top hat and cane wielding, tripping skeleton, he is dressed in the Captain Trips top hat that Jerry Garcia wore on the cover of the Dead's first album, that Jack Cassidy and other also wore. This hat shows how the American flag—for which the American Beauty rose is a stand-in—circulated freely among hippies. A large flag hung on Mickey Hart's Marin Country barn in 1970; it adorns the interior art of *Live/Dead;* it of course provides the central form of the Steal Your Face logo; and, as I mentioned before, it hung behind the stage at Big Sky, and hippies carried little flags on sticks at the Death of Hippie parade. There was a prominent flag at the Human Be-In near the stage; Paul Butterfield and others named their band The Electric Flag and were one of the top sensations at the Monterey Pop Festival. Peter Fonda wears a flag on the back of his leather jacket in *Easy Rider.* The Jefferson Airplane used the flag on *After Bathing at Baxter's.* Ken Kesey in 1964 had a fake front tooth colored as a flag.

And the American flag was not the only one so appropriated. The bear from the California flag, perhaps unintentionally, became a modern-day marker of bohemian nationalism. The earliest Californian bohemians, Harte and Beirce and the rest of the crew at *the Overland Monthly,* had borrowed the flag's bear for their masthead, except they had set it free into the wild. The flag's bear, seen in full-body profile walking to some unknown destination, is unthreatening and almost domesticated. Harte's bear is set

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[36] Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* p. 192.
[37] Ibid., p. 61.
[38] See Andrew Shalit, "Roll Away the Dew: An Exegesis of Robert Hunter's `Franklin's Tower,'" arts.ucsc.edu/gdead/agdl/shalit.html, which is a bit undisciplined in its analysis, and Hunter, "A Reply to Jurgen Fauth's Essay," arts.ucsc.edu/gdead/agdl/fauthrep.html. Thanks to X for bringing these pages to my attention.

on railroad tracks, turning and snarling at an unseen approaching train. This is very much a California bear, a state's icon whose independence is crucial. The Dead had their own bear, Stanley Owsley III, nicknamed Bear, whose circulation of acid, like Franklin's and the Digger's circulation of print, like the music scene's circulation of sound, provided one more kind of technological device to imagine the new nation. Further, the bear became a dancing, laughing bear on stickers, decals, and shirts, multicolored and so obviously stoned. This was New California's new bear.

Mainstream culture rebelled against this wholesale appropriation of the American flag. As Hoffman documents in *Woodstock Nation,* "Last summer [1968] . . . [Congress] passed a federal law protecting the flag from `defacement and defiling.'" So, because the national government wanted their flag back, Hoffman entitled his chapter "Fuck the Flag."[39] But, unlike Hoffman's appropriation of the flag, the Dead and other bohemians never meant to be programmatic, and thus, although he Hoffman tried to tie (die) himself to the Dead (he mentions them uncritically twice in *Woodstock Nation*) and to Woodstock Nation (his pronouncement that, all in all, Woodstock was a good thing is constantly undermined by his doubts about and harangues against the hippies) he was in the end discouraged and frustrated. He was able to name the hippies' nation, but he refused to become a bohemian citizen. Because the hippies' reuse of the flag never became a leftist statement, Hoffman could foresee only the cooptation of hippies by mainstream culture

Yet bohemians, and especially the Grateful Dead, never became associated with the negative aspects of nationalism. By embracing the flag, the colors of the flag, the thirteen stars, and so on, they only meant to, in a broad sense, play with the flag. Rather than celebrate a ready-made Americanness, they invented their own. Like a standard blues song that provides a basic structure, the stars and stripes gave the Grateful Dead a form to begin from in order to create a new nationalism. They grabbed the American flag away from straight culture, tore it to shreds, and used the shreds to make clothes and blankets. They used in their emblems. They incorporated it into their music. Their sense of community as bohemians alienated them from the mainstream, and so they constructed their new, alternative American mythology embodied best, perhaps, in the song "U.S. Blues." The song begins, "Red and white, blue suede shoes, I'm Uncle Sam, how do you do." Uncle Sam has been hiding out in a rock and roll band. (And of course it's a blues song!) The Dead can reappropriate Uncle Sam because they recognize that he shares the same iconic status as other pop culture figures, two of whom are mentioned in the song: "Shake the hand / that shook the hand / Of P. T. Barnum / and Charlie Chan."[40] The same appropriation takes place, though more obliquely, in "Ramble on Rose," where the identification of America and rose is implicit. In this song, we get a long list of pop cultural figures, including Jack and Jill, Wolfman Jack, Crazy Otto, Frankenstein, and Billy Sunday. Like bohemianism itself, the song is open-ended ("I know this song it ain't never gonna end"), and like the America the hippies live in the song is "a hundred verses in ragtime," a quintessential American musical form. In fact, in their borrowing of just about every kind of national form of music, the band played their new Americanism on stage.[41]

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[39] Hoffman, *Woodstock Nation,* p. 49.
[40] Hunter, *Box of Rain,* p. 234.
[41] Ibid., p. 174.

Further, consider John Perry Barlow's 1992 speech in front of the First International Symposium on National Security and National Competitiveness. In the audience were members of the U.S. intelligence community, and Barlow was invited to give them a different perspective on the culture of the internet. Barlow pointed out that he and Mitch Kapor were the first to use William Gibson's term *cyperspace* to describe the aphysical reality of computer-aided human interaction. "We saw," said Barlow, "that computers, connected together, had the capacity to create an environment which human beings could and did inhabit."[42] They envisioned it as, specifically, a place where copyright could not exist, where national boundaries would be blurry and perhaps nonfunctional, and where email would decentralize bureaucratic structures. This sensibility is plainly an outgrowth of the sixties Californian bohemian imagining of the virtual world created by drugs: a new, alternative but very workable and livable place that existed side-by-side with straight culture. It was identifiably American, but it did not serve national interests. Both the Haight and cyberspace were meant to be places where bohemian creation could take place, where spontaneity was valued, where a bear could dance high on acid. The flag became an intergral part of their art, but it never left their art world. It was always, not ironic, not under erasure, but at play.

Even though the later deployment of the flag in the bohemian nation signified, in ways that the Diggers in 1967 wanted their broadsheet to, a return to the purity of American independence, of true revolution, there is no denying that the appropriation of American nationalism may seem to run counter to the careless, unorganized, stoned nature of bohemianism. To appropriate the American flag is to risk being identified with American imperialism, with American consumerism, with American racism. Perhaps Grace Slick meant to counter this association by singing, in the song "ReJoyce," on *After Bathing at Baxter's,* "I'd rather have my country die for me." The Airplane is both following in the bohemian tracks of Stephen Daedalus and rejecting the patriotism of liberal Democrats such as John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. There's no question that the hippies were never going to go to war for their own nation. That was the stand that left politicos like Hoffman took. In the summer of 1969, while meeting with other underground and counterculture members on a farm in Michigan, he watched the police conduct a raid, and afterwards he thought how "in Chicago [during the 1968 police riot] I felt that I was ready to die over our right to be in Lincoln Park and how defending liberated land meant more than Vietnam. The only way to support a revolution is to make your own."[43] Just as Jerry Rubin was about to go onstage at the Human Be-In in 1967 to deliver a political speech, he told the Dead's road manager Danny Rifkin, "`Now, pay attention. What I'm going to say is very important.'" Garcia reacted negatively: "Like, all that campus confusion seemed laughable too. Why enter this closed society and make an effort to liberalize it when that's never been its function? Why not just leave it and go somewhere else." Earlier, in 1966, Rock Scully, the band's manager, had contrasted the hippie scene in San Francisco with the political scene in Berkeley: "The suit-and-tie Berkeley politicos wanted a political platform and `kept busting into our meetings.' They wanted to rouse the rabble--`Rabble-rousing is their very raison d'etre,' said Rock, while his and the Dead's view was `Let's make it fun, not misery. We've won already, we don't have to confront them [the government and other prowar forces]. Why go on their trip?

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[42] Quoted in Thomas Streeter, "The Moment of *Wired,*" *Critical Inquiry* 31 (Summer 2005): 757.
[43] Hoffman, *Woodstock Nation,* p. 57.

Why battle? Dissolve. Disappear."[44] To die for one's bohemian nation takes on different meaning from that of the heroic death of soldiers in combat. To be bohemian, one must be willing to "dissolve," to lose one's identity as a bohemian. To travel—one of the defining characteristics of bohemianism—means more than simply taking road trips. It means in its limit sense to actually leave the bohemian nation, never to return. The the Tomb of the Unknown Hippie is surrounded by the ghosts of the departed.

What do bohemians become when they leave bohemia? To get at a possible answer to this question, one has to turn to another fundamental commitment of bohemians, that of improvisation. To say that the hippies played with the flag is to say that they improvised on its symbolism, reinventing its symbolism, creating new meanings for it. What I have not addressed is the fact that they did not invent a new flag. Relying on the structure of the stars and bars was much like relying on the twelve-bar blues. Bohemians are not avant-gardists "inventing" new scales. At the same time, we need only look at how Garcia lived as a musician to understand a contradiction at the heart of bohemianism. Garcia spent his days practicing scales and his nights free-associating within given song structures. On the one hand, practice and responsibility; on the other, improvisation and freedom. The bohemian life tends to obscure the former in order to highlight the enlightenment and education one gains from the latter, but a bohemian is neither an anarchist nor a hobo. Bohemians are deeply rooted beings, both in history and in a geographical space. When a bohemian dissolves, he goes back home. He gives up his public identity and removes himself from the public sphere.

This then is the ultimate meaning of American bohemian nationalism. It is the creation of a home that is not a homeland. *Homeland* refers to soil and the people of that particular soil. It easily becomes a term to denote national political objects, and its first use in America pertained to the United States as it was being threatened by outside enemies.[45] *Home* can be both particular and abstract. A house is also a home but never a homeland. *Home* in the abstract means a place of comfort, a place of safety in the sense of being a place one can retreat to. Bohemians can be meaningfully contrasted with avant-gardists to get at the generalized notion of the bohemian home. Both bohemianism and avant-gardism share a similar sense of time. Both are well known for their distaste for calendaric time, for chronos; they favor kairos, the now. But their understanding of place separates them. As I mentioned before, the avant-gardist is an isolated "genius" at work alone. Bohemians, on the other hand, are by nature communal. The avant-gardist works apart from his or her environment. There is nothing identifiably Long Islandish about Jackson Pollack's work. When Zappa produced his most advanced, experimental work, it cannot be located as work produced in Laurel Canyon, let alone Los Angeles. That is, bohemianism is inextricably tied to place, to geography. It must have a home. With the disappearance of the Haight and the Village and other traditional geographies of American bohemianism, the bohemian home still is the site of coffee houses, concerts, and sometimes even academic conferences.

The word *political* as inserted into the definition of *nation*—"an imagined political community"—has the same force for the bohemians that it has for Anderson. It

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[44] Mcnally, *A Long Strange Trip,* pp. 179, 177.

[45] "For the earliest official usage [of *homeland* in America] on record, see Williams S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review* (May 1997), www.defenselink.mil/pubs/qdr" (Jennifer Bajorek, "The Offices of Homeland Security, or, Hölderlin's Terrorism," *Critical Inquiry* 31 [Summer 2005]: 877 n. 6).

exists apart from constitutions, political theory, and political structures. It is a cultural formation reliant on the circulation of print and sonic capitalism. The risk, then, that the Grateful Dead took as they reappropriated the flag turns out to be no risk at all. It may legal now to wear a flag bandana, and the flag has reattained its powerful patriotic aura. But the red, white, and blue of the Dead's Steal Your Face logo has lost none of its own luster. Bohemian nationalism lives. The freak flag still flies.