The Historical Present: Notions of Time, History and Postmodern Consciousness in the work of Richard Brautigan

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This thesis examines the evolving intellectual agenda of Richard Brautigan throughout his artistic career, and through his engagement with the contemporary counterculture, towards a rationalisation of the very mechanisms of consciousness and awareness. His analysis of social precepts, the concept of moment within models of history and time, and the processes of concurrent perception encapsulate the social struggle for self understanding and identity inherent within his cultural environment. At the centre of his literary technique lies a dichotomy in which his attempts to transcend the restrictive infrastructures of narrative codification are constrained by the capabilities of a readership that can only receive information transmitted in a conceivable manner – adherent to those same codes and signifiers that he wishes to deconstruct. The following work seeks to explore this dichotomy and to assess how successfully the author managed to mitigate it.

Brautigan's relationship to both the Beats and the emergent counterculture is explored as the genesis of his intellectual dissatisfaction with existing concepts of meaning and truth. From his appropriation of postmodernist techniques is drawn a hypothesis that the author sought to present a model of consciousness that accurately depicts its proactive construction of signification from a chaotic and limitless source of stimuli. By subverting time and history to the microcosm of the moment, Brautigan illustrates the latent power of the single point of awareness in defining its own reality.

Once this has been established, the subsequent chapters of this work seek to examine the aesthetic methods the author uses to articulate his thesis. His utilisation of genre is explored with specific reference to the theories of Northrop Frye, his use of comedic constructs is analysed in light of their Surrealist content, and his appropriation of Zen Buddhist principles is examined with particular attention paid to his use of Haiku and the fusion of Haiku with postmodernism. Central to each of these approaches is an application of Jungian analysis to determine Brautigan's use and subversion of archetypal images.

The author's idiosyncratic presentation of autobiographical data is then investigated to assess how successfully he manages to reconcile the process of consciousness, and its potential to liberate, with his own identity. Finally, his engagement with gender politics is examined to illustrate the limitations of his hypothesis and the point at which it fails to satisfactorily apply.

The crux of Brautigan's aesthetic agenda is therefore defined herein as the diagnosis of perceptual methods intended to promote enhanced self awareness and a more complete state of informed consciousness. This thesis strives to first establish this hypothesis contextually within the author's work, then to examine the methods utilised by Brautigan to expound upon it, and finally to apply the hypothesis to instances of self-representation and sociological issues apparent within the texts to ascertain how sound an intellectual proposition it is.

Abbreviations used for Works Cited

Richard Brautigan:

Confederate – *A Confederate General from Big Sur*

Dreaming – *Dreaming of Babylon*

Edna – *The Edna Webster Collection of Undiscovered Writings*

June – *June 30th, June 30th*

Mercury – *Loading Mercury with a Pitchfork*

Revenge – *Revenge of the Lawn*

Rommel – *Rommel Drives on Deep into Egypt*

So – *So the Wind Won't Blow it all Away*

Sombrero – *Sombrero Fallout*

The Pill – *The Pill versus the Springhill Mine Disaster*

Tokyo – *The Tokyo-Montana Express*

Trout – *Trout Fishing in America*

Unfortunate – *An Unfortunate Woman*

Carl Jung:

Archetypes – *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*

FA – *Four Archetypes*

Nature – *On the Nature of the Psyche*

Alan Watts:

Beat – *Zen and the Beat Way*

Spirit – *The Spirit of Zen*

Introduction

Richard Brautigan has been variously branded a "gentle poet of the young" (Stickney 49), a "created cultural hero" with "narrow [...] talents" (Hicks 152), and "all the novelist the hippies needed" in their "non-literate age" (Wright 36). There is a general consensus in these definitions of the author that he is in essence nothing more than a minor curiosity, a footnote to a transitional period of literary and cultural history. In fact, Brautigan is the first readily identifiable post-Beat writer to emerge from the American literary scene, one evidently influenced by the alternative lifestyles and perspectives of the Beat movement and yet differing significantly in technique. He replaces, for instance, spiritual hyperbole with an understated bemusement, substituting infinitely more visceral characters for Ginsberg's romantic "angelheaded hipsters" (*Howl* 9). Brautigan's protagonists are stripped of their iconography, are "smoky and sweating and blackened" by the dirty reality of existence (*Confederate* 117). Yet he still explores what it is to be American; he still rejects in his narratives the mainstream American culture of the time. His novels, poems and short stories remain the "expressions of a generation disillusioned with the American myth" (Britten 188). Both the similarities and the differences serve to illustrate how Brautigan provides a tangible link between the aesthetic concerns of the Beats and those of the ensuing counterculture of the Sixties and Seventies. The intellectual diversity and frenetic evolution of social perspectives in the period is perfectly encapsulated by his work. If it can be argued that the cultural shifts and social experiments of the Sixties have proved influential on subsequent cultural developments, then it surely follows that Brautigan's work ranks amongst the most socially pertinent writing of the twentieth century. The "pitting of freedom and fluidity against form and structure" (115) that Jonathon Green identifies at the heart of the social revolution is precisely mirrored in Brautigan's writing. The sociological content of his material indeed qualifies him as a chronicler of his age, but even more pertinently his aesthetic method distinguishes him as a purveyor of a postmodern

world, one where the manner in which we signify assumes greater consequence than the signification itself.

To "become aware of the means by which we *make* sense of and *construct* order out of experience" (51) is what Linda Hutcheon identifies as the paramount ambition of the postmodernist consciousness. This same ambition lies at the very core of Brautigan's ongoing project. Ultimately, like Modernists such as Joyce, Woolf, or Lawrence, he is an artist intent upon exploding the myths of linear thought and sequential awareness. Unlike these authors, however, he does not seek "the criterion of all truth and all good"; he does not demonstrate a belief in the tenet that "truth does not lie beyond humanity, but is one of the products of the human mind and feeling" (Lawrence, 389). For Brautigan, truth is a redundant concept. Reality is not in his work a logically ordered series of events, or even a fractured composite from which can be pieced some intellectual cohesion. Reality, for him, is rather an emotive engagement with a myriad of stimuli. To these stimuli are applied previous impressions and culturally imbued frames of reference to create a single moment of consciousness. There is no 'truth' for Brautigan; there is no 'sense' in the intellectual meaning of the term; there is simply the moment. This moment is, in fact, all that matters because it alone, in conjunction with a haphazard continuum of such moments, represents all that our lives really consist of. In this respect he is at odds with both the Modernists and the Beats, a group he remains loosely categorised with, because he substitutes the notion of a lateral, microcosmic instant for the preoccupations of "America and Eternity" (Ginsberg, *Howl* 12). This thesis aims to illustrate the ways in which Brautigan engages with this basic notion of immediate perception, and to analyse the existing artistic mechanisms he draws upon to support his supposition that consciousness is a phenomenon rooted predominantly within the present.

To support the analysis of the author's agenda, a number of different critical approaches have been applied, each selected because of its evident affinity to an influence upon Brautigan's work. For instance, his analysis of the counterculture in terms of its existence within a framework of historical precedent has been addressed here with reference to the revisionist theory of historicism. Brautigan's appropriation

of historical signifiers and his rewriting of history from a purely contemporary perspective lends itself to this theoretical framework because it essentially shares the same tenets. History is a narrative and like all narratives it is forged via a reductive process whereby disorder is formalised and significance applied according to the perspective of the narrative voice. As Paul Hamilton asserts, "historical meaning can change with the reception of its audience" (12). It can also be altered, will indeed almost certainly *be* altered, by "the mechanics of articulation" (21). History is ultimately a concept that can only be engaged with retrospectively and as such is subject to the influence of hindsight and reinterpretation. Therefore historicism supports the view that the author engages with his world as a single point of consciousness engaged in the acts of definition, redefinition and conjecture.

Likewise, a distinctly postmodernist critique has been applied to the use of tenor and vehicle[1] in the author's metaphorical method, and in his deconstruction of time. The cross-fertilisation of signifiers from divergent cultural sources, the equilibrium he promotes between classical and contemporary stimuli, the irony and intertextuality he utilises to derail conventional logic: these techniques are all entirely in keeping with the postmodern critical hypothesis. It is widely documented, however, that Brautigan did not adopt postmodernist techniques in a conscious manner, drawing them from critical research. He instead assumed them rather more organically, and in light of this some study is made of the influence his contemporary social reality had upon his aesthetic approach. Furthermore, reference has been made to critics such as Frederic Jameson to help contextualise the ways in which the author's postmodern method reflects the visceral manifestations of social change occurring around him in the counterculture.

Genre plays a significant role in the author's work, as both an extension to the postmodern aesthetic and as a crucial illustration of the arbitrariness of convention and perceptual constraint. The mixed genre novels that the author produced provide evidence of an evolution to his intertextual practices and a growing sophistication in the transmission of his intellectual position. By drawing attention to the methods of

[1] The term 'tenor' is used here to refer to the subject of the author's metaphors and 'vehicle' to the source of the connotational attributes applied to the tenor (Klinkowitz 357).

codification in a common cultural medium he is able to engage his readership in both an immediately conceivable and intellectually subversive manner. Elsewhere in this study, his affinity with the Dadaists and Surrealists is explored, and is done so in explicitly Surrealist terms, his texts cross-referenced closely with the theoretical points of Breton and Dali concerning the nuances of awareness. This surreal dimension to his work emerges, it seems, from the disjuncture inherent within his genre experiments. For Brautigan, the potential of the imagination is limitless, and it follows that consciousness is without boundaries. Perception, he seems to indicate, is being stunted by the demands of conformity – evidenced both culturally and within the methods of codification inherent in narrative and awareness – and we are but fractions of the sentient creatures we could and perhaps should be. Logic is the keystone to this intellectual fortress we have become barricaded within. To destroy logic is to bring the boundaries crashing down and to free the self inexorably. Postmodernism is illogical, Surrealism is illogical, and to this assault Brautigan also adds Zen Buddhism. Indeed, he finds commonality between the different approaches, a unity in their defiance of received truths, of 'common knowledge' and second-hand perceptual certainties. He produces, for instance, numerous examples of postmodern Haiku, a fusion which he manages to illustrate is not as incongruous as it may seem. The difference between them, he appears to contest, is in some ways superficial: Haiku serves to sweep the consciousness outwards from a single point of reference, a stark skeletal image that piques perceptual possibility, whereas postmodernism seeks to swamp the consciousness with a mêlée of disjunctive images that force it to rationalise and signify, to focus inwards. The techniques are, in other words, polar in method but identical in their objective.

Ultimately, all of these approaches – postmodernism, genre, surrealism and Zen – become unifying segments of a Jungian analysis of the author's agenda, one in which the interplay of the conscious and unconscious mind becomes of paramount importance. The imaginative sphere of Brautigan's canon is intrinsically concerned with notions of the psyche at work with common cultural archetypes. These archetypes serve to engage the individual with their immediate environment, to contextualise the concurrent moment of awareness. Perception remains a complex

phenomenon, informed by prior knowledge and pre-existing modes of codification, but an awareness of this foundation, in Brautigan's view, will surely provide glimpses of a broader fundamental truth concerning our collective potential. The author's definition of a writer, for example, in *Sombrero Fallout* is summed up by the image of "a vacuum cleaner [...] that broke all the time and only Einstein could fix it" (26). The inanity of the object is contrasted to the figure of Einstein, the cultural archetype of intelligence and the scientist that deconstructed the concept of time, to instil a sense of underlying complexity. That the image works in an absurd manner is secondary to the absolute clarity of the social archetypes used. This is the crux of Brautigan's technique: whilst attempting to break down common patterns and assumptions in the thought processes of his readership, he is nevertheless bound to common archetypes and signifiers in order to do so. The Jungian model of consciousness therefore stands as a central point around which revolves a number of divergent theoretical disciplines. In order to put forth an accurate blueprint of the author's method, this thesis strives to analyse his work in light of each divergent critical approach and to arrive at a convergent representation in much the same way as Brautigan himself drew these influences into his prose and poetry.

The primary source material for the thesis consists of all of Brautigan's novels, all of his published short prose and the majority of his poetry. The only exclusions are a very small portion of his verse that is no longer in print and the unfinished work not currently available in the public domain, although some of his unpublished poetry and prose held at the Brautigan archive at Berkley University has also been evaluated. Included for analysis here, then, are the early novels *Trout Fishing in America* and *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, the early collection *Revenge of the Lawn* and the author's less well known output from the 1960s and early 1970s such as *The Abortion* and *In Watermelon Sugar*. In addition, his explicit genre novels *The Hawkline Monster* and *Dreaming of Babylon* are included, as are the other middle period works *Willard and his Bowling Trophies* and *Sombrero Fallout*. Poetry has been analysed from the collections *Loading Mercury with a Pitchfork*, *Rommel Drives on Deep into Egypt*, *Please Plant this Book*, *The Pill versus the Springhill Mine Disaster* and *June 30th, June 30th*. The author's later work such as *So the Wind Won't Blow it all Away*,

The Tokyo-Montana Express and the posthumous *An Unfortunate Woman* have also been critiqued as has the posthumously published collection of poetry *The Edna Webster Collection of Undiscovered Writings*[2]. Reference has also been made to the papers collected in the Brautigan archive at Berkeley, most significantly the notebooks numbered 32, 33 and 37 as these are the most coherent and pertinent of the documents available in terms of illustrating the attitudes and motivations of the author. The widest possible selection of the author's work has been included in an attempt to support both the continuity and the complexity of the themes in Brautigan's writing that this thesis seeks to illustrate and deconstruct. This study also seeks to demonstrate an evolution of aesthetic agenda inherent in his body of work as a whole; and it is only with reference to the latter period prose and its interrogation of time, the middle period genre works and their Jungian influences, and the social commentary of the author's early output that this development can be adequately conveyed.

For the purposes of referencing, some of the unwieldy titles of Brautigan's published work have been abbreviated. This has been done to make the necessary breaks in sentence structure as unobtrusive as possible. A full list of these abbreviations is included prior to this Introduction, but by means of an example *A Confederate General from Big Sir*, for instance, has been shortened to *Confederate*, *The Edna Webster Collection of Undiscovered Writings* substituted with *Edna*, etc. A similar approach has been taken with supporting texts where more than one work has been referenced by a particular author and where those works have generous titles.

Reference has been made to the existing body of critical and biographical work about Brautigan. Most significant are the loose collection of memoirs written by acquaintances of the author which include Keith Abbott's *Downstream from Trout Fishing in America*, Greg Keeler's *Waltzing with the Captain: Remembering Richard Brautigan*, and the biographical volume written by the author's daughter Ianthe *You Can't Catch Death*. Existing critical works on Brautigan are relatively scarce but the following texts have been examined: *Richard Brautigan* by Jay Boyer, *Richard Brautigan* by Marc Chénetier, *Richard Brautigan* by Terence Malley and *In the*

[2] *The Edna Webster Collection of Undiscovered Writings* was posthumously published but contains poetry and prose that pre-dates the publication of Brautigan's first novel – juvenile works that were presented to a friend's mother upon the author's departure from Oregon to California.

Singer's Temple by Jack Hicks. In addition, a selection of magazine articles celebrating (and denigrating) the author's life and work have been utilised in the research for this thesis, as have a significant number of smaller essays that have appeared in Journals both during Brautigan's career and since his death.

The critical work already available on Brautigan is overwhelmingly biographical in nature. As not much is known about his early life, the biographical content is therefore mostly limited to the time he spent in Montana towards the latter part of his career. It is therefore not particularly informative about the aesthetic concerns of his early work, and does not actually provide much analysis of his later work either. Chénetier and Malley do analyse Brautigan's work critically and approach him as a postmodernist. However, the main focus of their criticism, in both cases, is solely upon the author's utilisation of language. Chénetier defines Brautigan as a writer "driven by an obsessive interrogation of the fossilization and fixture of language" (21). He identifies this as the "one central concern" governing all of the author's work and focuses solely upon the evidence that Brautigan attempted to free language "from stultification and paralysis" (21). Malley similarly asserts that Brautigan had "an awareness of the limits of communication" (38), and whilst both of these conclusions seem perfectly valid, neither critic really goes beyond them to explore what Brautigan's deliberate illustration of these limitations may signify on a wider scale. Chénetier is content with analysing Brautigan only in terms of his subversion of language; Malley is content with contextualising Brautigan as a product of his environment. The latter examines his "lack of proportion" (87), his extrapolation of "nihilistic tendencies" which also seem to permeate the "current American counter culture" (128), and identifies in his deconstruction of language and meaning a somewhat dystopian "American destin[y]" (111), a descent into meaninglessness and apathy. Boyer, on the other hand, tackles the interplay of the personal and the social in the author's work in a more direct manner. He, too, identifies Brautigan as a postmodernist but seems more interested in the way in which "cultural myths and personal realities [...] can inform one another" (49) in the texts. Again, there is no reason to dispute Boyer's conclusions, but he does not expand upon his identification of this feature in the narratives or to assign it any real significance.

He discusses Brautigan's use of imagery from the American West and draws a parallel with the notion of the frontier and the imagination – "the human imagination seemed to be the last uncorrupted frontier" (14). This is perhaps the closest any of the existing critics get to expounding upon the purpose of the author's approach, and yet even this assertion is a single paragraph in Boyer's work and is immediately dismissed by the critic himself as conjecture: "these are only notes, to be sure" (14).

The critical journal articles published on Brautigan are all much the same: the majority of them focus on the novel *In Watermelon Sugar* and discuss, specifically, the community of iDEATH as an examination of "the myths and language of the pastoral sensibility that reappeared in the sixties" (Schmitz 125). Those that focus on other works by the author explore the same themes. Kern, for instance, asserts that Brautigan's texts are so fragmentary that the author himself often "ends by not knowing what to do with the particulars of his perception once he has noted them down" (51). Whilst he at least identifies the personalisation within Brautigan's writing, he ultimately concludes it to be rooted in vanity, on the one hand "a calculated assertion of freedom from convention", and on the other "the wilful and sometimes arbitrary satisfaction of a whim" (52). Novak even goes so far as to postulate that perhaps Brautigan's poetry "is a catalyst to the solipsistic experience", but then immediately counters it by suggesting that "maybe he is saying, [art] can't tell you anything" (133). The point is that none of these assertions are strictly incorrect, it is just that they fail to rationalise why Brautigan employed the approaches and the techniques that he did. There is a critical consensus that he pushes the boundaries of language, that he promotes inconclusion and narrative subjectivity, but there are no satisfactory conclusions upon why he does this, and to what ends.

In contrast, this thesis strives to examine the *purpose* of the postmodern techniques Brautigan employs, the reasons why he highlights the boundaries beyond which language ceases to be a communicative tool, why he makes the assertions of his narrators overtly subjective, why coherency breaks down under the relentless stream of impressions the imagination offers up. These are not incidental features of the author's work, nor can they be satisfactorily addressed by isolated critical observations. They are instead strands of a much more complex theoretical agenda.

Language is a projection of consciousness. The codification inherent in metaphor, in postmodern methods of reference, and in the interplay of cultural myth and personal history is indicative of perceptual mechanics. The importance of the author's use of genre cannot be understated here either, as this is precisely where he strikes at the heart of cultural codification and the mechanics of comprehension. What Brautigan is addressing with all of these techniques is an illustration of the way in which we function cognitively. The reason this is significant is that he was writing at a time when the society around him was struggling to free itself from existing social perspectives and to construct a model of civilisation that would allow for greater personal freedom. In order to achieve this, the activists within the counterculture had to deconstruct the conventional notions of what a society is and how it functions. Brautigan's theoretical project, when seen in this light, becomes critical to understanding how this deconstruction could possibly be achieved. Theodore Roszak writes of the counterculture attacking "the foundations of the edifice" (55) in their quest to rebuild society. For social activists, this edifice may have been typified in physical institutions such as the law, education, political infrastructures. Brautigan's aims reflect precisely those of the activists, but on an intellectual level. His edifices are the constraints of language and the constraints of logic and his instinct is that these must be broken in order to construct something new, something that is not informed and shaped by the same old presuppositions.

An opinion shared by all of the existing critics of Brautigan, and one which is indeed borne out by strong evidence in the author's texts, is that he held a strong affinity with his cultural environment. John Stickney concludes that he was "involved completely with the everyday American experience" (50). Chapter one of this thesis explores the author's immersion in the explosion of alternative culture happening in San Francisco in the late Sixties. For socially active groups such as the Diggers[3] and the Yippies[4], the period was very much perceived as a new cultural beginning, a year

[3] The Diggers were a socio-political group active in San Francisco during the Sixties. They evolved as an anarchistic commune from their origins as a performance theatre troupe and named themselves after a radical faction of the Levellers active during the English Civil War.

[4] The Yippies were a self-styled section of the counterculture associated to Abbie Hoffman. They were not a defined group like the Diggers but rather a loose collective that chose "YIPPIE!" as a convenient slogan for the press to use when identifying them.

zero from which a new world order would arise. "Now is an accumulation of ends with all goals immediate", asserts Emmett Grogan when recalling the mood of the period (477). Unlike other year zero movements throughout history, however, the American counterculture did not reject out of hand everything that had come before them. Indeed, their particular process of self definition was a thoroughly exploitative one in terms of historical and sociological context. Brautigan's aesthetic approach very much reflects this, his ideology in synch with the principle that a history of western civilisation preceded the latest generation and that they were but an end product of this evolution. The Yippies, the Diggers, and members of other countercultural factions were all aware of the fact that they were reacting against the self-serving idioms that had arisen from a capitalist impulse for absolute authority. So they were borne of capitalism, their "quest for some new foundation that [could] support a program of radical social change" (Roszack 186) a direct result of this reality. This is why Emmett Grogan's moment, as defined above, is both fed by the past and focused absolutely on an alternative future. This is why Brautigan's reality is peppered with evocations of John Dillinger, Benjamin Franklin, Deanna Durbin.

Brautigan essentially puts forth the argument in his work that cultural suppositions, perceived truths, are precisely akin to the 'truths' of history, capitalism and time: they are all based on arbitrary constructs of logic. A subjective opinion made absolute, a self-serving perspective from the capitalist elements of society, a useful mechanism of control – these are the origins of what has since become a common understanding of the nature of reality. As Ursula Heise concludes on the notion of time, for example, "the mechanical clock [...] imposed a timeframe shaped by the necessity of machines, production and consumption" (44). Social institutions, laws, morality – all are borne of an organising impulse, and all become entrenched and restrictive. Just like Grogan and the Diggers, Brautigan's early impetus seems to spring from a desire to reclaim the concepts that underpin his existence. His perceptions are no less valid than those of anyone else, and it is this insistence upon equal authority that manifests itself in the author's personal vision of "America, often only a place in the mind" (Brautigan, *Trout* 97).

Chapter two of the following thesis focuses upon Brautigan's engagement with gender politics within the counterculture. Whilst he is able to succinctly illustrate the socio-political ambitions of his cultural environment in his work, intellectualising the quest for freedom of expression and liberated consciousness, gender is an issue he fails to resolve satisfactorily. Women remain in his work as something other, something alien and incomprehensible to the male narrative voice. In the following example, from a posthumously published early poem, the female is quite explicitly a projection of the poet, and nothing more than this:

> Once upon a sad weird
> there lived a girl
> who was my beautiful soul given form (Brautigan, *Edna* 89).

His early narratives depict women in a primarily sexual manner, an objectification of attributes that complement the male purveyor's egocentric cultural ideals. They are reduced to dislocated images of "large friendly-looking breasts and small pleasant breasts and behinds" (Brautigan, *Revenge* 51). So dismembered do they appear that they bring to mind another manifestation of male power – pornography. An entire segment of the population, the teenage girl, is even dismissed as good for nothing more than "a one night stand/in a motel" (Brautigan, *Edna* 94). All of these representations are essentially misogynistic in nature, and the women in the texts are presented in a way that demonstrates they accept these same limitations themselves. Vida, the principle female character of *The Abortion*, characterises womanhood in her own words as little more than an endless round of "dieting, operations, injections" (66). In later texts, such as *Willard and his Bowling Trophies*, however, Brautigan analyses the mechanics of relationships, and in *Sombrero Fallout* he even engages with female empowerment. Here, a female character even rejects her lover, for deficiencies that are not elaborated upon. Nevertheless, the issue of gender is one which he ultimately fails to resolve in terms of his overriding drive towards personal freedom. The concept of the female remains a persistently external phenomenon for the male author and his male narrators. Women are a trigger for their, or his, perceptions rather than an integral part of the perceptions themselves. Gender remains

entirely akin to history for Brautigan, to politics or mainstream social ethics: it is an institution of perpetuated truths. To it are brought the tokens of intellectual categorisation, prior knowledge and emotional experience, almost as though it too is a myth to be deconstructed. It is not deconstructed very well, however, and the female characters remain personifications of Helen of Troy or Deanna Durbin. Perhaps the personal experiences of the author prohibit objectivity in this particular area; perhaps he simply finds the topic too convoluted for a satisfactory resolution, as evidenced by his poem 'Nice Ass':

> There is so much lost
> and so much gained
> in these words (*Rommel* 36).

In any case, Brautigan at least addresses the issue of gender in his work, and his approach can be seen to evolve throughout his career. Whilst he reaches no satisfactory conclusions, he does highlight a gender crisis within the counterculture which is not an insignificant achievement in itself.

If Brautigan's suspicion of absolutes is something that reflected the cultural mood of the Sixties, then it is likely that his postmodern impulse sprang from the same sociological source. This theory is tested in chapter three. According to all the available sources who knew the author personally, he was not an individual who put much faith in literary criticism or literary theory.[5] However, it is undeniable that his "characteristic device of going from a simile [...] to a literal condition" (Malley 28) is entirely in keeping with the postmodernist school of thought. So, too, are his interrogations of history wherein truth becomes truth simply because it is so willed by a protagonist. So, too, are the tortuous constructs employed in his metaphors wherein the disparity between the tenors and vehicles used creates a collapse in conventional coherence, a chaos of allusion in which popular culture meets history, science and classical citation. At the core of postmodern theory, and its application, lies the assertion that authenticity does not actually exist as a conceivable proposition.

[5] Keith Abbott confirms that Brautigan had no critical works in his library and simply saw no value in them (Interview, email, June 2004). Greg Keeler confides that he saw criticism as "intellectual pretension" and lacking in precision (Interview, email, June 2004).

Jameson defines the difference between Modernism and Postmodernism as follows: "modernism aspires to the sublime" (*The Cultural Turn* 83) whereas postmodernism represents "the dissolution of art's vocation to reach the absolute" (84). Brautigan's postmodern technique is precisely this: the representation of a fractured truth, one without an ultimately unifying subtext. The consciousness creates order from chaos; there is no inherent order to be found in its own terms. There are no facts; there are too many truths for truth. Reality is no more than the sum of perceptions of an individual at the precise moment that they are engaged in the act of perceiving. Those perceptions may then be interpreted or reinterpreted by subsequent acts of expression, but the reality constructed is self-conceived and self-fulfilling. Brautigan, like other postmodernists, "refuses to connect what does not connect" (Crouch 400), and seeks no ultimate cohesion in the scattered impressions he has to work with. Every image and every impulse is for him relative, is informed by a myriad of other images and impulses. There are no logical connections to draw between them, merely contextual, often random ones. It follows, therefore, that everything is both subjective and notional. Authenticity, the measurement of whether something is accurately portrayed, becomes a redundant concept because accuracy is a redundant concept. Hutcheon terms postmodernism "resolutely contradictory" (1) precisely because it permits, simultaneously, any number of complimentary or conflicting claims upon the meanings inherent in any social or artistic statement. For Brautigan, as for the wider counterculture, it is apparent that "all have equal access to [any] event" (Roszack 149), all have equal claim upon the substance of that which they are experiencing.

Trout Fishing in America and *A Confederate General from Big Sur* are suffused with challenges to the notions of authenticity and authority. Brautigan deconstructs history, and debunks capitalism – "USED TROUT STREAM FOR SALE", "MUST BE SEEN TO BE APPRECIATED" (*Trout* 139). Time itself unravels under even the most cursory scrutiny: "Seagulls: past, present and future passing almost like drums to the sky" (*Confederate* 15). Chapter four of this thesis analyses the author's depiction of time throughout his work. Brautigan sees time as another of society's monolithic constructs. The linear, sequential and divisible nature of time as it is commonly perceived in mainstream society does not resonate with his

theories of subjective perception. Instead, Brautigan constructs a postmodern model of time, a geographical model where all moments – past, present and future – relate in a complex network to forge instances of primary awareness. The reality of existence, he asserts, lies in the moment: the immediate now in which everything that constitutes the experience and knowledge of the individual is brought to bear microcosmically. Such a deconstruction of temporality is the logical extension of Brautigan's other postmodern methods and his affinity with the counterculture. To free the consciousness, the ordering principle of linear time must be broken in the same way that the narrative structuring of history must be broken. Simple cause and effect can be discarded, and with them simplistic notions of morality. For Brautigan, time is "the edifice" that Roszak speaks of (55), the keystone of social values that must have its foundations destroyed before something new can be built.

In exploring time and the moment, Brautigan finds another theoretical framework that promotes his notion of concurrent perception. As with postmodernism, which all the sources close to the author (Keeler, Abbott and Barber)[6] claim he appropriated from its cultural manifestations rather than from a direct theoretical source, Brautigan's adoption of Zen Buddhism seems to be informed by a secular manifestation rather than any theological source. Chapter five investigates how he utilises the tenets of Zen to further tackle the deconstruction of logic and to investigate the principle of momentary awareness as the truth of consciousness. As will be discussed, he does not enter fully into the mystical or ritualistic aspects of the theology. Indeed, those elements he does requisition from Zen Buddhism seem almost a natural evolution of his method, so concerned is this spiritual framework with the indistinguishable juncture of the individual consciousness and its wider environmental context. Zen is a natural vehicle for Brautigan's message, and another manifestation of the tenet of inversion whereby reality becomes the result of an internal process rather than an external absolute. Or more precisely, reality becomes the method by which one engages with the world, the instant in which stimuli and perception

[6] It is Keith Abbot's contention that the postmodern elements in his work were influenced by the popular culture of the sixties when postmodernism had already been appropriated by cartoon makers, comic book artists, even journalists. (Interview, email, June 2004).

coalesce to create of unrelated phenomena something whole and resonant. Brautigan evidently finds in the principles of the Zen koan an affirmation of his own assault on the limitations of logic, constructed as they are to pose questions that cannot be answered literally. They point beyond meaning, as Brautigan's language points beyond meaning. From the evidence of his poetry, however, it is the Haiku form that really piques Brautigan's artistic interest in the intricacies of Zen. The verse of poets such as Basho and Issa is intrinsically concerned with the synchronicity of experience, the deceptive interplay of occurrence and cognition, of perceptual cause and effect. Even the most simple representations are rendered infinitely complex. The skeletal form of the Haiku is such that it triggers a sharp emotive response that must move beyond the finite number of words presented on the page in order to achieve any sort of satisfactory resolution. In other words, the technique seeks to push the consciousness of the reader outwards from the observation of the poet into an infinite universe of possibility. As D. T. Suzuki states, Zen and Haiku both strive to pique a state of awareness that has "no dependence upon words and letters" (176). Haiku is the perfect companion to Brautigan's postmodernism in that both methods seek to trigger in their audience an awareness of their own stake in defining the world. They may approach this impulse from different ends of the scale – the minimalism of the Haiku and the chaotic multitude of signifiers inherent in postmodernism – but they are ultimately means to the same ends. Brautigan even manages with some success to reconcile the two forms in his poetry, creating what initially seems an oxymoron: the postmodern Haiku:

> Propelled by portals whose only shame
> is a zeppelin's shadow crossing a field
> of burning bathtubs (Brautigan, *Rommel* 33)

This fusion of Haiku and postmodernism works precisely because the two artistic approaches share a common purpose. They are each suffused with just enough ambiguity and just enough metaphorical potency to coerce the reader into a process of rationalisation that paves the way for an awareness of that rationalisation. Both fit

comfortably with Brautigan's theoretical project, which can be best described as a promotion of self-awareness as prerequisite to true individual liberty.

Brautigan's hypothesis then is that every individual arrives at a definition of reality rather than being presented with one. They do so instinctively, and are therefore perpetually engaged in a process of reduction which spins form from chaos. There is contraction occurring through the application of prior knowledge and the manipulation of complex stimuli into comprehensible tropes and archetypes. It is an illustration of Jungian psychology at its most visceral: "underlying instinctual pattern[s]" (Jung *Psyche* 114), common approaches that are brought to bear in the process of ordering, sequencing and categorising events. Chapter six concentrates on Brautigan's direct engagement with the process that we term understanding, in explicitly Jungian terms. Timothy Leary described his experimentation with LSD as a means to the "cellular and neurological merging of archetypes" (Torgoff 71), and Brautigan, too, in a more measured manner, addresses archetypal concepts in his narratives. It was the gnarled root of the self that countercultural figures such as Leary, Grogan, Dylan, and indeed Brautigan, knew they must analyse and dissect in order to free themselves from the "inarticulate assumptions and motivations that weave together the collective fabric of society" (Roszack 143). In his work, Brautigan utilises the cross-cultural theory of archetypes, as presented by Jung, to illustrate commonality within a single cultural environment. The effect of this is to reinforce the symbiotic relationship between the individual and his contemporary world. For instance, he can describe a woman as "a composite of all the beautiful girls you see in all the cigarette advertisements" (Brautigan, *Revenge* 39), an image that immediately resonates with several generations of Western consumers. If anything, it resonates more profoundly than any classical allusion to beauty would, thereby serving to equate the pop culture reference with anything commonly held as more aesthetically satisfying. Again, this is entirely in keeping with the countercultural view. The motives of the counterculture, multi-faceted as they were, ultimately sprang not from a desire for physical revolution but rather from a reactionary impulse triggered by dissatisfaction. It was generation that had tired of being told what and how to think. It was a generation that viewed authority with suspicion and was not convinced that the

elected professional classes to whom society had "surrendered their responsibility for making morally demanding decisions" (Roszack 22) were any more capable of making them than they were.

Brautigan goes one step further with his analysis of archetypal patterns, however, aligning them with the patterns and codifications evident in genre fiction. He seeks to use generic conventions as a way of establishing intellectual frameworks that he can then rapidly deconstruct. To this end he mixes genres, writing a Gothic Western, a Historical Romance, a Perverse Mystery. One of the most successful is the private-eye novel *Dreaming of Babylon,* in which the highly stylised ideals of the protagonist perpetually collapse under the weight of the more granular and pedestrian concerns of daily life: "It's hard to find people to kiss when you haven't got any money" (31). Tzvetan Todorov asserts that "genres communicate indirectly with the society where they are operative through their institutionalization" (19). In fact, genre seems to work precisely as a microcosm of a wider cultural awareness. Both are underpinned by a set of predetermined rules of engagement. To existence, as to a genre novel, the individual brings his expectations. These expectations are set by previous experience, prior exposure to signs and symbols and culturally conditioned knowledge regarding the likelihood of meanings and outcomes. Engagement with one's physical environment is, after all, "nothing other than the codification of discursive properties" (Todorov 18). By undermining the rules of genre via comedy and farce, Brautigan imbues the reader with a sense of the arbitrariness with which they attempt to rationalise their awareness and comprehension of the world. Essentially, Brautigan's aesthetic intent revolves around the explosion of the myth of received meaning. When the individual perceives in a manner prescribed to him by others, he is effectively disenfranchised from his own purpose, his own being. He will only engage with his environment in a meaningful and rewarding manner when he is once again empowered to do so on his own terms. The great paradox in the author's work is, therefore, that Brautigan attempts to reinstate this autonomy in the medium of writing – a medium which effectively perpetuates reality as a representation of someone else's personal vision. To some extent this seems an almost insurmountable problem: all Brautigan has to work with are words; metaphors and allusions of his

own devising which somehow must attempt to point the way beyond their immediate significance and encourage the reader to construct his own method of perception. It is precisely because of this limitation in the form in which he is working that the author is so keen to appropriate existing intellectual mechanisms as vehicles for his message.

Whilst genre lends itself to the illustration, and deconstruction, of inherent social and psychological boundaries, it is the seemingly innocuous device of the joke that allows Brautigan to most successfully derail complacent logic. His utilisation of comedy, and specifically surrealist comedy, is discussed in chapter seven. As a writer seeking communicative efficiency, Brautigan was aware that jokes follow a common construct: they establish a premise and then confound anticipation. They already work in precisely the same manner that any successful attempt to debunk logic would have to work, and Brautigan's utilisation of them demonstrates his talent in the most articulately succinct light. "The worst thing I ever did was getting as poor as I was now" (18) his narrator proclaims in *Dreaming of Babylon*. The critical component of the technique, here and elsewhere in his work, is intellectual inversion. In this instance poverty becomes an ends that someone would aspire to, a conscious decision that can be looked back on as a bad one. The inversion itself represents the potential of non-literal thought, and thereby the potential of singular perception. Once he has established this, Brautigan begins to move beyond the simple comic construct and to employ ever more outlandish and complex illogical cognitive alternatives:

> I wanted electricity to go everywhere in the world. I wanted all the farmers in the world to be able to listen to President Roosevelt on the radio. That's how you look to me (Brautigan, *Revenge* 61).

There are seemingly no limitations to the latent power of the imagination in such passages as this. It logically follows, therefore, that there *are* no limitations on the manner in which perception can draw upon imaginative impulses to create abstract, lateral, and absurd connections between disparate impressions. Nostalgia can be linked to physical stimulus as it is above precisely because they are each conceivable notions. That simple commonality is all that is required for the individual psyche to begin forging links and connections. The conscious and subconscious minds are a

maelstrom of different codes and comparatives and contradictions, and when the restraints of acceptability are cast aside – that is, what is commonly held as plausible – anything becomes possible. In Brautigan's work the individual is free to create his own reality in any manner he sees fit. He need not conceive in the terms he has always known, or in the terms of others. Those terms only exist for communicative convenience. They are constructs and there is no reason why one's own constructs are any less sufficient.

When taken as a whole, Brautigan's entire agenda centres around perceptual freedom, the primary role of the individual psyche in defining the world, and the transitory immediacy in which awareness exists. In chapter eight it is asserted that this objective in Brautigan's work inevitably leads to a suffusion of autobiographical content. In order to represent the mechanisms of a consciousness at work, the author is obliged to utilise his own consciousness, and to demonstrate it interacting with the circumstances of his existence. Unlike other autobiographical projects, however, Brautigan's is not a linear exposé of all that has happened to him. It is instead an illustration of his conscious and unconscious mind at work within the context of the moment. Each perception of the poet, every passing impression of the narrators of his novels, is filtered through the immediacy of the present tense, of now. Their engagement with the precise instant of awareness is very much like the effect of light refracted through a prism whereby the stimulus enters on one façade and a spectrum of responses is produced. Some of these are emotional responses, some intellectual; what emerges on the other side is an array that ranges from personal experience, through cultural conditioning, to unshackled imaginative possibility. The past, including the past of the author himself, is deducible from the writing rather than laboriously extrapolated. There are persistent indicators of idiosyncratic responses, personality traits, and the psychological tics of the author. It is no coincidence, for example, that several of Brautigan's characters display symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder. Numbers and statistics are a recurrent theme:

> She tries to get things out of men
> that she can't because she's not
> 15% prettier (Brautigan, *Rommel* 6)

Indeed, numbers and statistics are again examples of the social drive towards quantification. They are ultimately meaningless as they are based on arbitrary foundations. They are manifestations of "the buried premises from which intellect and ethical judgement proceed" (Roszack 50). Yet many of the author's characters find peace in the simple act of counting. They count punctuation marks in texts; they count random articles present in their immediate environments; they even count the progress – chapter by chapter, page by page – of the works they are narrating. There is solace to be found in the consumption of received wisdom. Yet this solace is destructive, is precisely that which must be surrendered in the process of liberation.

The counting of physical attributes is a documented symptom of OCD, a condition often mistakenly identified in the earlier part of the twentieth century as schizophrenia. Brautigan was himself, of course, diagnosed as a schizophrenic in his youth. This extrapolation onto the page can therefore be viewed as the author practicing what he preaches, so to speak, applying the same self awareness that his work seeks to initiate in others to his own self representation. It lends weight to the idea that perception is a state in which nothing is truly divisible. In Brautigan's work, every particle of prior knowledge, whether it be cultural memory, emotional residue, or even personal neurosis, is brought to bear in every instant to every response. Ultimately, his point about singularity is quite simple: this is how consciousness works. The evidence in Brautigan's writing is simply too compelling to refute. Yet there seems a persistent cultural belief that our responses to the world should be, and can be, purely rational and appropriate (where appropriateness is defined by narrow sociological contexts: the roles individuals are expected to assume socially). Reason is, according to Robert Pirsig, "emotionally hollow, esthetically meaningless and spiritually empty" (120). He contests that it has been promoted as the primary mechanism of being because "the system demands" it, demands that we "live meaningless lives" (104) in order to serve the greater capitalistic good. Brautigan's work seeks to illustrate that to persist in this manner is to deny one's own uniqueness, to deny oneself a wholeness of being, a synchronous unity of the self and the universe to which one should be entitled above all else.

What Brautigan achieves, perhaps more successfully than any other author, is an articulation of the aim of the counterculture to free its members from the capitalistic and material repressions of their existing cultural reality. Whilst the Diggers assumed a direct strategy in the construction of alternative commercial modes of being, Brautigan approached the problem much more esoterically. He attacked the foundations of his readers' perceptions and prompted them towards personally resonant ways in which to view, in which to define, their world. Understanding that this encouragement to self-sufficiency would be a complex intellectual exercise, he sought to implement his agenda in ways that would be comprehensible to his audience. He therefore appropriated existing artistic and philosophical methods to better transmit his agenda into the popular consciousness. Postmodernism, Zen Buddhism and surreal humour are all intrinsically tied to the zeitgeist of Brautigan's countercultural landscape – he recognised this and utilised them all accordingly. This appropriation granted him access to a willing and receptive audience, one he could then engage in the mechanisms of his writing – the language and grammar, the ink on the page, the very methods of articulation and awareness – in order to make them aware of their own part in this process. He highlighted for them their own perceptual mechanisms, enabling them to understand that it is they who control the manner in which they perceive. It is not the perception, or the stimulus that triggers it, that controls who they are or how they respond. "We have the power to transform our lives into brand-new instantaneous rituals" (109), he declares in *The Abortion*, insisting that we have a responsibility to take control of our engagement with the immediate moment, the transitory instant of now. We have a responsibility to do so because upon this control rests the future of our preconceptions and the key to our evolution of self.

1. The John Lennon of the Hippie Novel: Brautigan, the Beats, and the Counterculture

> [...] there was no way of getting used to the ceiling. It existed beyond human intelligence and co-ordination (Brautigan 50).

The intangible nature of Brautigan's ceiling muse in *A Confederate General from Big Sur* encapsulates perfectly Theodore Roszack's categorisation of the American counterculture as something akin to "a medieval crusade: a variegated procession constantly in flux" (48). A "total rejection" (44) of the technocratic and capitalistic values of the preceding decade it may well have been, but it was ultimately, he concedes, a period of rebellion which lacked focus if not intensity. In his extensive treatise on the subject, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, he veers between a celebration of its lofty social purposes and a more candid analysis of its likely origins. Rather than a genuine politicised revolution, Roszack attributes its genesis much more prosaically to the "permissive child-rearing habits" of the previous generation and a resultant "anaemic superego" (30) of their collective offspring. He paints a picture of a whole new generation of self-righteous and hedonistic teenagers with no real ambitions beyond those of self-gratification. This illustration, however, should not be taken as proof that the countercultural movement existed as nothing more than a manifestation of self-indulgent teenage angst. As Emmett Grogan points out, "the material affluence of America was permitting many of the young people to live off of society's surplus" (319), and why should they not do so, why should that surplus be wasted, untouched? In fact, it seems precisely to be the advent of the American Teenager, a defined period of stasis between adolescence and adulthood, that led to a more focused questioning of social values. The countercultural generation may well have been "stranded between a permissive childhood and an obnoxiously conformist adulthood" (Roszack 35), but the delay in transition is precisely what gave them the opportunity to ponder upon it, to analyse their social role, and then to decide to "strike [...] beyond ideology to the level of consciousness" and to "seek [...] to transform [their] deepest sense of the self" (Roszack 49). After all, without the leisure afforded him to stare at his ceiling, Brautigan would not have had the opportunity to arrive at

his conclusion that it existed beyond human intelligence and comprehension. It is the freedom to muse that first unlocks the potential to question.

If the material origins of the counterculture were situated in the affluence of Fifties and Sixties America, the intellectual seeds can be identified in the Beat, or Bohemian, movement that immediately preceded it. Roszack himself concedes this point, drawing writers such as Kerouac and Ginsberg into his debate. Indeed, he holds the poetry of the latter up as a method of communicating what he terms "the new consciousness", the very root of the countercultural perspective (129). The point is that alternative models of thought already existed in the work of these authors, in the artistic and psychological spaces they inhabited. It is evidently these Beat ideals – intellectual liberty, the synchronicity of philosophy and experience – that informed the early attitudes of those that followed. Brautigan is no exception to this. It is ironically not his first novel, although it is his first published, but *A Confederate General from Big Sur* is immediately identifiable as a pseudo-Beat text[7]. It begins with a rather typical premise: a pair of destitute friends grow tired of poking around San Francisco and decide to travel down to "the Grand Hotel of Big Sur" (75), called there by nothing more than the "strange compelling power that draws people" (53). Immediately, parallels can be drawn between these characters and the protagonists of novels such as *Go* or *On the Road*, who "operate [...] on feelings, sudden reactions" (Holmes 35), who are not sure whether they are "going to get somewhere, or just going" (Kerouac 22). There is the same carefree manner, the same deliberate lack of focus as they drift towards vaguely anticipated experiences which will be all the more valued because they will not be forced into being. It is a vague "lust for freedom" (Holmes *Nothing More to Declare* 111) that can only be satisfied by random adventures that spring organically from "the raw immensity of the American night" (Holmes *The Horn* 38). Brautigan's characters inhabit the same intellectual landscapes as those of Kerouac or Holmes. The invocation of Big Sur suggests that they inhabit the same physical landscape also. Certainly, these characters of all three authors are borne of the same concerns. They have names "made for [them] in another

[7] *A Confederate General from Big Sur* was first published in 1964. *Trout Fishing in America* was not published until 1967 although it was written in 1961.

century" (*Confederate* 65); they look for cigarette butts and find "not a damn one, and the end of an American dream" (92). They are the "end product[s]" (81) of an accumulation of cultural existence, the children of American history. Lee and Jesse echo Kerouac's narrator of *Lonesome Traveller* as he leans back and "feel[s] the warp of wood of old America beneath [him]" (38). This sense of lineage is critical to both writers; it is essentially the method by which they define their characters and define themselves in relief against a vast cultural landscape. At the end of this cigarette butt American dream there is very much a scramble for alternate meanings, for a significance to lives that are rapidly running out of precisely this commodity. There is in all these characters a "longing to do or feel something meaningful" (Holmes *Nothing More to Declare* 122). The rampant consumerism of the Fifties, it seems, had become as apparently superficial as its slick façade, and it is therefore hardly surprising that these writers would attempt to reach back beyond that era to a grittier, less polished reality. Brautigan, like Holmes, is all too aware that "the valueless abyss of modern life is unbearable" (Holmes 126) and casts about for something to offset this. What he finds is a vague historical notion of "American spirit, pride and the old know-how" (Brautigan *Confederate* 81). It is a frontier, folklore heritage that his characters seek in themselves, an adventurous and resilient tenacity that appeals more to their sense of worth and worthiness than aluminium kitchen appliances and suburban etiquette.

In many respects, it is difficult to conceptualise the Beats satisfactorily because the categorisation incorporates so diverse a group of writers that their interests are inevitably myriad in nature. However, it is possible to define a core of common interests against which perhaps a tenuous definition of the Beat ethic can be established. Perhaps the best illustration of this lies in *Go* by John Clellon Holmes, a book often attributed as the first Beat novel, with its recurring imagery of "clutter[s] of ash trays, empty beer bottles, odd volumes of poetry" (16). There is a focus on "energy, a manic verbal energy pouring out of the mouth, a feverish energy of mind with which words cannot keep pace" (Holmes *Nothing More to Declare* 53); an engagement with enthusiasm, intellectualism, sensualism – "that inexhaustible flux of a consciousness in the act of exploding outward" (Holmes 53). There is a duality to

the Beat experience; a synchronous participation in the immediate moment – the party, the drinking, the cigarettes – and in a much loftier, much more noble, poetic truth. Pleasure is both physical and intellectual at the same instant. One without the other is an incomplete experience: rapture can only be attained if the senses and the mind are stimulated in equal proportion. This is why only the sensual rhythm, the melody and musical craft of jazz can send the character Hart in *Go* into a state of euphoria - "Y-e-s! Blow! Blow!...You know who you are" (139). "Jazz is primarily the music of inner freedom, of improvisation, of the creative individual" (Holmes *Nothing More to Declare* 124); it is the medium in which the senses and the intellect coalesce. As with literature, jazz has the ability, via music, to reference a vast array of cultural sources. "In Edgar's furious, scornful bleat sounded the moronic horn of every merciless Cadillac shrieking down the highway with a wet-mouthed, giggling boy at the wheel, turning the American prairie into a graveyard of rusting chrome junk" (Holmes *The Horn* 19). Sound can trigger memory, can trigger thought and intellect. Ginsberg addresses a similar interplay of stimulus and intellectualisation in his poem *In the Baggage Room at Greyhound.* Here, he focuses on a set of racks, "wooden shelves and stanchions" that are "God's only way of building the rickety structure of Time" (46). Human consciousness is a duplicitous entity, but it only reflects the composition of corporeal reality itself. The physical world, the matter that exists all around us, is indivisible from the projections and conceptualisations of the human psyche. As Kerouac puts it in *On the Road*: "everything I had ever known and would ever know was one" (147). Self and time cannot exist in a vacuum; they exist alongside the dusty racks of a baggage room, exist only *because* of this baggage room, given definition by the physical reality that frames them.

For the Beats, then, the physical and the intellectual are one and the same. It is a conclusion that is also picked up by Brautigan, albeit in a more self-referential manner. The premise he delivers to the reader is the end result of a very physical and mechanical process. It builds and emanates from a string of words pressed flat in ink on a sequence of pages. Brautigan was not only a writer but was also often involved in the physical side of printing, producing "Flash! bulletins" (Grogan 351) on a lithographic machine during the Digger sponsored Invisible Circus, and broadside

poems for distribution around Haight Ashbury. In *An Unfortunate Woman* the narrative constantly pauses to accommodate this fact, the narrator pausing to comment on how much of his notebook he has filled: "the first page has 119 words, the second 193" (76). For Brautigan it is almost as though the writing and the written were entirely non-distinguishable; they were merely different perspectives upon the same entity, the means and the ends rolled into one conceptual whole. The same applies to the imagination. Anything is possible in terms of human creativity, the author seems to assert, but it always begins and ends with a physiological act of perception. Brautigan often begins with a mundane list of statistics such as the number of words in a notebook, or the number of "punctuation marks in Ecclesiastes" (*Confederate* 62), and ends with a conclusion on the nature of truth such as that illustrated in the following section from *An Unfortunate Woman*:

> I divided my cash output, $40.00, into my total viewing time on the set, 6 minutes, and came up with a per-minute cost of $6.66. If I had watched that set for an hour before it died, I could have bought a brand-new set with the money it would have cost (97).

Here, the narrator of the novel attempts to rationalise the money he has spent on a defective TV set. The set breaks down after he has watched it for only six minutes so he divides the amount of money it cost him by the number of minutes it worked for to derive a unit costing. So far this is simple logic and a relatively meaningless calculation. Except that the narrator then makes a mental leap, inverting the statistic he has arrived at to identify that this unit cost, if prolonged from six minutes to sixty minutes, would exceed the price of a brand new TV set therefore rendering him naïve for buying a second-hand one. Of course, if the set had worked for sixty minutes it would not have cost the narrator any more than it did when it worked for six. But what Brautigan is doing here by effectively pushing the narrative outside the laws of mathematics and physics and logic, is illustrating precisely how the imaginative side of the human experience takes the factual as its stimulus and creates, sees, understands at a much more esoteric level. The author, he seems to suggest, cannot

exist outside of his environment. He is a product of his time and place and can only create out of this context, using this context and defined by this context.

There is of course in Beat literature a great paradox against which authors such as Kerouac and Holmes consistently find themselves pitted. One of the primary concerns of the movement is in the immediacy of experience, the transcendental synchronicity of feeling and understanding and knowing, the "IT" of *On the Road* (206). The Beat narrative and the motivations of the archetypal Beat character are hewn from this very quest to saturate the soul with all the stimulus it can hold, and yet it is a quest that can never seemingly be fulfilled. It is a means with no ends, an attempt to "go and never stop going till we get there" (238), except 'there' does not exist. If the essence of human awareness is both sensual and intellectual at the same time, then there is no process of becoming in such a literal or linear sense of the term. It is not that the sensual exploits of these characters lead to a deep understanding of life; the understanding *is* the sensual experience which in turn *is* the understanding of that experience. Being on the road, being in motion between fixed points and between absolutes may be a perfect catalyst for the synchronicity of being, but it is an inadequate metaphor for how this mode of being feeds itself. After all it does feed itself, perpetually. A complete and whole experience of existence in these terms can never lead to anything other than sequential experiences of the same nature. Progress becomes a redundant concept, which is something that many of the characters in Beat fiction struggle with. Even Sal in *On the Road* at one point remonstrates that they have all eventually "got to go someplace, find something" (116). Perhaps somewhat more prophetically, Carlo sees these exploits as but the precursor to serious consequences later on: "the days of wrath are yet to come" (130). There is a sense that the Beats unearthed a genuine theoretical problem in their attempts to transcend the cultural values of Fifties America, and yet did not manage to resolve the issue satisfactorily. Holmes himself concedes that his generation was one "with a greater facility for entertaining ideas than for believing in them" (*Nothing More to Declare* 113) and perhaps this is precisely because belief requires a satisfactory resolution of meaning; it requires purpose, and this is something his generation failed to achieve.

It is as good an indication as any of Brautigan's status as a post-Beat writer that he engages to some extent with this same paradox and manages to rationalise it much more successfully. He does this by inverting the process of awareness. He replaces the macrocosm of eternity that so preoccupies Kerouac and Ginsberg - "the skies that have a beginningless past and go into the never-ending future"; "a great endless universe with nothing overhead and nothing under but the Infinite Nothingness, the Enormousness of it" (Kerouac 36) - with the microcosm of the moment, the sum of everything that ever was as distilled into a single instant of time. This is a significant shift because it removes from the individual the primary focus and the responsibility of having to consciously engage with the world beyond. It is no longer a prolonged effort of will and energy to see and to understand and to be. It is no longer the projection of the individual psyche outwards, but a transfusion of the endless signs and signifiers of the wider culture channelling into the soul, permeating themselves into the fabric of each passing second. The moment becomes a maelstrom of images and implications and meanings as and of itself. Brautigan effectively moves away from Burrough's conviction in *Naked Lunch* that "The Word cannot be expressed direct" and can only be "indicated by mosaic of juxtaposition like articles abandoned in a hotel drawer, defined by negatives and absence" (98). The moment *is* "The Word", all that it contains are the meanings of everything – there is nothing more to grasp beyond what is there. It is a "complicated little life ballet" (*Tokyo* 35), sufficient in itself. For Brautigan, the moment encapsulates the natural state of being within which human intellect operates and within which ideas and conclusions develop and evolve. His characters are not "engaged in taking away/From God his sound" as the poetic narrator of Weiners is (27); his characters are their own gods, engaged in the creation of their own worlds, their own moments of "ever time" (*Tokyo* 115).

Of course, this approach generates its own complications, specifically a chaos of imagery, a myriad of conflicting influences and signifiers that become apparent in any one instant. There is no way to screen them or prioritise them because they are all equal in their claims upon the overall sensory impression that they combine to create. Indeed, Brautigan often experiments with this postmodernist, white noise effect,

"rummaging through the image reserves of the past" (Hutcheon 89) to present this notion of the individual as a composite of the totality of Western culture. It *is* specifically Western, specifically American, in his early work, with the narrator's friend transforming into "Frank Lloyd Mellon" in *A Confederate General from Big Sur* (85); with assertions that "the Missouri River [...] doesn't look like Deanna Durbin" in *Trout Fishing in America* (122); with Norman Mailer showing up in the beleaguered town of *Sombrero Fallout* to report on the carnage created there by its rioting citizens. There is a secular chaos in his choice of metaphors and descriptions which is in stark contrast to the Beats who sought spirituality and transcendence in their stimuli. Rather than watching for angels dancing over the fire escapes of New York, the narrator of *Dreaming of Babylon* obsesses over the old man in a deli who would look "just like Rudolph Valentino if Rudolph Valentino had been an old Italian making sandwiches and complaining about people having too much mustard on their sandwiches" (25). The approach is different, but the ambition is the same. Just as Kerouac and Ginsberg and Weiners sought out manifestations of eternity, "everyday is in eternity" (*Howl*, 27), so too does Brautigan. "He looks at life in terms of analogies", and whilst Bokinsky may see this primarily as evidence of the author "giving meaning to the meaningless" (97), it is just as surely an endeavour to find a linear cohesion, a dialogue between the past and the present we find ourselves in. There is an inherent timelessness to the human condition which unleashing the chaos of signifiers we use to construct comprehension illustrates perfectly.

Irreverence towards the traditional constructs of the literature that precedes him, however, is perhaps the key that links Brautigan's work to that of his immediate generational predecessors. Weiners asserts that he is "pushed on by the incompletion/of what goes before [him]" (30), but generally the irreverence of the Beats takes the form of a healthy questioning of the existing canons of art and literature. There is evidence they regarded them to mean nothing in and of themselves, and were freely available to be deconstructed and rebuilt in whichever way they saw fit. This is not to suggest that the Beats or Brautigan lacked respect for those artists that preceded them, but rather that they sought to re-evaluate and to reassess. For example, in *On the Road* Kerouac constructs a lineage of great jazz musicians from

Louis Armstrong, through Roy Eldridge, to Charlie Parker and the current musicians who are but the "children of the great bop innovators" (239). What is notable about this passage is the absolute respect and kudos afforded these musicians, a reverence usually reserved for discussion of the 'higher' art forms, such as literature, or painting, or classical composition. The inherent spontaneity of jazz had a real resonance with the Beat perspective. This is partially because it reflected back notions of spontaneity and freedom, and partially because it was as emotive and referential as literature. In Holmes' *The Horn* it is "fragmented, arduous, spaced with poignant and terrible intervals" (69); it can spark allegory when "somebody blew the loud chirrup of a barnyard dawn on his tenor sax" (124); it allows the player to "scorn those who listened, to mock them, and then himself, and finally even what he played" (100)". For the Beats it was essentially a multifaceted, complex and infinite form of expression, and "at the bottom somewhere there was song, the same song, the one song" (47). Brautigan is less selective, perhaps less precious in his elevation of pop culture motifs, as evidenced in *The Tokyo-Montana Express*: "maybe you like Shakespeare. Somebody else may care for Laurel and Hardy" (35). The critical difference is that he evidently did not feel the need to apologise for his exercises in aesthetic equality. Kerouac's carefully constructed lineage in the evolution of jazz as an art form contains almost an apologetic undertone, certainly a defensive premise. Brautigan's dichotomy is much bolder; it seeks to completely dispense with notions of aesthetic or intellectual merit. Some people may find Shakespeare funny, others may like slapstick. The two are equally valid proponents of the same principle so there is no point dwelling upon secondary considerations or counter arguments. Between Holmes and Brautigan there is evidence of an evolution in ideology, a movement away from a Beat 'alternative' to a more fully formed cultural perspective – a certainty in the equality of all propositions.

This is the cultural space that Brautigan occupies: the transmutation of alternative perspectives into an all encompassing mode of heightened awareness and social change. The inherent values of the Beat lifestyle, for instance, seem founded on a freedom to switch between different lives and lifestyles as dictated by whim. It is an existence imbued with impulse, and the freedom to sleep "eight hours (any eight) out

of every twenty-four" (Holmes *Go* 4). There is a disregard for the staid materialistic values of Fifties America, but no real desire to overturn them. As Holmes says, for a Beat "there is no desire to shatter the 'square' society in which he lives, only to elude it" (*Nothing More to Declare* 113). Even Mailer concedes this point, asserting in his essay "The White Negro" that there is no point trying to "interview a hipster because his main goal is to keep out of a society which, he thinks, is trying to make everyone over in its own image" (337). The movement was insular in many ways, concerned primarily with a very real desire to experience an 'authentic' reality. This is what leads Kerouac to life as a railwayman, or a sailor, or a forest fire lookout – it is a personal quest for meaning and satisfaction. The shift in Brautigan's counterculture lies in the realisation that acting authentically does not guarantee authenticity, that there is in fact no such thing as authenticity: the whole concept is little more than a psychological construct. Lee Mellon does not have to have fought in the Civil War to become a Confederate General; he becomes one by simply willing it. Hearron identifies this as a recurrent theme of Brautigan's work and describes it as a conviction that "the manner in which one thinks of and describes reality can alter reality itself" (26). In order for Kerouac to define himself as a railway brakeman, he has to become, at least temporarily, a railway brakeman. Lee Mellon can simply use his imagination, can imbibe notions of the civil war via some cultural osmosis, and simply proclaim himself a historical figure. It is a theoretical twist, one that dispenses with primary sources and moves swiftly instead to signs and signifiers. "The imagined likeness becomes a literal rather than metaphorical identity" (Hearron 25).

Of course, this evolution of thought would not have occurred had not the foundations been previously set. Intellectually speaking, the Beats undoubtedly paved the way for the ideological revolution that followed. The conviction below, set out by Ginsberg in his journal, is one which quite evidently foreshadows the radicalism of the emergent counterculture and its growing challenge to the very foundations of the dominant society: its laws and institutions; its morality and imagination.

> Educate the men to be themselves, their actions will follow more justly than/Law imposed on them from outside (170).

The intellectual encouragement for the individual to take an existential control of his existence, to take matters into his own hands, was a call answered by any number of countercultural groups. Perhaps most pertinent to Brautigan were the Diggers with whom he was loosely associated for a considerable period of time and who waged an outright war upon capitalism through their free-food and free-store initiatives. Coupled with impromptu, almost Dadaist, theatre performances in public places that involved unsuspecting audiences as participants, they attempted to broaden people's perspectives on the roles they had unwittingly assumed in the dominant social hierarchy. A sign in their free-store, for instance, read "If Someone Asks to See the Manager/Tell Him He's the Manager" (Grogan 374).[8] All decisions would often be turned over to a random individual who had entered this physical space and they would then, in theory, be coerced into contemplating what it was that dictated their suppositions on the roles of customer and manager, and on their role in any socially constructed relationship. The call to arms of the Diggers is reminiscent of Ginsberg's, albeit rather more confrontational in tone:

> ...this country is our country, and if we don't like it, then we should try to change it, and if we can't change it, then we should destroy it (Coyote 59).

Society is, in essence, the collective expression of the values of those individuals it comprises. Every single one of those individuals has the same responsibility towards how this expression is defined and employed. The responsibility is therefore a shared one, and it follows that the authority on how this end result is achieved belongs to everyone. Nobody has any greater authority than those around them, therefore all subjective claims on the form society should take are valid. Brautigan was only marginally associated with the Diggers, spending much more time "wander[ing] the Haight gravely peering at everything through round, frameless glasses" (Coyote 78).

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[8] The Free-Store was an initiative where goods were exchanged without the intervention of money. If somebody needed something that was available in the store they took it. If they had something they no longer needed they brought it to the store for somebody else to take. The concept was to liberate those living in Haight-Ashbury from the constraints of a capitalist system. However, the stock levels were generously supported by 'liberating' (or stealing) goods from different sources and simply making them available to anyone who needed them, thereby ensuring the initiative was in fact dependent upon the capitalist society it opposed (Grogan 374).

He didn't appear regularly on the front lines, but his perspective on authority is no less vehement for all that. Nobody has any real authority, according to Brautigan, or at least, nobody has any *more* authority than anybody else. His narrators certainly do not: Jesse in *A Confederate General from Big Sur* guesses that a neighbour of his is an actress, but concedes that "one might as well believe that as anything else because there [is] no way of knowing" (25). More importantly, it seems that the author is not even able to control his own narratives: they can spiral quickly out of control, they can accelerate towards "186,000 Endings per Second" (142), or they can continue to write themselves even after the author has thrown them into the wastebasket (as occurs in *Sombrero Fallout*). What Brautigan demonstrates in these passages is the division of responsibility that exists between the author and the reader when a concept is communicated textually. Just as the conclusions that can be drawn from the ending of *A Confederate General from Big Sur* are endless, and just as the narrative of *Sombrero Fallout* constructs its own meaning, so too is any text subject to the suppositions of those at both ends of the communicative process. Neither party in the transaction can necessarily claim greater authority on the meaning of the exchange than the other, because the meaning is not something laid down to be picked up. The meaning is inherent within the interaction itself, borne of the interpretation as well as the intent. In the words of Roland Barthes, the "text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning" but rather "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (146).

Brautigan uses precisely this conflict in his work to derail the reader's perception of himself as a reader, as a consumer of words and knowledge. An example of this can be found in the eponymous poem that begins "the net wt of winter is 6.75 ozs" (12). Here, because the taste of toothpaste reminds the poet of winter, it follows that the tube of toothpaste is a physical manifestation of the concept of winter, and the weight of that toothpaste is therefore the weight of the concept. Of course, this assertion is arbitrary and the line of reasoning is deliberately laboured, is absurdist in nature. Brautigan does not seem to want the reader to take his theory seriously - toothpaste is quite obviously not the same as winter, and nor is 6.75 ozs the weight of four months of the year. But what he is doing is to challenge the cultural expectations

of the reader, expectations that have germinated within a dominant aesthetic framework which suggests that winter is a season and toothpaste is a cleaning product and the two concepts do not and cannot exist as signifiers of each other. Because the poet as an individual cognitive entity has made a connection here, and because the poet has equal share in what can and cannot be so, this makes it a valid connection. Nobody is really in a position to contradict its aesthetic merit. Or in another poem, 'Nine Crows: Two out of Sequence':

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 6, 8, 9 (117)

It is ridiculous to assign crows a logical sequence, and equally absurd to determine how two of them could be out of order. But then this is precisely what Brautigan is implying: definitions of basic logic, definitions of anything, are all to some extent arbitrary. These definitions have been initiated and refined by a process of cultural acceptance that has perpetuated itself over such an extended period of time that even the notion that they may be wrong, or inadequate, or inapplicable lies back in the mists of cultural evolution.

It is perhaps also of significance that both these passages appear to reference, indirectly but nonetheless clearly, works of other established American literary figures. The extrapolation of the weight of winter brings to mind Emily Dickinson's poem which asserts "the Brain is just the weight of God" (312). Brautigan is a documented Dickinson fan and the postmodern assertion in the power of imagination that emerges from his conceit is entirely in keeping with Dickinson's equation of the intellect to God. In the other instance, his nine crows recall the thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird as espoused by Wallace Stevens in his poem of the same name. The affinity between Brautigan's point and that of Stevens is perhaps less clear, although the conclusion of the latter that "a man and a woman and a blackbird/Are one" (93) does seem in keeping with the former's view of cohesion when the elements of a perception become indivisible from the entirety of that perception. The passing reference to these two authors perhaps reinforces the earlier point that Brautigan's countercultural agenda is one which recognises its place within a historical context, and one which feels free to tinker with the existing canon in a somewhat irreverential

manner. In any case, both of the logical conceits presented from Brautigan's poetry are examples not of some sophisticated social theory on the author's behalf but rather an agenda in his work to pique the intellectual capabilities of his readership. A single instance of the implausible, if delivered intriguingly, is enough to trigger a contemplation of the very concept of implausibility itself and what that actually means.

How do concepts become implausible; what are the criteria utilised in this process? Brautigan's technique in both of these extracts is reminiscent of Derrida's aesthetic "event" (351), "the moment when [...] everything became discourse" and it became apparent that "the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences" (354). Winter can therefore assume a net weight because within the system of differences, within the discourse, the concepts can coalesce quite easily. In essence, all products of narrative and cognitive process are relative. It is apparent in the two poems quoted that the foundations upon which the principles of logic, plausibility and realism are constructed are little more than a set of assumptions, an unquestioning acceptance of arbitrary principles. Marc Chènetier terms it Brautigan's "persistent speculation on the very nature of the real" (21). Just like the Diggers, or indeed the Yippies or the Pranksters, the author is attempting to lead his readers to the edges of their socially defined perspectives, allowing them to look out beyond the perimeter of their assumptions at something potentially liberating.

It is precisely this alignment of Brautigan's critical technique with the haphazard intellectual agenda of the counterculture during the Sixties which identifies him as something more than a mere Beat imitation. However, it is far from easy to classify him as a prototypical 'hippie' writer, if such a thing exists, as his commentaries do come from the fringes of the counterculture rather than from one of its political centres. Of all the publicised countercultural groups The Diggers were indeed the one that he had some association with, but they were part of a much more contradictory and complex whole. Hoffman's claim that "fantasy is the only truth" (66) is something Brautigan would have found a real affinity with, but the axiom of the Yippies that "once one has experienced LSD [...] action is the only reality" (9) is

something he couldn't have reconciled himself to because of his reactionary stance on drugs. Even those groups that shared the view that LSD was the acceptable catalyst of expanded consciousness had conflicting ideologies. As documented in Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Ken Kesey and his Pranksters visited Tim Leary's refuge Millbrook, only to find Leary unwilling to meet them as he was engaged at the time in "a very serious experiment" (99). The Pranksters eventually left, disappointed that their inclusive social ambitions were not matched by the academic snobbery of the Leary crowd. "This was Millbrook, one big piece of uptight constipation" (99). Indeed, Hoffman claims of the "hippies and Diggers" and different factions in general that all "are myths: that is, there is no definition" (26). The point is, there was no clear and cohesive ideology within the counterculture; all claims on a sociological solution were subjective. Therefore it is hardly surprising that there is no clear and cohesive ideology in the way Brautigan reflects back the values of this counterculture. His association with the mongrel horde is impossible to rationalise. It is only in the core values of many of these groups – liberty, individualism, freedom of expression – that his affinity can be identified, but his representations of the society around him retain a critical objective ambivalence.

Indeed, within the entire body of his work, Brautigan tackles the crux of the Sixties scene, the commune, only once, and even in this text his ideological stance is far from clear. The community represented in his novel *In Watermelon Sugar* is so overtly counter-cultural, so inherently alternative, that it generates a sense of expectation that its author will utilise it to express some fundamental opinion about the social concept it represents. But this does not happen because Brautigan's primary interest remains not in the promotion of the hippie way of life, but rather in a dissection of the human experience within a contemporary setting. Schmitz describes the novel as a critical examination of "the myths and language of the pastoral sensibility that reappeared in the sixties" (125) rather than as a piece of social commentary, and this indeed seems to be the case. In the work Brautigan utilises what appears at first glance to be an extended allegory to convey his message, but because of the anti-authoritarian stance inherent in his narrative technique this becomes a very odd allegory, a vague and almost inscrutable one. It is perhaps the best example of

what Bokinsky identifies as Brautigan's tendency to "verge on the incomprehensible" (99). Allegory by its very definition requires a particular focus of subject and stringent control of signifiers to convey its ultimate message, and Brautigan's technique seems essentially incapable of this. After all, if the narrator and the author have no authority, if meaning is something that congeals in the intellectual space between writer and reader, then a highly charged sequence of resonant metaphors is surely doomed by an impending chaos of freeform interpretation. Such a breakdown is precisely what happens in this instance. The novel's 'message' ultimately collapses under the weight of so many oblique signs and signifiers and the ambiguity inherent in the author's autonomy of representation:

> In watermelon sugar the deeds were done and done again as my life is done in watermelon sugar (33).

The organic material from which everything in the commune is forged is not elaborated upon in the text, it just is. It provides no real clues as to the origins or the aspirations of the society beyond a vague connotational nod to self-sufficiency and agrarianism. Perhaps the sweetness of the sugar indicates an idyllic environment, or perhaps one which is overly sweet, sickeningly so. It is impossible to conclude.

Much more significant is the name of the community, and the relation to it of the narrator. He does not live directly within the town of "iDEATH" (1), he is not absorbed into the collective social identity in the same manner as his neighbours. Yet the significance of this social distance remains unclear. On the one hand he does retain some vestige of individuality, but it is an individuality without a satisfactory identity. "Somebody asked you a question and you did not know the answer" – "that is my name" (4). Identity within a social context was a significant intellectual concern of the counterculture at the point in time in which the work was published. The Diggers, for example, named themselves in accordance with very specific aspects of their lives: Peter Coyote attached to himself the name of his spirit guide as glimpsed in a vision; Emmett Grogan forged his name from a sense of his origins, "double sixes, boxcars and a good, solid, Irish name" (Grogan 291), before then giving his identity away to

make himself anonymous.[9] Perhaps Abbie Hoffman's designation of labels is closest to the narrator of *In Watermelon Sugar*. On the one hand he is happy to endow his followers with the term Yippie, but then states "There never were any Yippies and there never will be. It was a slogan YIPPIE!" (121). There is a distinct agenda at work here in the self-appointment of identity, a concerted effort of the individual to sift through what Hermann Hesse calls the "pieces of the distintegrated self" (192) to create a model, a cohesive entity. Or to conclude that there is no cohesion as far as identity goes, it is all a notional exercise in futility because the self is too complex to rationalise in that way. The agenda remains the same: to liberate oneself from designations that have been previously assigned and to emerge through a sense of self-awareness into a new self-styled existence. Brautigan's narrator of *In Watermelon Sugar*, however, quite conspicuously fails to follow suit. He is incapable of forging himself an identity and his natural state of being is one of emptiness, vacuum, and powerlessness. He relies upon others to define him. "My name depends on you" (4); it is the reader who bestows him with a self, the reader alone who can create for him a personality and a soul. It is only via interaction with a wider social sphere, Brautigan appears to contest, that identity can begin to form, in action and reaction to the stimulus of others. On the one hand this would seem to deconstruct Grogan's and Coyote's exercises in self-aggrandizement, or to affirm the arbitrary naming practices of Hoffman, but on the other it validates the communal model of identity that is entirely in keeping with the social perspectives of them all.

Brautigan goes no further, however, in any kind of celebration of community as a unilaterally positive influence. Within the commune itself, there is a veneer of balance and order, built as it is upon the premise that "everybody should have something to do" (13), everybody should contribute, everybody should form a part of the multifaceted whole that is the social entity. But underneath this sense of shared responsibility are indications of something much more ominous and sinister. The community is founded on the principle of the lowest common denominator and its

[9] In Grogan's case there is a duality of effect if not of purpose, because he succeeded in making himself both anonymous and synonymous by empowering others to take his identity. He effectively made it impossible for anyone to believe he was who others said he was, but also ensured his own status as legend (Grogan 409).

inhabitants pride themselves on the knowledge they have lost, on their tangible intellectual regression. "We call everything a river here" (2) confides the narrator, evidently because distinctions between what is a river and what is not have become unimportant. Such a lack of precision may seem rather idyllic, except that it is then revealed that nobody has "the slightest idea why they built the aquaduct" (84) in the town, and it then becomes apparent that this flippancy is not borne of mere idealism but rather a wilful disregard of their own history and heritage. The people of iDEATH do not know who they are. The narrator is in fact not the exception in his lack of identity: he is an embodiment of the rule that governs this place. The only tangible sense of self is offered in the characterisations of inBOIL and his gang. inBOIL himself is initially presented as a reactionary figure, a sort of old backwoodsman or moonshiner who "make[s] whisky from things" (61) and slowly gathers an army of likeminded individuals to him in what can be best categorised as a threatening right-wing faction within the settlement. What they begin to do, however, once they have gathered on the edges of the town is to undertake a largely intellectual exercise, delving into the vast resource of a local rubbish dump, a historical archive of "forgotten works" (69), and they utilise these artefacts to reconstruct a notion of their own origins. This effort is in sharp contrast to the perception of history held by the rest of iDEATH – "things that happened just a few short months ago" (60) – and as he proceeds to challenge the inadequate social definition bestowed upon him by his peers, he grows in stature and power. When contrasted with the inquisitiveness of inBOIL, the rest of iDEATH come to resemble the Eloi in H.G. Wells' *Time Machine*, their placidity and indifference as cloying as the watermelon sugar itself. They have no inclination towards anything but the hedonistic pleasures of the immediate present; they exist in a state of abject apathy. But if these are the Eloi, it does not automatically follow that inBOIL and his disciples are the Morlocks. What they learn from the forgotten works is never made explicit in the text, but they certainly use this knowledge to challenge the dominant ideology of iDEATH. "This place stinks" they claim, "this isn't iDEATH at all" (64), "what a mockery you've made of it" (89), "bring back iDEATH" (93). The reactionary faction of the commune transform themselves into a group who are not reactionary at all, but are in fact more radical

than the social majority. They are not proposing a return to any pre-existent culture, but rather a reassertion of the founding principles of this cultural alternative as it was once defined. They have ceased to be reactionary; they have ceased to be counter-revolutionary; they are now the new revolution and as such challenge the latest dominant majority. It is precisely this transformation in inBOIL and the purpose of his followers that seems to hold the key to Brautigan's stance on the ideal of communism and on the counterculture itself. Revolution consists of little more than a challenge to the mainstream social mode of being. If a previous revolution created the new mainstream mode, then subsequent challenges become the new countercultures. If social evolution is seen in this light, there is in essence no difference between radical and reactionary politics. The two are infinitely interchangeable, the distinctions between them arbitrary at best. According to inBOIL, "iDEATH [is] all wrong" (76), and it does not matter why he thinks it is all wrong; his is just another opinion in the ongoing struggle to rationalise social structures into tenable solutions for harmony and individual freedom.

Ultimately, the narrator of *In Watermelon Sugar* sides with the residents of iDEATH and looks on as the counter-revolutionary band of dissenters proceed to hack themselves to pieces. But he does so out of disaffection rather than any real conscious conviction, and it is much less clear where Brautigan's loyalties lie. On the one hand, inBOIL and his followers "cut off [their] noses" (94), perhaps symbolically to spite their own faces. They have a role in a relatively free society and they throw it away. But then, in a truly free society they should be able to cut off their own noses, "cut off their thumbs" (94) if that is what they choose to do. It is telling that they have to withdraw themselves from the community at iDEATH in order to pursue their forages into the forgotten works and to stop washing and to drink whisky. They cannot follow these impulses in the confines of the 'free' society, which seems the crux of Brautigan's point: that individual freedom and prescriptive communal ideals are in essence incompatible, whatever those communal ideals may be. Like Peter Coyote's counterculture which was "neither more nor less ethical, diverse, or contradictory than the majority culture" (xiv), the issue of cultural modes for Brautigan is beyond absolutes such as right and wrong and is a much more complex issue about consensus

and liberty. The point here is that freedom can only exist if there are choices to be made on an individual level about how those individuals wish to live. Any society, be it a capitalist model or one of the countercultural models, retains and develops a set of "inarticulate assumptions and motivations that weave together the collective fabric of [that] society" (Roszak 148). In other words, all social models demand a subversion of individual desires to a collective consciousness, a communal ideal. True individual freedom cannot exist in any of these superficially different versions of social order, and Brautigan, it seems, recognises this and acknowledges it in the text of *In Watermelon Sugar.*

In this he shares one other perspective with Grogan and the Diggers, with Kesey and Hoffman and even Leary. All these groups realised that it was "the foundations of the edifice" (Roszak 55) of society that they were seeking, not the trappings of a culture that could simply be addressed in the same terms of conduct laid down by that culture. They too recognised that politics, a sense of moral right and wrong, was an insufficient medium, a redundant concept borne of the existing social order. Yet they maintained that it was possible to develop a cultural unity out of their "ideological mongrelism" (Coyote 17) and "create free life amid the desert of industrial capitalism" (Coyote 106). Brautigan does not seem quite so sure, precisely because he recognises these recurring patterns in his countercultural society and because he cannot conceive of a new social age in the same way. His work does not signify the potential of starting again socially, with a clean break from the past and all that it signifies. His work is too intrinsically tied to the past. "My grandmother [...] shines like a beacon down the stormy American past", asserts the narrator of 'Revenge of the Lawn' (1). The end of a relationship, he writes elsewhere in the same collection of stories, is "an old song that's been played on all the juke boxes in America" (18). For Brautigan, there is no new start, no clean break from history. Human nature persists, history persists, every passing moment influences the next and the next and the next. Everything that has ever happened is happening now and will be happening forever. This is why the past encroaches upon the community of iDEATH, this is why a century's worth of popular culture references force themselves into each of the author's metaphors. American culture, majority or countercultural, is a culture which

feeds upon itself. Everything is connected; the whole is an inter-relation of the parts and there is no getting away from the parts without fundamentally misunderstanding the whole. An elegy on the practice of trout fishing in the work of the same name identifies a "clear snow-filled river acting as foundry and heat" for "trout steel" precisely because these trout in a stream in Oregon are part of the same America that produces steel up in Pittsburgh and cars in Detroit and hippies in San Francisco (3). The rural–industrial–historical–sociological–revolutionary–reactionary–political-experimental beast that is Brautigan's cultural reality is precisely this cross-threaded and complex and there is no way to easily simplify its intricacy. A commune is not going to change this cultural complexity, nor is a wilful ignorance. Brautigan, it seems, identified the fatal flaw in the counterculture's premise long before its chief proponents did, which makes him arguably the most astute of the chroniclers of this social period. The Digger archivist asserts on the movement's website that Brautigan "was both a Digger and not at the same time" (1), which is perhaps a polite way of saying that he was not a Digger at all. As we have already established, he was not a Yippie, or a Prankster, or a disciple of Leary. He remained perpetually aware that the counterculture was comprised of much more than the ideologies of any one group and he ultimately transcended their differing objectives to become a chronicler of the broader counterculture as it evolved beyond the social agenda of the Sixties, and on into the disillusionment of the Seventies, as typified by his novel *Willard and his Bowling Trophies*. The eponymous papier-mâché bird and these gaudy trophies are emblematic of Brautigan's world. They are icons of the clash between a waning counterculture and the reassertion of suburban values – symbols of social evolution and thus, by implication, symbols of everything that has occurred for society to reach this precise point:

> [...] it is very important for Willard and his bowling trophies to be a part of everything that has ever happened in this land of America (110).

Willard is "Abraham Lincoln" and the trophies "his generals during the Civil War" (109). This ongoing cultural friction is the new Civil War, and as absurd as the triggers for this allegory appear to be, the synchronous elevation and devaluation of

metaphors gives these disposable artefacts a significance they lack in and of themselves. As with *In Watermelon Sugar*, the allegory is not dogmatically pursued, but as the narrative unfolds it becomes increasingly clear that Willard acts as a pivot between two distinct social modes of being: the artistic spontaneity and aesthetic values of the counterculture and the materialistic and competitive ideals of the majority culture. He is an aesthetic object, a model that has been created for no other purpose than his creation. The bowling trophies are symbols of some twisted sense of achievement; they are the prized possessions of three brothers who have spent several "lost years looking for the[m]", changing in the process from "wholesome, all-American boys" (27) into cruel, obsessive thugs.

The implications are obvious: the materialism of conventional Western society is eating away at these characters, destroying their innocence, their morality, and their humanity. Of course Brautigan does not make the dichotomy between his two sets of characters in the novel as simplistic as a criticism of mainstream culture and a celebration of counterculture. His representation of Bob and Constance is a much more complex dissection of their values than a straight juxtaposition with the unsavoury Logan brothers. Their lives are far from idyllic: they too have been through an arc of character development brought on by obsession. In their case, it is not materialism but rather sexual experimentation, their "Story of O game" (35). In an attempt to explore the limits of experience together, they have become involved in sadomasochistic practices. By the time the narrative commences, this has ceased to be a new experience and has instead become a rather staid ritual, one they perform without any real fervour – "he put the belt down beside her on the bed. That part was over" (36). There is a law of diminishing returns at work in their behaviour and an over-exposure to sexual innovation has rendered that innovation routine. Like the Logans, they are unsatisfied by the ideals that inform their being. Both sides of the cultural coin, Brautigan suggests, are essentially the same. Materialism has led the brothers to violence because of the fragility of the concept of possession; sexual liberty has led Bob and Constance to an impasse where novelty has become pedestrian.

Brautigan deconstructs in this text the most fundamental value of the counterculture itself – that of personal freedom, of emancipation from restrictive social values. The sexual liberation of Bob and, in particular, Constance has a very real consequence and at the crux of the matter is whether or not the satisfaction gleaned from their experimentation justifies the results it has on their lives. Not only does sadomasochism lose its appeal for the couple, it actually becomes indicative of their life together, a loss of focus and a growing disillusionment. Constance's infidelity leads to a contraction of genital warts which cannot be remedied. Their obstinacy and constant appearance in the narrative comes to symbolise the permanence and the severity that repercussions brought about by self-exploration can have on the future of an individual. The amount of concern and thought applied to them by the two characters becomes indicative of, and a contributing factor to, the loss of Bob's intellect. His fetishism is in reality merely an allegory of his psychological atrophy. At precisely the same rate as he loses the ability to concentrate on simple tasks such as bringing his girlfriend a glass of water, his obsession with a collection of "ancient poetry" accelerates (67). His observations of the physical world lose momentum and become rather conservative, stuffy, repetitive. It becomes increasingly apparent in the text that his plight symbolises a wider shift in countercultural attitudes as the optimism of the Sixties gives way to a subsequently more disillusioned decade. At some point Bob was a bright, educated and entertaining young man, living with his partner, moving towards a state of sexual and psychological experimentation. Now he is a dejected individual "thinking about people who lived in another time and were dead now and he grieve[s] for them and himself and the entire human condition: the past and future of it all" (28).

Willard and his Bowling Trophies is very much a text concerned with the comparable states of innocence and awareness, and sits as a companion piece to *In Watermelon Sugar* in that it analyses the benefits and limitations of each. Is it better to push self-exploration to its limit in order to be free, or is it more comfortable to accept the boundaries inherent in a less self-aware state? Innocence is a concept fundamentally at odds with the countercultural point of view because it presupposes ignorance to be a virtue. As previously indicated, the "mockery" (89) the majority has

made of their commune iDEATH in the novel *In Watermelon Sugar*, a place where no-one has "the slightest idea why they built [an] aquaduct" (84), stands as testament that this is not the case. Admittedly, the innocence on display here is a deliberately engineered one, a conscious disregard of prior knowledge, a wilful ignorance, but the result is the same. The inhabitants of iDEATH are terrified that knowledge will corrode and break down the comfortable simplicity of their vacuous lives. Which is not an unfounded fear: it is a standard theory of physics which states that "disorder, or entropy, always increases with time" (Hawking 161). In social terms, entropy is defined as the disintegration of communal ideals and laws.[10] Because ignorance is a founding social principle for iDEATH, information represents the greatest threat to this principle. Brautigan unearths the same truth in *Willard and his Bowling Trophies* where the accumulation of knowledge in a personal sphere is also beset with this same descent into disorder. The greater the knowledge on any supposition, the less absolute that supposition becomes; the wider the experience, the less singular or comprehensible it is. "The second law of thermodynamics" (Hawking 161) is at work not only in the physical laws of the universe, but in the psychological and sociological processes of the twentieth century as well. inBOIL's increasing knowledge of the past leads him to an irreconcilable frustration about the realities of the present, a frustration which proves ultimately destructive. Bob's mind atrophies and his intellectual methods descend into chaos because they are subjected to a wealth of experiences that overwhelm his otherwise focused take on the world. Likewise, the socio-political thrust of the counterculture loses momentum as it diversifies and flounders amongst the vast array of sensations on offer. Both *Willard and his Bowling Trophies* and *In Watermelon Sugar* provide the key to Brautigan's significance as the complete countercultural writer because they each demonstrate his willingness to engage with the theoretical issues of the movement as well as challenging them. The exploits of the Beats and the hippies, the experiments of "feelings, sudden reactions", social alternatives, LSD, "expanding these far out of perspective to see in them profundities" (Holmes 35), is but one side of the equation. On the other side can be found the consequences these experiments have on human consciousness and social

[10] www.dictionary.com defines entropy as "a doctrine of inevitable social decline and degeneration".

harmony, on identity and meaning and purpose. Brautigan is not afraid to tackle these conceits in his work, nor to seek a literary method suitable for this myriad of causes and effects and intricate theoretical tangents. It is his persistence in this quest and this commitment to finding a technique that adequately conceptualises the period that makes Brautigan a truly representative author and one who transcends a designation as flippant as "the John Lennon of the hippie novel" (Bradbury 217).

2. A Topless Place Over in North Beach: Brautigan and gender in the counterculture

> Somebody has got to start designing communities in which women can be freed from their burdens long enough for them to experience humanity (Greer 343).

Although associated with the activism of the Sixties, the women's movement began to gather momentum rather late in the decade. For Brautigan, issues of gender do not really materialise in his work until some way through the following decade. In his early writing women are little more than props for the male protagonists, mere extensions to the male characters, appendages which illustrate their sexuality and identity: "Lee Mellon held up two fingers and Elizabeth's hair affirmed it" (126). In this example between Lee Mellon and Elizabeth in *A Confederate General from Big Sur* there is an attempt at some sort of symbiotic relationship, but the male remains the point of focus, the female still little more than a respondent trigger upon his perception. Whilst the communes and the counterculture at large sought to create "social paradigms as free men and women" (Coyote 70), and Brautigan indeed attempted to document this endeavour in novels such as *In Watermelon Sugar*, the reality was that gender roles within the alternative community remained relatively static. As Peter Coyote himself admits, the substitute society he and his comrades imposed was no less "contradictory than the majority culture" (xiv), and no *more* so than in its engagement with notions of sexuality and femininity. "Feelings of anger and jealousy were the legacy of a decadent bourgeois heritage", he writes of the ideal of sexual freedom, "unless of course, they were one's *own* feelings" (236). In other words, the ideology of sex was no different from the ideologies of communal ownership, shared power, social equality. The countercultural community purported to want these tokens of equality and yet never really found itself in a position where its members had to relinquish any personal gains in the name of the ideal. Except, of course, in the arena of sexual politics, where it was most evident that beneath the various manifestos and grand rhetoric remained the same human frailty and ego-centricity. Specifically, it was the challenge to the male ego that undermined the

otherwise aspirational principles of equality. The strain that sexual liberation put on female emotions was considered of no significance – as expressed in Lauri Umansky's work, women "were pressured to be available sexually to all, without birth control which was considered 'unnatural'" (27). For Brautigan, just as for the male contingent of the counterculture, the figure of the female remained a component of his masculine vision. Just as history and time and social power structures are represented in his work as external manifestations to be deconstructed in the processes of male perception, so too do women remain a cultural phenomenon to be decoded and reinterpreted. They are the subject of an intellectual exercise rather than equal campaigners for their own perceptual freedom.

Nettie Pollard reveals in an interview for Jonathon's Green's book *It: Sex Since the Sixties* that her prevailing experience of male/female solidarity took the form of an attitude best expressed in the sentiment: "you're not liberated unless you have sex with me" (11). Sexuality was used in the counterculture as a tool to coerce women rather than a means to liberate them. Significantly, it seems it was the only area in which they were allowed to exhibit any freedom from social precedent, although they were expected to exhibit it strictly on male terms. Lee Mellon's neighbour Elizabeth in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, for example, is presented as the most empowered woman imaginable in the context of the novel because she has cast off the moral constraints of mainstream society and supports her children by working as a prostitute. She is very relaxed about her profession and the author is at pains to avoid any ethical perspective on her choice of career. She retains her dignity in the text as an individual exercising her right to earn a living by whatever means are available. Her economic freedom is, however, a decidedly secondary factor in her liberation: the character's sexual 'freedom' is what the author foregrounds in his depiction of her. In fact, the economic element of the situation is presented in a rather telling manner by Brautigan. Elizabeth is not an artist in her field, she is not even a craftsman, she is instead "a highly paid technician who work[s] three months out of the year, saving her money" (73). She is no different from any other individual working in a service industry, performing the same task again and again by rote for somebody else's gratification. She is not free by any definition of the

term, but is instead just another labourer enslaved to an industry and a wage. Jesse and Lee Mellon are unemployed, perhaps even unemployable – romantic scoundrels and masters of their own destiny. The women around them do not have the same luxury, are not at liberty to define themselves as they see fit against the myriad of cultural and historical reference points that take time to coalesce into an identity. In other words, Jesse and Lee are precisely what they claim to be: "the dominant creature[s] on this shit pile" (103), whereas Elizabeth is not.

A similar fate awaits Vida in *The Abortion*, another of Brautigan's early novels. Written in the mid-Sixties, or what Ted Polhemus would term the earlier of the two Sixties, the "James Bond, *Barbarella*" (Green 19) period, it focuses intently upon the invention of the pill and the sexual awakening amongst the youth of Sixties society. Vida is presented almost as a pin-up girl for the mini-skirt generation, an archetype of femininity for this period. She is "developed to the most extreme of Western man's desire in this century for women to look" (Brautigan 43), but is uncomfortable with her sexuality, shy and awkward and desperate to avoid contact and situations of a sexual nature at any cost. Her boyfriend, the narrator of the novel, is similarly introverted. Cloistered away in a secret library, "some kind of timeless thing" (75), he avoids the realities of the world and uses his "strange calling" (91) as an excuse for his psychologically adolescent state of being. The main trajectory of the text is the narrator's awakening, his progression into adulthood. Sex is, for him, the catalyst that brings about responsibility and interaction with the wider world. After getting Vida pregnant and being forced to take her to Mexico for an illegal abortion, he finds he cannot re-enter his library, can effectively not go back, and has to face up to a future on the outside. Despite the pregnancy directly affecting Vida, the reader is never given any insight into her state of mind or her journey into her new world of responsibility. She is told by the narrator that she "should use the pill after [...] the abortion" (71), it is not a decision she comes to herself. Indeed, her fate is presented in the novel almost as an afterthought. Whilst the narrator is marveling at the wonders of The Beatles and the diversification of society in Los Angeles and San Francisco, he mentions in passing that Vida is "working at a topless place over in North Beach" (225). She has evidently overcome her innate shyness and is now confident about her

pronounced sexuality although there is no elaboration on precisely how this has happened. Again, she has become 'liberated', but only in sexual terms. Presumably now on the pill, she is free to have sex without fear of pregnancy, and by some illogical leap therefore free to display her body to men for money.

Germaine Greer defines female emancipation as "freedom from self-consciousness" and "freedom from being the thing looked at rather than the person looking back" (10). Vida has achieved precisely half of this aim, which is admittedly better than achieving nothing but illustrates perfectly the limitations of countercultural thought in the period. Women were encouraged to partake of some of the freedoms on offer, but certainly not as many freedoms as the men and evidently only those that the still dominant gender perceived to be of benefit to themselves:

> If a guy made a pass at you and you said no, you got a speech about his version of socialism, which included your body as part of the state property he was entitled to (Green 63).

It is evident that a distinct sense of subservience still existed during the period: women were free to serve male sexual needs indiscriminately but they remained the passive partners, the disenfranchised when it came to their relationships with men. Sex remained an interplay of desire and status. All that seems to have shifted in the counterculture is the emphasis of how this status was made manifest. Along with all the other perceived hypocrisies of the majority culture was rejected the notion of the trophy wife, the acquisition of a desirable female to affirm the male ego. What replaced it, however, was not an alternative based on equality, simply a rather more casual application of these same motives. If every man was now entitled to his own destiny, his own identity and his own definition of success, he was entitled also to whichever sexual partner happened to fit into his latest notion of what was owed him.

A further example of Brautigan's strict adherence to the gender zeitgeist can be found in the first of his mixed genre novels *The Hawkline Monster*. Here the two main protagonists, Cameron and Greer, are contracted by the Hawkline sisters to kill a monster that is terrorising their family home. One of the twins goes out to find the mercenaries disguised as an Indian and seals the deal by having sex with them in turn.

It is what she expects she will have to do to entice them back with her, and they are hardly surprised by it either, accepting it unquestioningly as part of the bargain. The woman they both have intercourse with, however, is not a woman at all, but rather a projection of exotic male fantasy. Almost as soon as the act is over the assumed identity of the Hawkline sister is dispensed with: "Magic Child lived as long as she was supposed to live" (88). As soon as she has fulfilled the male desire she has set out to elicit she dies and "a second Miss Hawkline [is] born" (87). What this encounter effectively represents is the blunt reality of female liberty, the limits beyond which emancipation cannot truly progress. The only freedom Miss Hawkline is allowed is sexual, and so it is this alone that is available to her when she attempts to manipulate a situation to her own ends. Sex is her only bargaining tool, the only method she has to subvert the power of the male and take control, albeit indirectly, in any given circumstance. What is even more interesting about the exchange is the fact that Cameron and Greer are so nonchalant about it all. They are not particularly interested that their mysterious, sensual Native American guide has disappeared: "if she wanted to be an Indian that was her business" (22), just as her decision to suddenly *stop* being an Indian is entirely her business. They do not engage with her as an individual, as a personality, but merely objectify her for their own ends. Once these ends have been met they could hardly care less. As an object she is disposable, there are other objects to pique their interest: "Magic Child was dead and it did not make any difference in which Miss Hawkline she was buried" (120).

Perhaps an inevitable consequence of women capitulating to the use of sexuality as their only mechanism of power was the devaluation in the period of this particular currency. Certainly, this seems to contribute to Cameron's and Greer's rapid loss of interest in the topic. "Sexual liberation is not personal liberation", insists Jane Mills, an interviewee in Jonathon Green's book *It* (100). To "devalue [...] sex", she asserts, (100) is essentially counterproductive as it does not lead to some tantric realisation of the self but only to a greater sense of isolation. Richard Whitfield observes in the same text that "increasingly [partners] tended to treat each other sexually rather more as objects than persons" (20), the consequence of their failure to engage emotionally being that they remained locked into their own individual needs

and desires. There was a loss of shared destiny, no respite from the loneliness of being, simply a "heart [...] like a sea gull/frozen into a long distance telephone/call" (Brautigan, *Rommel* 45). There is no communion in a relationship such as those illustrated above, no common understanding, merely a perpetuation of self-gratification, of egoism. This is especially true on the part of the male protagonist who seems to have considered the fulfillment of his transitory needs as little more than a service to which he has an entitlement as a consumer. The following extract from one of Brautigan's poems illustrates this very well:

> When she has finished folding all my wounds
> she puts them away in a dresser where the
> drawers smell like the ghost of a bicycle.
> Afterwards I rage at her: demanding that her
> affections always be constant to my questions (Brautigan, *Rommel* 73).

The poet here "demands" affection, "demands" that his every need be met, and still feels justified in raging when they are not. The relationship he has with his female muse is defined strictly in his terms, is one-sided and misogynistic in nature. The arrogance, the unquestionable expectation, the refusal to invest anything beyond immediate self gratification – all of these signify an unhealthy individualism. There is a narcissism on display here where the good of the one outweighs absolutely the good of the many, or even of the few. This self-centeredness is all a far cry from the communal ideals earlier expressed by Peter Coyote or the unity of a "single popular class to fight for equality, forming a united front" (Grogan 378). It may well be "in the nature of revolutions to thin out as they spread" (Green 73), but it seems the sexual revolution of Brautigan's Sixties condemned itself to failure from the very start by refusing to instigate any significant shifts to the relational dynamics of gender.

In the world of the commune, all the evidence points towards a resilience of the old gender roles. Women "not only did all the traditional women's work, cooking, housekeeping, etc.", but were also, as expressed earlier, "pressured to be available sexually to all" (Umansky 27). Sexual repression was acknowledged to be a principle component of the existing capitalist structure, a means towards "its own perpetuation" (Umansky 24). Whilst it was clear, however, that this had to be transgressed in order

to build a new sociological order, it seems that gender equality on a more ideological level was simply a step too far. Possibly because the existing inequality ensured that necessary work, supportive of the comfort of the male, was still being performed by someone else. It was a convenient arrangement which allowed the men to challenge and critique the Judeo-Christian work ethic at their leisure. Brautigan's representation of relational dynamics in the commune is at least one which recognizes that nothing much has changed. The attitudes of the old majority culture, its terminologies even, remain very much intact. "How well Pauline has slept since we have been going steady together" (128), claims the narrator of *In Watermelon Sugar*. He has just left one relationship, an act in which he, the male, did the rejecting, and now he is in another where his female partner is dependent upon his presence and his patronage for her own well being. The use of the term 'going steady' is interesting also. There is a disjuncture between the free love ideal and this almost archaic notion, this remnant of the mainstream culture. It is a 1950s ideal – dating, going steady, marriage, children – still at large in this brave new communal world. Whilst he does not attack gender politics directly in this novel, Brautigan nevertheless signifies that they form one of the many elements that are contributing to the failure and impending collapse of the iDEATH commune. inBOIL commits suicide because the values of the place are being compromised, and it is no coincidence that the narrator's former partner takes her place with the founders of the rebellion. She too becomes intrigued by the forgotten works and the trappings of a culture other than the one she inhabits. Something is rotten in the counterculture's Utopian society – if it was not there would not be so many incited to counter-revolution – and gender inequality seems one of the symptoms.

There is, however, a clear trend in Brautigan's middle period and later work towards both an acknowledgement of gender issues and an appreciation of the social imbalance between the sexes. He draws attention to the objectification of women by men in *The Hawkline Monster*; he acknowledges that the principle of equality is not working in this free society of *In Watermelon Sugar*; and in *Willard and his Bowling Trophies* he tackles the power struggle between the sexes head on. Bob and Constance's bondage games stand as the epitome of male/female relationships

wherein the man acts out the dominant sadist role and the woman takes the submissive masochistic one. That their sexual enthusiasm has drained away is significant because it has two distinct causes. The first lies in the fact that Constance has upset the balance of this arrangement by being proactive, by having an affair and contracting a sexual disease that has left Bob with "warts in his penis" (23). The second, and consequential, factor arises out of the distance between the lovers imposed by the need for condoms, a physical barrier that has drawn attention to the act of sex as precisely that, an act, a repetitive ritualistic routine. Their "Story of O game" (35) is an attempt to redress the equilibrium, to reaffirm the old hierarchy by taking it to its ultimate expression, and it is not working for either of them. Once Constance has exercised her right as an individual on a sexual level, the old power structure cannot be resurrected: it is ineffectual and simply not sufficient. Their roles have changed and a new dynamic must be found. That Bob fails to adapt leaves her frustrated and leaves him feeling "incompetent" (14). At the core of the novel are essentially two juxtapositions. The first exists between the liberal lovers and the embittered Logan brothers, young men with conservative values struggling with the sociological shifts going on around them. The second comprises of, on one side, Bob and Constance and their bondage games, and on the other the Logans' parents and their inability to even talk to each other anymore. Despite the generational and cultural divide, their respective situations are not so very different. Whilst the younger couple struggle to connect, both sexually and intellectually, the Logans too are evidently trapped in their own spheres of isolation. Mrs. Logan fills the void of their union with constant baking whilst Mr. Logan looks on uncommunicatively: "It was easier for him to live with all those cakes and pies and cookies than it was for him to say anything to anybody about anything" (145). The implication is clear: whilst the specifics of Bob and Constance's predicament may be caused by the affair and subsequent sexual infection, the root of their problem lies much deeper than this, is in fact an issue that has existed prior to their relationship, stretching back a generation and beyond. The existing model upon which the gender roles of both these couples are constructed is simply not fit for purpose – it does not lead to a fulfilling existence, for either respective partner.

There is no disguising the critical significance of sex, however, in the period. Brautigan's shifting approach to the topic reflects the struggle going on within his social environment to find a definition for the role of sex, a satisfactory conclusion on how it should fit into a liberated lifestyle. "Fuck me like fried potatoes" (*Mercury* 61) demands the author in the poem of the same name, extolling his partner to satisfy a fleeting need he has identified, one with as little significance as a passing mood for a particular food. On the one hand, sex should be casual. On the other hand, there is evidence that it was seen as part of a considered approach in the rejection of the attitudes of mainstream society. As Matthew Russell sardonically puts it in Jonathon Green's book *It*, "one generally believed that this was changing the world, that if you fucked the girl that you rather fancied with the big tits next door in Kathmandu Valley on Buddha's birthday then that actually was going to make nuclear bombs disintegrate" (11). In any case, neither delusion could last. *Willard and his Bowling Trophies* was written and published in the early seventies, and it signifies a slight but perceivable shift in countercultural attitudes towards sex and sexuality, a shift that continues throughout the next half decade of Brautigan's work. There are no conclusive answers to the gender crisis in the novel, but at least there is an appreciation that a crisis of sorts does exist. "Those days were gone" (34) affirms the narrative voice when recalling the casual sexual and intellectual energy exhibited by Bob and Constance in their earlier years. Such an acknowledgement hardly constitutes a burgeoning feminism, but it is nevertheless a step towards a late awareness of the issue.

Moving forward from this point, the marginal representation of women in Brautigan's texts is steadily replaced with much stronger, self-sufficient female characters. These women no longer service the transient sexual desires of men but actually dictate the terms of their relationships. They are capable of breaking men's hearts and shattering their lives by a focus upon their own needs. *Sombrero Fallout* followed the 'Perverse Mystery' of Bob and Constance in the mid Seventies and centers on a failed, rather than a failing, relationship. The narrator's girlfriend has left him and he is so distraught that he wanders aimlessly around his apartment, checking for food and abandoning various attempts at writing a new novel. In fact, he is so

preoccupied with his grief that his latest narrative is left to write itself. While he frets and despairs, she is quietly sleeping in her bed, "dream[ing] of Kyoto" (93), "her breathing [...] slow and steady like the ticking of a clock in a castle" (60). The existing sexual power structure is not just in crisis here, it has actually polarised. The narrator's girlfriend does not need him, for material support or for self definition. He is now the dependent partner and struggles to exert his own identity in her absence. His sense of male bravado has not deserted him entirely: at one point he decides to visit another woman he knows, to reject his deeper emotions and return to a more superficial attitude towards casual sex. He calls this woman, gets ready to leave and puts his coat on. However, he in fact does none of this because he has only imagined it. His pretense at a distinctly masculine brand of apathy falls apart very quickly and he tumbles back into the void of his thoughts and regrets. The significance of this episode lies not so much in the fragility of the character's ego but rather the solution that he temporarily fixes upon for his troubles. The answer to his problems, it seems, is no more complicated than the substitution of one woman with another. It is almost as though he is no longer complete without a female counterpart, and it is the woman in his life that helps define him as an individual. She is now far from being merely a sexual prop, a disposable commodity, and has become in fact a critical factor in his own realisation of self. This idea of dependency is not necessarily a new development in terms of sexual relationships, but it is certainly a new development in terms of the male perception concerning these relationships.

In *Sombrero Fallout*, sex is no longer incidental. Long gone are the casual episodes of "beautiful, sobbing, high-geared fucking" (Brautigan, *Rommel* 85). Sex now has emotional consequences, and it has them because it is no longer engaged in by a male protagonist and an objectified receptacle but between two distinct individual personalities. Brautigan's descriptions of Yukiko in the novel are particularly telling precisely because of their detail. She is characterised in a manner in which no other female character has been previously characterised in the author's work. Her laugh is "like rain pouring over daffodils made from silver" (37); she undresses "like a kite" in a "warm April wind" (56); her voice is delicate but has "a strength to it that [makes] one realize why a teacup can stay in one piece for centuries,

defying the changes of history and the turmoil of man" (45). It can be argued that Yukiko represents what Germaine Greer classifies as the "rescue [of] men from the perversities of their own polarization" (112). A brutal imposition of Yukiko's equality with the male narrative voice is what is required to try and break the persistent gender model. However, this is scant consolation for the novel's narrator, and it offers no clues as to how the female can move beyond the "*passive* sexual role" (Greer 77) and still exist as a component part of a functioning couple. Yukiko as an individual disrupts the equilibrium of the narrator's sexual being, is incompatible with it somehow. Brautigan is evidently struggling at this point in his career to reach that definition of a new status quo in gender politics. He can hardly be criticised for his apparent failure, as Greer herself is forced to admit that "it is difficult [...] to suggest what a new sexual regime would be like" (368). Ultimately, *Sombrero Fallout* stands as a testament to a shift in attitudes to the female role in relationships that was occurring at the time of its writing and publication. Yukiko's characterisation offers no answers to the power issues between the genders, but it at least acknowledges a burgeoning independence that cannot be ignored and must be addressed.

In fact, it is an issue that Brautigan does not really address again so directly in his subsequent work. It remains an unanswered question for him. In *The Tokyo-Montana Express* all of the narrator's relationships become again superficial and transitory, and the relationships he has with women are no exception to this. He views them from afar, on the Japanese transport system, in cafes and restaurants:

> We met at a bar. We talked for a while. We had a few drinks. Then we went to her place (187).

His sexual encounters are conducted once again at arms length. All he can remember about the particular woman in the extract above is that they "made love and she had a dog" (187). This casualness does not necessarily indicate that the author, or his narrators, have regressed to their previous gender attitudes, with their penchant for new conquests, their penises like "the bow of a ship/touching a new world" (Brautigan, *The Pill* 12). There is, however, an inherent sadness to the encounters that pepper this later work, a very real despondency, a willingness to take whatever is

offered without any hope that it will yield anything more than a momentary relief from loneliness. Kevin Ring comments that outside his texts Brautigan "seemed to need casual affairs at the same time he wanted reasonably healthy relationships" (36), and the author's antics, whilst in relationships and otherwise, do seem to support this claim. Correspondence from Don Carpenter, sent to Brautigan in 1976, refers to the author as a "Brother in Sin" and makes reference to their shared practice of "picking up filthy sluts" (Carpenter). Evidence also exists from around the same period of extreme bitterness on the part of former girlfriends who resented the author's cavalier attitude to them. "Get out of my life and my telephone line", writes Siew Hwa Beh, "my life with you was a gothic tale". "Take your money and your little life and shove them both up your ass" (Hwa Beh). His body of work, when assessed aesthetically, seems to suggest that the author's attitudes were more complex than Hwa Beh's reaction implies. Brautigan's typical male protagonist is perpetually experiencing a crisis of adjustment, of balancing his own needs and his impulses with the needs and impulses of female counterparts. Interactions with women are expressed as "complicated little life ballet(s)" (*Tokyo*, 35), an image that suggests compromise and orchestration on both parts.

Carpenter, a close personal friend of Brautigan, attributes the author's string of affairs to his "desire to be loved" which "was so overpowering it inevitably drove his women away" rather than to a psychological need for new, transitory attentions (Carpenter). Even more significant than this explanation is the transition already illustrated that occurs in Brautigan's work as his career progresses; the author is constantly enhancing his personification of women, incrementally empowering the female characters in his texts, even to the detriment of his own male narrators. Whether this sexual evolution was reflected in his personal life is a matter of some debate. It is reported that he branded at one point the real partner upon whom Yukiko is based as "just a whore" and did little to redress the perception that she was a "beautiful Japanese gold-digger" (Thomas 20). This is hardly a celebration of her right to independence. What all these divergent impressions really demonstrate, however, is a contradictory nature to Brautigan's attitudes towards women. He seems to have retained an emotional confusion as to their role in his life and in the definition

of his identity, and this contradictory attitude is reflected back in the texts he produced.

The author's preoccupation with women does indeed remain a constant fixture in his work in one form or another. Perhaps most prominently they feature on the front covers of almost all his books, with each novel and collection of poetry sporting a different female model. Some of them were his lovers, some of them merely friends, but all of them expressive of an ideal of countercultural beauty. As Kevin Ring observes, the reoccurrence of the female image used in this manner "seems too obvious to be anything other than a deliberate policy on his part" (36). Precisely what this policy was is unclear, except perhaps when considered in the light of his daughter Ianthe's confession regarding her father's musical tastes. "He used to buy albums", she claims, "because of the girls on the covers" (Ring 36) and the most obvious conclusion to be drawn from this is that he saw the commercial potential and understood the innate capitalistic power of the female image when considering the sale of his own work. Brautigan was very much the driving force behind these cover models, personally offering Beverly Allen the job of modeling for *A Confederate General from Big Sur* and *Rommel Drives on Deep into Egypt* and even overseeing her wardrobe for the latter text. He prompted the use of a long raincoat and black boots to evoke Nazi stereotypes that fit the collection's title. The control he displayed leads back to Germaine Greer's complaint that women are trapped in the role of commodity, that they are defined by the consumerist demands of "a buyer's market" (Greer 41) and suffer ideologically as a consequence. Significantly, there are no hideously ugly women on the front covers of Brautigan books, no obese or unkempt women. When Brautigan appears alongside them he has an unbrushed shock of hair, an unmaintained moustache, ragged and ill-fitting clothes. He is not subject to the same standards as his pretty and stylish women. Interestingly, *The Hawkline Monster* was the first of Brautigan's books not to feature a female model on the cover of its first edition but rather an illustration intended to evoke the mixed genre content of the novel. In fact none of his work from this point on was marketed in the manner of his earlier books, with the exception of *The Tokyo-Montana Express*, which featured Nakai Keisuke, a Japanese bar owner and loose patron of the arts in Tokyo. Keisuke,

however, quite significantly featured on the back cover and her inclusion seems more of a tribute to Brautigan's existing canon than a reinstatement of his original sales tactic. The distinct switch in presentation can probably be explained by passing fashions as much as anything else. However, it also seems little coincidence that the cover artwork changed so markedly at precisely the point that the content within the texts was becoming more gender aware. It would be overstating it as an epiphany on the part of the author about the objectification of women, but it seems at least a considered exercise in subtlety. In the earlier works sex was just another facet of the author's haphazardly signified existence, so the promotion of women on the covers was perhaps inconsequential in terms of the themes or narrative thrusts of the work within. Once these themes start to become much more significantly associated with the issues of gender and sexual politics, a continuation of the same artwork would likely become aesthetically vulgar, and stylistically clumsy.

It was perhaps inevitable that Brautigan's writing would eventually attempt to tackle gender politics. Brautigan seeks throughout his work a definition of psychological wholeness, a synergy between the random events of existence and the completeness of the individual soul in its historical, cultural and intellectual contexts. As Michael Foucault asserts, sexuality is a dominant feature in this psychological landscape:

> It is through sex [...] that each individual has to pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility (155).

Sexuality has to be for Brautigan a significant component of the complex patterning that defines how one thinks, feels and reacts. It is an innate understanding of this patterning that informs his attempts at intellectual liberty. Elsewhere in his work, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, he engages successfully with procedures of sensory awareness, with the structures invoked in intellectual process, with the operations of the subconscious mind in a framework of time and history that informs its potential to be free. Gender, however, is a topic that he seems unable to address quite so succinctly. Feminists such as Lauri Unamnsky would undoubtedly argue that this shortcoming is precisely because of his maleness, that he cannot approach the

subject objectively because he is biologically programmed, as are all men, to "dominate and abuse women as they seek out the all-comforting mother, and then lash out when she proves, again, to be inconsistent" (141).

Such criticism seems on the one hand rather extreme, and yet at the same time seems to contain some element of truth, especially in what can be termed Brautigan's middle period – the aforementioned transition that occurs in his perspective on women throughout the novels *The Abortion* and *Willard and his Bowling Trophies*. In the first of these two texts particularly, the author seems to struggle with the duality of Vida's female role in society. She is a young and beautiful woman, she exudes sexual potency. Yet she is pregnant, a potential mother. Vida stands on the cusp of a great schism. Behind her lies her superficial sexual appeal, represented in the novel by the overt objectification random men in the street subject her to; in front of her lies the daunting archetype of the mother figure with its myriad of psychological connotations and emotive complexity. As Jung puts it, she is on the verge of entering a realm of "wisdom and spiritual exaltation", and of personifying "the abyss", all "that is terrifying and inescapable like fate" (Jung, *FA* 15). The decision to terminate her pregnancy is absolutely a joint one taken by both her and the narrator and is undoubtedly intended to indicate a burgeoning female independence in the period, a liberation of women wresting back the reigns of their own destiny. However, there is likewise a sense that this character is pulled back from the brink by her author. This primeval sense of matriarchal dominance is not in tune with the young, liberated sexual flower that is Vida. She is the personification of the countercultural female ideal and Brautigan cannot allow her to transgress beyond this. *The Abortion* is, after all, a 'Historical Romance', set against the great tradition of epic encounters such as those of Romeo and Juliet or Troilus and Cressida. Vida is the countercultural manifestation of the beautiful virgin muse and it is surely too subversive a concept for the greatest love story to unfurl between a young hero and a mother. Maternity would give the female character independence, personality, significance beyond the mere aesthetic of her beauty. A muse is, after all, not really an individual, but merely a device to reflect back the characteristics of her hero. She is the spur for his 'great deeds', the trigger for his quests, an empty vessel that is filled with the ideals of the

male pursuing her rather than a character in her own right. Vida is no exception. She does not have to kill herself when her honour is compromised because the society she inhabits has alternatives available to her and her lover, but beyond this social concession not much has changed. She is an object within the context of her culture, and she remains an object at the end of the novel and beyond. Brautigan's concessions to her do not extend beyond this classification because they cannot. He is male, his narrator is male, and Vida is something other to them. Their primary engagement with her is lies in beholding her, perceiving her, idealising her. She can only be appropriated into the male consciousness on those terms. It is her sexual anima, her ability to carry male values projected onto her that the author is interested in and it is this which perpetuates her status as an object and seals her fate.

Ultimately, Vida is a textual device rather than a character. She is a projection of the male ego. When he moves away from using women in this way in his texts, Brautigan uncovers an equivalent collapse in the confidence and assuredness of his male characters. In the poem 'Cashier', for instance, the poet is left unsettled and unnerved by the actions of a woman who is significantly individual and alien to his perception:

> The young Japanese woman cashier,
> who doesn't like me
> I don't know why
> I've done nothing to her except exist [...]
>
> *clickclickclickclickclickclickclickclick*
> she adds up her dislike
> for me (Brautigan, *June* 66).

It is impossible to discern here whether the woman truly dislikes the poet or whether he is merely sensitive to her indifference. In either case, his almost petulant male response to her female expression of anything other than devotion is evident. She is not interested, so she is not interesting. The point is, however, that the woman here is a conscious entity, a person in her own right, not a collection of characteristics that affirm the values of the male looking at her. She is entitled to a dislike for the poet, a dislike that indeed he cannot fathom, and it disturbs him precisely because she exists

outside of his ability to rationalise her. It is hardly radical feminism, but nevertheless a progression on behalf of Brautigan in recognising this fact and being willing to commit it to words.

Perhaps the best example of Brautigan's growing awareness of the emotional distance between the sexes can be found in the author's posthumously published novel *An Unfortunate Woman.* The eponymous woman has committed suicide and the narrator of the novel spends the entire narrative avoiding the topic out of some evident coping mechanism, some attempt to stave off the trauma of the news. However, there is also a metaphorical distancing at work here. The whole book is about "loose ends, unfinished possibilities, beginning endings" (107) and the emotional void between the narrator and his dead friend becomes something much more resonant than the mere fact of her death can account for:

> *I sat there staring at the telephone, wanting very much to call you, but I was completely unable to do so because the telephone call I had gotten from your friend a little while before told me that you had died Thursday (ix).*

There is a resounding note of regret to the narrator's grief, an undertone of lost opportunities and unfinished business. He discovers the news of her hanging days after the event from a friend, suggesting that he has not been in close contact with the woman for some time, already separated from her before the final blow that parts them forever. This sense of isolation is echoed in the minor events of the text, also. Seeking an avenue out of his mourning, the narrator spies a woman in a supermarket for whom he feels a stab of attraction: "I wonder how this supermarket love affair would begin and who would first initiate it" (24). But it goes nowhere because he cannot relate to this woman on a personal basis. He states that "her name was X and she had recently graduated from the University of California at Berkley" (25). She remains anonymous to the narrator, faceless and alien. Perhaps there is no coincidence that she is an educated woman, a free thinking woman having "majored in philosophy", her developed capacity for independent thought contrasting sharply to the more superficial "blondes" the narrator "once had a thing for" (25). At this point in his career Brautigan's narrators are evidently struggling with their perceptions of

women, with the political barriers that have sprung up from their increased education and assertiveness. Elsewhere in the text he regales the reader with an anecdote describing how he spectacularly fails to perform sexually: "my body failed me", and "the woman got out of bed and dressed. It had [...] been a frustrating experience for her" (30). It is significant that the frustration is felt by the woman, not primarily by the narrative voice. There is empathy on display here. Not only can the narrator appreciate the woman's perspective, but the author is even willing to signify a role reversal here whereby his male character is now found wanting by his female counterpart. She is now able to pass judgment upon the man's conformity to his own ideals, and the judgement is met with a pronounced discomfort by the male. He is made to suffer a sense of awkwardness and beat a hasty retreat from intimacy. Finally, there is a person here behind the female anima.

It is highly presumptuous to transpose the awkwardness of Brautigan's narrators onto the author himself, yet it is reported by Lawrence Wright in *Rolling Stone* magazine that Brautigan's own relationships were fraught with difficulties concerning the autonomy of women. Confirmed in part by one of his Japanese girlfriends, Akiko, who claims "he had some dream of women", Wright concludes that his affair with her coincided with his refusal to learn Japanese, his preference to "coast [...] above the mystery" of the Japanese culture, "reading his own meaning into events" (40). His relationship with this particular woman, he contests, took precisely the form of an artist and his muse. He claims that Brautigan "created a persona for her, this female ideal, and when she betrayed his image of her, he became frighteningly violent" (40). This reaction is, in essence, surely the crux of the problem in any relationship. The identity of each party is not wholly their own possession, but is forged in the interaction that occurs between the two. To a certain degree the identity of each is forged independently in the perception of the other. Infatuation always begins with the identification of elements, traits and characteristics in the subject that the infatuated finds appealing. The simplistic nature of these impressions is such that no complex psychological being can live up to them over a progressive period of time. They break down under the pressure of the million minor adjustments that have to be made to them in the course of a complicated, and often mundane,

social existence. When considered in this light, disappointment is inevitable and the more noble the initial ideal, the greater the sense of loss when it crumbles. Germaine Greer would undoubtedly argue that this self-serving disillusionment is a particularly male trait, rooted in arrogance and an unwillingness to accept that this happens to both parties in a sexual bond. The ideal is first constructed, she contests, as a worthy passion for "the superior being" who, when he discovers the flaws in his possession then finds that he "cannot demean himself by love for an inferior" (Greer 158). This argument appears to be overstating the case somewhat, although it is to some extent borne out in Brautigan's work. With Vida as a muse, the narrator of *The Abortion* is free to enjoy a thoroughly satisfying existence. With an independent sexual partner, the narrator of *An Unfortunate Woman* is much less happy and satisfied. This seems more because the latter is now aware that he is not the superior being though rather than because his lover is inferior to his expectations.

Whatever else changed during the cultural revolution of the sixties, gender politics, it seems, did not shift very much at all. Which is not to say that there was no evolution whatsoever in male attitudes as Umansky herself is forced to concede that although "the counterculture ignored the significance of gender" (124), it nevertheless laid the foundation for the feminist movement that followed. The feminist movement bears the same "cultural mark" as the former; it shares the counterculture's "essentialism, its belief in the elysian promise of the flesh, its prizing of 'process' over 'product', its search for authentic communication" (113). Whatever the truth of his personal relationships may be, Brautigan's aesthetic approach to the subject is entirely in line with this assertion. He may not resolve the issue of gender imbalance but he certainly acknowledges it. Furthermore, in drawing particular attention to the problems inherent in existing sexual power structures in his later works, he at least contextualises the symptoms in a manner which can be argued to have facilitated the debate since. "I can count but I can't add", (77) claims the narrator of *An Unfortunate Woman*, and it is this qualification that perfectly characterises the author's approach to gender politics. The signs of a crisis are evident, and they lend themselves to expression and textualisation. The solutions to the crisis are less clear, and the

objectivity required to reach them is perhaps beyond the inherent subjectivity of a sexually active and implicitly ego-centric male consciousness.

According to Lawrence Wright, in his *Rolling Stone* article 'The Life and Death of Richard Brautigan', several members of the Beat generation often denigrated Brautigan's talent. Lawrence Ferlinghetti even went so far as to identify the Sixties as a "non-literate age" (36), partially because of Brautigan's prominence. Whilst this was evidently a rather flippant remark, the significance of such an assertion cannot be underestimated. On a superficial level at least there is a sense that this observation is borne of incredulity, is no more than the typical response of an artist witnessing the end of his era. But the fact that Ferlinghetti is not alone in his opinion indicates that his comments signify a broader belief. The sentiment is indeed even shared by writers who were deemed central to this new generation. Ken Kesey, for instance, one of the greatly celebrated literary debutant of the period, began to voice his own misgivings about writing following the publication of his second novel *Sometimes a Great Notion*. He concluded that writing was "an old-fashioned and artificial form" (95) of expression, preferring instead to turn to filmmaking and multimedia projects. For him, at least, there was a realisation that literature was no longer the most effective medium for the countercultural agenda. When taken together, the assertions of Ferlinghetti and Kesey point towards a growing sense of dissatisfaction within the artistic community, an identification of inadequacy in existing forms of articulation. In its attempt to explore and build social alternatives, the counterculture was beginning to draw on a number of cultural influences, both historical and creative, to generate something new, something hybrid. The intellectual challenge inherent in such an endeavour was such that it was bound to test the limits of conceptual thought and expression. As Theodore Roszack explains, what was "of supreme importance [was] that each of us should become a person, a whole and integrated person in whom there [was] manifested a sense of the human variety genuinely experienced, a sense of having come to terms with a reality that [was] awesomely vast" (235). The goal was at the same time rather vague in definition and enormous in scope. It was perhaps inevitable then that the only way to tackle the problem artistically was to take a number of different approaches, each of them as free from formulaic restriction as possible in

order to allow freeform experimentation without the need to lock ideas into a logical structure.

It is certainly no coincidence that writers such as Kesey began to switch their attention away from words in a patterned sequence on a page to more emotive methods of expression such as cinematic collage and a form of social theatre[11]. On a more political level, this diversification of media was also reflected in the work of the Diggers, who began to take their theatre out into the streets. Their approach was to include bystanders in their plays, "life-actors", illustrating to them that life itself is an act, is an assumption of "life-roles" which are instilled and perpetuated by majority social values (Grogan 371). Through this technique they sought to break down the expectations of drama audiences and show them that the structure of social experiences, such as the act of watching a play, was only the way it was because it had gradually become ingrained in that manner, it had not been challenged. Artistic expression for the Diggers became, therefore, even more immediate than that of Kesey's film project because they dispensed with the barrier – the page, the canvas or the frame – which would divide the artist from the audience. Instead they strove to make their audience part of the art itself. The audience were "active participants" in a transitory expression of a message rather than "passive stargazers" (Grogan 349) looking on at a permanent end-product of that expression, fixed and permanent and once removed from the artist's intent.

It has already been discussed in the first chapter that Brautigan was at least marginally associated with the Digger movement and apparently shared some of their aesthetic perspectives. Marc Chénetier believes that his literary aesthetics *completely* match those of the Diggers in terms of immediacy and inclusion. In his study of the author he makes the claim that Brautigan considered writing as something that "exhausts, encloses, defuses, cages" (27) the moment. He goes so far as to suggest that the author considered "writing [as] killing" (31). While it is certainly true that Brautigan experimented with the immediate distribution of his work in an attempt to make the act of reading it as synchronous as possible to the act of production, the very

[11] The Pranksters often filmed their experimentations with LSD, in particular their interactions with police and the general public whilst under the influence of the drug.

fact that he did not turn his back on the written form as Kesey did would seem to suggest that this is in fact a rather presumptuous conclusion to draw. Indeed, it appears instead that Brautigan fully explored all the devices he could manufacture within his chosen form in order to best represent the ideologies that were being drawn by those around him in the cultural consciousness. Synchronous distribution of reportage during the Invisible Circus[12] was merely one of these devices which best suited the artistic message that was being conveyed in that precise instance. Elsewhere in his work he drew on a whole range of other techniques, utilising the most effective vehicle for whichever of his aesthetic concerns he was focusing upon at that point.

Perhaps one of the best examples of this would be his engagement with notions of the authoritative voice. If his affinity with the Diggers illustrates anything, it is that Brautigan was in no way enamoured by or unquestioning of the vestiges of authority or the values promoted by mainstream society. Keith Abbott picks out an incident in the author's childhood as a particular turning point on this issue. In his retelling, the young Brautigan realises that his excellent school grades have done no more than make him the puppet in somebody else's game, that "doing things right only led to the bondage of always doing things right according to other people's standards" (70). To Abbott this reaction is indicative of an informed irreverence, an intelligent but resolute rejection of what at that age would have been an unquestionable social precept: that to do well at school, to fulfil one's designated potential, is undoubtedly what one should strive for. In a very tangible sense, this same irreverence is one of the most significant foundations of Brautigan's literary technique. Along with the Diggers he challenges the values of the majority culture, his place in that culture, the culture itself, and its own revisionist and self-aggrandising history. His novel *A Confederate General from Big Sur* is testament to this, reflecting as it does Mark Currie's claim that history is nothing more than a discourse; that historians "construct rather than reflect, invent rather than discover" (88) their representations of the past. Whether Brautigan saw himself consciously as a purveyor

[12] The Invisible Circus was a countercultural gathering with "active participants" (Grogan 349). Brautigan was involved and provided instantaneous reportage by writing, printing and then immediately distributing articles about the event as it was still happening under the banner of "The John Dillinger Computer Service" (Grogan 351).

of this postmodernist approach is unclear, but his narrative begins with an incident whereby the main character, Lee Mellon, uses what he believes to be a genuine ancestor, a Confederate General, as a method of defining his own identity. He establishes for himself a great American lineage of which he is the end product. Brautigan is very quick to dismiss the factual truth of this assertion: Mellon cannot find the statue that is supposed to exist of this mythical forefather of his and then fails also to find any reference to him in the historical documents of the period. The point of interest, however, is that this hardly seems to matter in the context of the narrative. The more conclusive the evidence becomes that there never was a Confederate General Mellon from California (which was, after all, never a Confederate State) the more concrete and affirmative this definition of Lee Mellon's character becomes. Indeed, everything he does begins to be represented in these terms. He "lay[s] siege to Oakland" (33), drinks muscatel and schemes in "his official San Francisco headquarters" (24), and slips further and further into the persona of an arcane American rebel or outlaw. The absolute fact of the matter, Brautigan appears to be saying, is secondary to the significance Lee Mellon has placed upon the issue. The truth of his ancestry does not have to be literal to exert a very real and tangible influence. The power is in the belief, the interpretation, not in the infallibility of the concept. In essence, history is only as significant as its proponents choose to make it. It is only as reliable as personal interest allows; when it ceases to make the point it is being utilised to illustrate, that is where the narrative ends, that is precisely where the history becomes complete and absolute and closed to further interrogation.

Brautigan, however, pushes his interrogation of history even further than this in the text. A parallel narrative begins, depicting an alternative history of "private Augustus Melon thirty-seven-year-old slave trader" (117) and his antics with the Digger Indians during the final days of the Civil War. Not only is Brautigan undermining the value of substantiating evidence as a factor in understanding one's own history here, he is mocking the very concept of truth itself. The Mellon ancestor is knocked down from his rank of General to a Private, as far as he can be knocked down, and is ridiculed in the narrative by events which depict him as a coward. At one point he pretends to be dead in order to avoid a column of Union soldiers who are, it

is revealed, themselves merely "looking for a Confederate to surrender to" (121). What the author is doing here is not an attempt to correct an error of history, but to elevate this error, to revel in it and celebrate it and make of it an untruth so absolute that it challenges the very notion of what truth is. History is not truth. History is the repression of certain facts and the promotion of others to create out of the chaos that is existence an illusion of coherency. As Paul Hamilton points out, we are forced as sentient beings to "choose between the several meanings any utterance may have in the light of the special circumstances under which it [was] made" (51). This heightened state of ambiguity "can perversely require us to reinterpret the very notions of tradition" (53). The conclusion of such an argument is that history is nothing more than a fiction, and if this is the case, then all fictions have an equal claim to authenticity when representing this history. Just as with Jacques Derrida's theory of relativism, there are no absolutes here: none of the versions we are presented with are any more or less reliable than any of the others. Nobody is in a position to effectively contradict that Lee Mellon has a Confederate General for a grandfather, just as nobody is in a position to contradict that he was instead a cowardly private squatting in the mud of Big Sur. Both propositions are subjective, and as such both are equally valid and equally invalid.

Brautigan is already aware, even at this early stage of his career, that any form of representation is essentially a compromise between relative positions. If truth is relative, then it follows that everything built upon this foundation is also relative. Any assertion is co-dependent upon everything that informs it; it is held in place by a notional keystone, a piece of received truth or wisdom that may or may not be accurate. In effect, any form of representation contains elements of the suspension of disbelief demanded by fiction. This perspective directly parallels Mark Currie's postmodernist model of reality in which "any sign is embedded in a context" and "its meaning bears the trace of the signs which surround it" (77). When considered in this light, Brautigan's work begins to move away from the shadow of the Beats and becomes much more attuned to the ideologies of the postmodernists – their sense of duplicity within meanings, of infinite relativity attached to truths and axioms. Indeed, the aims of the evolving counterculture, if refracted through the work of Brautigan,

also seem to be shifting towards this postmodernist stance. Certainly, Linda Hutcheon claims that "postmodernism reveals a desire to understand present culture as the product of previous representations" (55) and one of the primary techniques of groups such as the Diggers and Kesey's Pranksters is to do exactly what Lee Mellon does in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*. That is, to reach beyond the values of the previous generation and mainstream culture, and claw back for themselves a set of signifiers from a historical past that have personal resonance. If this could not be achieved directly from a stylised sense of history, then they utilised other sources of inspiration within the popular culture that could be filtered through a layer of irony or reinterpretation. The costumes of Kesey's pranksters sewn together from discarded American flags, for example, would be a prime example of this, a reclamation of the ultimate nationalistic icon to symbolise the new America that these social groups felt was coming. In a very tangible sense, the era represented a reassessment of how culture is forged and how the base elements in this process can be manipulated to produce a very specific and much more desirable end. Jean-François Lyotard identifies this self-awareness as a common trend in the evolution of any society, claiming that "the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age" (3). It is a perhaps inevitable consequence of greater prosperity and personal liberty amongst young adults: with more time to reflect and with greater access to education, an erosion of absolute respect for absolute authority is almost certainly guaranteed. Once this erosion is combined with a political agenda, an impetus to smash through the protracted process of incremental cultural change will not be far behind. That is certainly the view of Charles Kaiser who claims that "students were too impatient for change to work within the system" during the period; "their dream was to overthrow it" (154).

Therefore, out of this new liberated perspective on political theory also emerged fundamental truths about the nature of current sociological frameworks and further realisations about the methods by which these are attained. The whole cultural trend essentially comes back to this central concept of definition. The founding principles of any society – its moral structure, its ethical hierarchy – are essentially

nothing more than arbitrary rules agreed upon by either the majority or a powerful minority, perhaps later passed as laws by a sect of self-designated experts. The postmodernist trend in the counterculture during this period can ultimately be expressed as a realisation of this arbitrariness and the promotion of certain viable (and some less viable) alternatives. Of course, these ideas are not without their detractors. A common charge levelled at postmodernism in general, not least by Frederic Jameson, is that it is a superficial method of comprehension; that it fails to engage with representations of the past, or indeed of anything conceptual, in a meaningful or insightful manner. Jameson terms it the "pastiche", the "bravura imitation" (133) of postmodernism, a reduction of authentic images and ideals to a "mass cultural allusion", a set of stylised signifiers which start to replace the truth of any matter (134). The example he cites in his opus *Postmodernism, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* is David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* which, he believes, displaces "the 1950s" with "the 'fifties'" (281), a string of "stereotypes, of ideas of facts and historical realities" (279) rather than those facts and realities themselves. To a certain extent this argument has real validity; however, it seems somewhat misplaced. This process of conceptual displacement is not strictly a fault of postmodernism alone. Representation itself is by very definition a reductionist process. The 1950s do not *mean* anything as and of themselves; they are merely a collection of years, of months, of revolutions of the earth around the sun. The attachment of significance to them is a revisionist process, an editing of facts into a narrative, a method which raises the same questions of whose narratives have greater authority – those of the historian or those of the "teller [who] constructs that truth and chooses those facts" (Hutcheon 56)?

What Brautigan is attempting to do via his postmodernist technique is far from simplifying those concepts he feels aesthetically compelled to present to his readership. Indeed, he is trying to do precisely the opposite, to deconstruct the very limitations that the written form imparts on the clarity of the artist's message. To question the very nature of truth, knowledge, and understanding in an attempt to liberate the author and the reader in a manner that they have never been before: this is what postmodernism does. It does not present textual content as an adequate representation of human consciousness or physical reality in the way that realist

fiction does. It does not do this because in all honesty textual content is *not* an adequate representation of human consciousness or physical reality. Textual representation is at best a relatively accurate summation of its subject to the limitations inherent within the form. On a physical level, text is little more than words on a page which have to be processed via the rational mind of the reader via the mechanical act of reading. Not everything in human experience is rational, is conscious, can be imparted or understood mechanically or logically. Like many other postmodernists, Brautigan's primary technique is to highlight the artificiality of his artistic method. *Trout Fishing in America*, for instance, begins with a description of "the cover for Trout Fishing in America [which] is a photograph taken late in the afternoon" (1). Immediately, the author is identifying his work as precisely that, a stylised *work* of fiction, of writing, of textual creation. The book is not merely a reflection of reality, an image created in a mirror held up to the world; it is an entity as and of itself. "The grass is wet from the rains of early February", it is "five o'clock in the afternoon of my cover for Trout Fishing in America" (2). The description is a specific moment in time within the alternative system of moments in time that constitute this novel, this fabricated reality of represented moments. The primary significance of this technique is that it serves to effectively dispose of a whole set of literary conventions in one gesture. Because Brautigan has identified his text as an alternative universe, he is suddenly free to explore within it alternative connotations of the language and metaphors and cultural allusions that he will employ within that text. Indeed, he proceeds to do precisely this, likening the method by which the Cobra Lily traps insects to "a ballet to be performed at the University of California at Los Angeles" (19). Obviously, the initial reference is to the grace with which the plant dispatches its function, yet the allusion then draws in a sticker promoting Nixon for president and then a score provided by "an orchestra of mortuaries with ice-cold woodwinds" and a reference to "the pines, in the pines where the sun never shines" (20). The author is praising the grace of the lily, decrying the ruthlessness of its digestion habits and, by incredible tangent, referencing the lyrics of a blues song by Leadbelly all in the same sentence. But this is precisely what *Trout Fishing in America* represents to Brautigan: a distillation of all the cultural influences that have

congealed within the artist's subconscious down onto the page in a freeform representation of the contemporary American psyche. It is less a novel and more akin to Hesse's "Magic Theatre", a theatre of signs and tokens that encapsulate the chaos of understanding (32).

Consciousness, in Brautigan's work, is nothing if not random. "For some strange reason" exclaims the author's narrator elsewhere in the text, "suddenly it was a perfect time, there at Mushroom springs, to wonder whatever happened to the Zoot suit" (106). There is, he points out, absolutely no accounting for the tangential nature of the function of the human mind. The cultural destiny of the Zoot suit is just as likely to emerge at any time from the maelstrom of images and influences within the primordial soup of the brain as the impression that "the Missouri River [...] doesn't look like Deanna Durbin" (122), or that a sandwich maker in *Dreaming of Babylon* does look like Rudolf Valentino (25). The strength of the postmodernist technique is that it does not preclude any combination of signifiers to express in the most powerful terms the sensual or connotational impact a situation has on the culturally imbued mind. While Jameson might argue that it is a superficial process, reducing the Forties down to the base element of the Zoot suit, or supplanting a century of movie making with one freeze-frame of Deanna Durbin, in fact it serves to open up a greater understanding of these concepts by cross-fertilising them across the whole of the human experience. Consciousness operates in a sensual manner, linking sensory stimuli like smells or images to broader memories, episodes in time. What Brautigan is effectively doing in his technique is to reflect this human tendency within his chosen form of expression. The smell of flowers or the taste of a particular food can trigger a recollection, as illustrated by Marcel Proust's narrator dredging up a "visual memory" which is "linked to [a] taste" (62), the latter recalled by association from the former. So too can a configuration of lines and shadows on a patch of water trigger the memory of an actress's profile. Instead of a process of reduction, stripping away true meaning from a signifier for the recipient, this is actually a communicative technique which explores and recreates the very method of actualisation itself. It replicates the manner in which understanding and comprehension form within the human consciousness. By drawing upon a reservoir of previous knowledge and prior

experience to illustrate something new and to locate it in relation to all other knowledge, it comes as close as any form of artistic expression in transmitting its conclusions in a state that the human mind is already primed to receive them in.

There is no substantial evidence to suggest that Brautigan regarded his own work in explicitly postmodernist terms, but then this is the crux of why his appropriation of the form is so significant. The irreverent, non-linear, chaotically emotive nature of postmodernism is something that was so embedded in the counter-cultural mindset of the period that a writer such as Brautigan would not necessarily identify these traits in his work as something theoretical. In a cultural landscape where even to "attempt to attribute a single meaning to a particular [pop] song was to miss the point" (Kaiser 203) it is clear that the postmodern ethic was so entrenched in populist thought that to disentangle it as a signifier would perhaps have been impossible. In fact, the closest Brautigan came to attributing anything he did to postmodernism was to declare the mangled text of a book he shot a hole into as the ultimate in "conceptual criticism", reading as it now did – "it in a black printed nicely the cover" (Keeler 63).[13] Critics have, however, retrospectively identified several postmodernist traits in the author's work. Greg Keeler himself, one of Brautigan's closest friends during the final years of his life, is keen to comment on the author's appropriation of genre in his later works. Keeler identifies recurrent themes of "deflation and parody" in Brautigan's narratives, a tendency to "take on many of the Great American Novel's serious genres by turning quests and conflicts into absurd dilemmas" (156). This claim is indeed borne out in texts such as *Dreaming of Babylon*, where the conventions of the private eye novel are essentially deconstructed and parodied. Not only is the narrator of this novel a hopeless private detective, continually "fresh out of bullets" (2) and running scared from his landlady – in essence the antithesis of the cool and controlled Raymond Chandler or Dashiell Hammett hero – he is also a character perpetually aware of the trademarks he is trying to emulate. He identifies his shoulder holster as "an authentic touch" (9) and is constantly disgusted with the limitations of his available transport, concluding that ultimately "there's something about a private detective walking or taking the bus that

[13] The book was Jack Hicks' *In the Singer's Temple*.

lacks class" (134). In this novel Brautigan introduces an element of awareness in his characters as to the artificiality of the genre they exist within. In effect, they fail to live up to the standards of behaviour that a detective story demands of them because these standards are in reality unattainable. It is interesting to compare the narrative voice from Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely* to that of *Dreaming of Babylon*:

> I needed a drink, I needed a lot of life insurance, I needed a vacation, I needed a home in the country. What I had was a coat, a hat and a gun. I put them on and went out of the room (Chandler 207).

Brautigan's narrator attempts to phrase his observations in the same sardonic tone as Chandler, but he cannot even pull this off:

> When you're hired to steal a body from the city morgue, that's very strange in itself, but when the people who hire you hire other people to steal the same body from the morgue and then hire some more people to steal the body from you after you manage to steal it, you've got a lot of weirdness going on (Brautigan 196).

The short, clipped phrasing of the cynical Marlowe is deliberately parodied with the rambling, almost confused attempt at rationalisation on display in Brautigan's work. It is not merely the repetitive nature of the description that is of significance. The almost painful manner in which the section is delivered suggests the narrator is only just grasping at his own comprehension of the events he is imparting, but the manner in which it is so meekly concluded with the rather ineloquent expression of "weirdness" truly illustrates how little intellectual grasp he has on his own situation. Brautigan's narrator is absolutely not in control of the circumstances he is in; he is not even in control of his own interpretation of these circumstances, or of his own faculties of articulation. He cannot operate at this fictional level of emotional detachment and wry wit that is so essential to the characters of Chandler: he is too grounded in the reality of his day-to-day existence, too aware of his sexual frustration and the absurdity of a "detective who's only wearing one sock" (19). Of course, this grounding lies at the centre of Brautigan's aesthetic point. When compared to the triviality of everyday existence, the conventions of the detective genre begin to look ever increasingly

artificial, laboured or even comical. As Greg Keeler implies, Brautigan is indeed attempting to make the genre look absurd. The real question, however, lies in the ends to which these tactics are utilised. Is it merely to ridicule the detective genre, to mock the endeavours of authors like Chandler and Hammett? Is it intended to punctuate the assertion made elsewhere in Brautigan's work that the written form is an artificial system, a human application of order upon something unordered, something chaotic, which is ultimately representative of the way we think as well as the way we read? Or is it a reinterpretation of the form itself, a postmodernist deconstruction of the genre which opens it up to renewed powers of expression and consequence? The most likely answer is that it is all of these. The deconstruction of previous narrative techniques *is* inherently dismissive of the effectiveness of these prior models, but that such a questioning of the validity of the artistic medium should itself be addressed in that same medium implies an acknowledgement of the form as representative of a wider phenomenon. It implies that the concept of genre is a microcosm of cultural cohesion, a delicate framework of codes and unspoken rules which can only be tackled from within, at the foundation of its own indelible structure.

Further evidence of this aesthetic crusade can be found in Brautigan's other 'genre' novels. Increasingly, he is at pains to mix seemingly incompatible pulp fiction blueprints, hence *The Hawkline Monster* is subtitled as *A Gothic Western*, and *Willard and his Bowling Trophies* as *A Perverse Mystery*. The most overtly genre-focused of these is the former, taking as it does two western outlaws and placing them in a gothic mansion with a pair of rather sinister twin sisters. The novel is certainly not one of Brautigan's more accomplished works, but there is an interesting contrast between the imagery of the frontier in half of the book – Greer and Cameron are described as "a relaxed essence distilled from the [...] two qualities" of "tough and mean" (13) – and the clinical, almost scientific horror of the second half with its "huge yellow house standing in a field of frost at the early part of this century" (148). There is a curious subtext to the narrative, the house being terrorised by the mutated effects of a mysterious jar of chemicals which seems to evoke both the exploratory science of Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and the dangers of hallucinogenic drugs, a subject that was obviously a contemporary issue for the author. But this subtext, along with

the increasingly random episodes of the narrative, seems secondary to the atmosphere and the imagery of the novel. The two contrary halves of the text – contrary as to genre at least – hinge upon the character of Magic Child. Whilst out searching for a bounty hunter to help her and her sister in their quest, she is characterised as a Native American. When they arrive at the house, she ceases to be this, in fact she ceases to have a unique identity at all and becomes an identical counterpart of her gothic twin sister: "Magic Child was dead and it did not make any difference in which Miss Hawkline she was buried" (120). It does not make any difference because the characters of the Hawkline sisters are of relatively little significance, as are the characters of Greer and Cameron. Ultimately, the four heroes and the missing father, are all marginalised, as is the protagonist – the Monster and its inherent shadow, in what is essentially an exercise in style, imagery and evocation. Much more prominent is the gothic "Victorian clock [...] pushing Twentieth Century minutes toward twelve" (166), or the butler who shrinks, literally turning into a dwarf when he dies (136). What Brautigan is attempting to achieve in *The Hawkline Monster* is a dissection of the concept of genre. Rather than merely a blueprint, a schematic of theme and plot to be filled in with detail, he is consciously elevating it to the status of a genuine literary technique. If used correctly, it is extremely expressive and evocative, especially when combined with other techniques, other genres even, to create the maelstrom of imagery that more closely reflects the cognitive state of human comprehension. But even more importantly than this, the cross-pollination of genre in these novels contributes to Brautigan's agenda of freeing the text, freeing the mind of the reader from ingrained assumptions, because if nothing else, genre is a method of promoting intellectual comfort. The reader approaches a genre text with a surplus of preconceptions and expectations. A detective novel or a gothic novel or a western all conform to perceived notions of their own limited scope. To undercut these conventions with irony, to highlight the artificiality and absurdity of them is to effectively perturb the mind of the conditioned reader and harbinger the first stage in their awakening to new modes of understanding.

Of course, this method of using genre, utilising existing methods of expression to create something new, is precisely what critics such as Jameson and Lyotard appear

to deplore about the postmodern technique. Rather than a progressive development, an exploratory take on the application of literary methods, Jameson would claim that it instead indicates a lack of imagination, an artistic sterility. In his extensive treatise on postmodernism, he states quite explicitly that he views "the process of [a culture] trying to identify its own present" via means of existing cultural signifiers as indicative of that culture failing to define itself, evidence that it is "reduc[ing] itself to the recombination of various stereotypes of the past" (Jameson 296). The suggestion is that the rise of postmodernism signifies a culture in decline. This is seemingly a rather simplistic charge to lay on postmodernism because it ignores so many of the nuances of this method of representation. In the first instance, the stereotypes of the past are not merely regurgitated whole in the work of a writer such as Brautigan. In fact, the very opposite is true: these stereotypes, or cultural signifiers, are consistently applied in unique and inventive ways, often to express a concept far removed from the initial image. Hence the hump of a trout when cooked can "taste [...] as sweet as the kisses of Esmeralda" (*Trout* 76); or a postmistress can have "one of those mouths they used to wear during the 1920s" (*Revenge* 76). The true postmodern aesthetic lies in this appropriation of old images, "the image reserves of the past" (Hutcheon 89), in order to encapsulate most effectively, most evocatively, the often unrelated subject under discussion. In the second example here, taken from Brautigan's *Revenge of the Lawn*, the author is making an oblique joke about the manner in which subjects in photographs and films from the 1920s seem to hold their mouths. Of course it is ironic: not everybody from the period held their mouth in the same way. The humour, however, is of secondary importance to the fact that the author is explicitly aware of the stereotype he is employing here. He makes overt use of the fact that it *is* a stereotype to elicit a laugh from his reader. Effectively the line makes two important comments: the first upon the emotional distance between the 1920s and the author's contemporary period, and the second upon the way in which the author and his readership, temporally located in the latter of these periods, understands the method by which it comprehends the former. Brautigan is fully aware that the 1920s mean nothing more to his audience than the odd photographic detail and well publicised superficialities such as fashion. To call on these details in a descriptive textual context

is not to stunt the cultural development of new signifiers and contemporary imagination but to draw upon an emotive frame of reference that the reader will respond to in an intellectual manner. It is an effective method of opening the present up to an awareness of itself: its perspective upon those very things that it has developed from and its definition of itself from a comparative ideological position.

What makes this technique even more interesting is the fact that so many critics make the claim that postmodernism is essentially an anti-historical aesthetic. Marc Chénetier concedes that Brautigan "recognizes the existence of history" (88), but argues that his concept of existence does not really extend beyond the appropriation of "instants [...] side by side; between them and beyond them, nothing" (82). This is a view shared by Keith Abbott in his memoir *Downstream from Trout Fishing in America*. He claims here that Brautigan's reticence about his own past was indicative of his perspective upon history, of the generally dismissive stance taken by the "psychedelic generation" as a whole, their "insistence on the present, the here and now" (43). Whilst neither of these assertions is strictly incorrect when applied to Brautigan's work, they are perhaps a little simplistic. In the first instance, it is not uncommon in the author's work to find a literal representation of a single moment in the life of the narrator. One of his later works, *The Tokyo-Montana Express*, is indeed nothing more than a collection of these moments, instants in time, fragmentary impulses and impressions strung together into a random narrative of the author's time in Japan. But to suggest that these moments are somehow divorced from a conceptual appreciation of the past – both in terms of those previous moments that have led here and the much more tangible weight of cultural history itself – is somewhat inaccurate. Whilst all of his narratives deal with contemporary issues, they do so in a way that draws out the relevance of these issues in a meta-referential manner, utilising signifiers of a pre-existing popular culture as a frame of reference. Brautigan's present is *always* about the past, and very often about the future too. The moment is for him a microcosm of the totality of experience, is a window on the constant flux of history which spills off the page in all directions. Perhaps nowhere is this concept more evident than in *So the Wind Won't Blow it all Away*:

> I walked very carefully over to the baby buggy. I didn't want to stumble over the past and break my present-tense leg that might leave me crippled in the future.
>
> I took the handle of the baby buggy and pulled it away from the 1900s and into the year 1947 (11).

There are no limitations on the myriad of ways in which these tenses can intersect. A train of thought can begin anywhere in this vast referential system and lead effortlessly anywhere else. An anecdote about hunting for bears, for example, can be initiated by "a photograph in the newspaper of Marilyn Monroe, dead from a sleeping pill suicide" (*Revenge* 77). But this unpredictability is applied to precise effect: human experience is composed of all of these disparate elements, images and influences from across the entire expanse of not only an individual's life but also of their frame of reference, their cultural awareness. The present and the past are intrinsically tied in the human consciousness by countless little cognitive impulses and comparative memories. History, in both a personal and cultural sense, is an ever present notion in Brautigan's work, infringing upon every perception and every fundamental act of comprehension.

The crux of the postmodernist argument on the nature of history, however, lies precisely in this same cognitive process. As has already been discussed, Jameson dismisses the evocation of a cultural past as nothing more than a contemporary cultural laziness.[14] Of course, this perspective ignores the tendency for postmodernist texts to interrogate and reinterpret these old signifiers, making them relevant to the sociological present. However, the fact cannot be ignored that this interrogation *is* a reinterpretative process, that the appropriation of pre-existent cultural signifiers is a decidedly interventionist procedure that cannot help but contaminate the original specimen under discussion. Lyotard expresses the phenomenon thus: "the [postmodern] narrative's reference may seem to belong to the past, but in reality it is always contemporaneous with the act of recitation" (22). The present, in other words, may always be about the past, but a past that is being constantly revised and

[14] It is Jameson's contention that many manifestations of postmodernism merely demonstrate "a collective consciousness in the process of trying to identify its own present at the same time that they illuminate the failure of this attempt" (296).

harmonised with the present it is being pressed into service to amplify. In fact, the issue is not even as simple as this: the signifiers of the past are not only changed by the process of appropriation, they are in fact differently understood by the contemporary artist from how they would have been perceived at the time. The appropriation, therefore, proceeds from a different point of comprehension anyway. "Textual meaning changes through time" (Hamilton 206); each successive discourse on a cultural icon or image changes its meaning, revises its significance and realigns it to new connotational alliances; "history is cyclical in the sense that individuals constitutionally rework an inherited pattern of evolution on their own terms" (Hamilton 35). Brautigan's appropriation of the American West, for example, is not a direct discourse with the truth of the nineteenth century but a culturally imbued perspective on documentary evidence filtered through the stylistic representations of the western genre and idiosyncratic parallels drawn by the artist between his own sociological reality and that of the "aristocratic rebel tradition" (Abbott 168). The author himself acknowledges this relationship over and over again in his work. For example, the narrator's grandmother in the story 'Revenge of the Lawn' is not presented as merely an icon of the old frontier, a epitome of old western values that encapsulates fully the essence of nineteenth century life. Instead, she "shines like a beacon down the stormy American past" (1), creating a genuine link with the period that winds its way through a whole maelstrom of meanings and reinterpretations just as a beam of light travels through time, distorted and bent by external forces before it reaches the recipient.

When Jameson claims that "there is no such thing as 'history'" (282), he is making a fundamental assumption that he understands precisely what history is, and more importantly, what it is not. He seems convinced that the "allegorical processing of the past" (287) inherent in the postmodern method is not history, but is counter-historical, is in fact counter-productive to an understanding of the very concept of history itself. The preceding discussion on the incremental reinterpretation of historical signifiers demonstrates clearly that history, in a true representative sense, has *never* actually existed. By definition, any interrogation of the past has to be performed in the present by an individual who cannot but be influenced by events and

opinions (many of them perhaps seemingly unrelated) that have emerged in the intervening period. Postmodernism does not create this problem; the linear patterns of time and the human condition create this problem. Postmodernism simply acknowledges the irony inherent in the relationship between fact and meaning and takes advantage of the opportunity to enhance understanding of this schism. As Lyotard points out, knowledge "goes beyond the simple determination and application of the criterion of truth" (18), and comprehension, in its truest form, goes beyond the consideration of a single fact in isolation of any other contrary influence. To arrive at a conclusive representation of a historical instance is to consider that instance in its own terms, to consider both its relevance to its own period and to the contemporary period, the interpretations put upon it by previous 'historians', and the idiosyncratic cognitive impulses it sets off in the individual preparing the representation itself. In short, the postmodern technique replicates the conditions of any scientific method wherein the properties of the source material are factored in alongside the conditions in which these are tested, the bias of the tester and the original objective of the experiment. History is not dead in the work of writers and artists such as Richard Brautigan, it is instead rather more of a subordinate factor in the attempt to promote "a unity of experience" (Lyotard 72) than it is a fundamental, unquestionable source in its own right.

It seems in many ways that postmodernism was a natural technique for Brautigan to appropriate in his writing. Not only does it align closely to his sense of humour and his active imagination, it seems also to be an extension of the life he lived in Haight-Ashbury and later in Bolinas and Japan. Keith Abbott concludes in his book that Brautigan attempted to "create [...] a new vision out of the materials at hand" which is "exactly what people were trying to do with their lives in the Haight" (40). He spent a lot of time walking around this burgeoning Mecca of the hippies, soaking in the ambience and open to whatever random experience might present itself next to his imagination. Later on, just as he "launch[ed] himself into the serendipity of San Francisco life" (24), he also wandered around the streets of Tokyo, declining to learn the Japanese language, preferring instead to "coast [...] above the mystery, reading his own meanings into events" (Wright 40). Even his relationships with women have

been reported as definitively grounded in his own dogged interpretation. As discussed in the previous chapter, his one-time partner Akiko claimed that "he had some dream of women", and it appears that he had a tendency to "create [...] a persona" for his female companions, to form "this female ideal" (Wright 40) and attempt to make his partners conform. Ironically enough, a postmodern analysis of love would perhaps suggest that all human relationships are founded upon a fiction, a composite image, an illusion that is fed by projections of personal ideals that feed into a myth of the other person. As George Herbert Mead describes it: "the value [an object] has are values [defined] through the relationship of the object to the person who has that sort of attitude" (5). But what all these second-hand accounts of the author's behaviour demonstrate, along with his own proclamation that he "love[d] chaos" (Stickney 54), is a deep seated affinity with the postmodern ethic. Brautigan seems to have had an innate awareness of the manner in which reality is conceptualised, is forged into comprehensible elements of the individual consciousness. In other words, it is perhaps postmodernism that chose Brautigan and not the other way around. In *An Unfortunate Woman*, he contests:

> it would be convenient if one could redesign the past [...] but if one could do that, the past would always be in motion. It would never settle down finally to days of solid marble (8).

If postmodernist patterns of thought indeed encroached themselves upon Brautigan's personal life, it is perhaps inevitable that it should eventually seep into his perspectives on memory and personal history, and ultimately time itself as the framework that memory and history sit within. Lawrence Wright claims that "time meant nothing to [Brautigan]" (36). He makes this claim in relation to the fact that the author was "a hopeless insomniac" (36) so it would perhaps be easy to read too much into it, however even a cursory analysis of Brautigan's later work would reveal that time in fact meant *everything* to him. Indeed, time becomes one of the fundamental issues in his postmodernist agenda. There is a malleable quality to the time in the author's final texts, especially in *So the Wind won't Blow it all Away*; a sense of subjectivity and authorial control that can stop and start at will. The narrator can step

outside of his moment and describe another one while waiting for the first to reach its conclusion. "While I'm a quarter of a mile away, walking back to the pond [...] I'll talk about something else that is more interesting" (25). Because after all, what is time but a primary experience of passing moments as interpreted at the focal point of individual perception? If history for Brautigan is a chaos of facts reconstructed into a narrative, then time is a maelstrom of impressions that are reconstructed into a chronology. Brautigan's credentials as a postmodernist really begin to take shape as soon as he applies the same method of deconstruction he used on history to the founding principle of Western thought: the absolute and linear nature of time itself. It is here that he truly begins to take on the counter-cultural call to attack "the foundations of the edifice" (Roszak 55), to mount a serious challenge against an intrinsic social precept and attempt to free the minds of those under its spell.

> Each moment we live exists, but not in their imaginary combination (Borges 258).

The great paradox of a human perception of reality lies in the fact that it can never be free from the nuances and bias of that perception. The existence of any tangible thing in creation owes as much to the process of rationalisation that imbues it with meaning and description as it does to its own simple physicality. As Jorges Borges puts it, "outside each perception [...] matter does not exist (266)." This hypothesis stands for sensory stimuli, for grand human concepts such as history, and it also holds true for time itself. For Brautigan, time is no more than an end product of the imaginative processing of the mind: it does not exist in his texts as a scientific principle that dictates the ordering and flow of events. It is much more subjective than that, irrevocably tied to the intellectual whim and limitations of any given narrator. Time is an experience rather than a fundamental law and, like all human experience in the work of Brautigan, it tends to be microcosmic in nature, imbued with a sense of cultural weight and resonance. Each moment holds within it the ghosts of previous moments, of former sensory impressions and existing frames of reference. All moments lead to this moment, and everything that comes afterwards will be a direct result of what is happening now, what has happened so far. This concept is not restricted solely to events of great significance but also to minor circumstances, the minutiae of everyday existence. In short, the law of sequentialism applies to everything. In *An Unfortunate Woman*, for example, the narrator muses upon the heritage of his notebook, "made in Japan, purchased in San Francisco, now here in Montana, containing these words and destined to remain here in Montana" (76). There is a constant flux at work whereby a fusion of existing elements occurs to crystallize a unique instant in time and then liquefy again to add to the combination of elements that will form other instants. This whole process is co-ordinated by the mind, the correlation of links between disparate events to create a rational temporality, a comprehensible system of cause and effect. Because this temporality is so personally defined, because it is so subjective, it is also effectively arbitrary. The connection

between events can appear eminently rational in Brautigan's work, and then again they are just as likely to be absurd. A disillusioned teenager in *So the Wind Won't Blow it All Away* is described as irrevocably headed towards "a marriage with a spiteful woman ten years older than him" (77); similarly, a child decides from his limited experience with a young friend that "living in a funeral parlour gave a person cold hands" (30). This structuring of time into arcs of tangible consequence is a fundamentally revisionist procedure, and a highly selective one. The child with a friend from the family of funeral directors is processing data in precisely the same way that everyone does, from the historian to the scientist: that is to arrange and promote and exaggerate observable effects to reach a conclusion which solidifies the world. Time is no less of a narrative than history, a fabrication of meaning and structure for the sake of something comprehensible.

Sociological awareness, of course, forms a factor within this equation for Brautigan. His narrators begin to process their appreciation of time in specifically cultural terms, not only with respect to the language of signifiers that they apply to their temporal experiences but also in the manner in which they understand and perceive this very temporality itself. The protagonist of *So the Wind Won't Blow it All Away* is a typical example of this because he freely utilises the pre-existent notion of film and cinematic editing to rationalise his own personal history. Throughout the novel he is engaged in a process whereby he constructs montages of images for the reader in an attempt to represent his life in a logical and coherent manner. He suppresses minor details which he feels will detract from his point, and more importantly, he switches between time zones and different sequences of events to avoid recounting the tedium of his childhood. "I was now ahead of them in time" he states of his fishing friends who have yet to arrive at the pond he frequents, "I would give them a couple of hours to catch up" (7). Like everything else in the experience and cognitive function of the narrator, time has to be appreciated and expressed in existing terms of reference. Knowledge is a cumulative effect, an evolution of interrogatory impulses:

> I didn't know the full dimensions of forever, but I knew that it was longer than waiting for Christmas to come (38).

Awareness evolves in an incremental fashion, and it leaves in its wake a vast archive of impressions and conclusions. This is precisely why time is microcosmic in nature for Brautigan: as a concept it only truly exists when the perceptive impulses of the individual consciousness forge it from the disparate chaos of tokens and events that are its natural state. To achieve this construction, the full weight of the individual's experience is brought to bear on the subject and the result is inevitably referential. The emotional stimuli of any given event or circumstance essentially serves as a fuse which can ultimately fire anywhere in this labyrinth of cross-referencing notions.

Time, therefore, as a hypothetical concept, is essentially as artificial as anything else that constitutes human experience. Once Brautigan has established this hypothesis in his work, he then begins to mount a direct challenge to the very founding principle of time – or rather, to the founding principle of time as it is rationalised and perceived in the industrialised world, "a calculated standard value, enforcing perfect operation and excluding the unexpected" (Borst 121). Time has been made "calculable and controllable" claims Arno Borst (94), a metronomic sequence of divisible units, in order to support the mechanisms of a technocratic majority culture. This formalisation was, he infers, essential to the operation of advanced commerce and the control of a subjective workforce. However, this is no more than a single interpretation of the structure of time, and one which is laden with ulterior motive. In reality, it is only consensus that holds the imposed framework in place, and as he did with history Brautigan encourages his reader to liberate themselves from this constraint. Time is not necessarily sequential: it could just as easily be defined as something cyclical, or modular. Brautigan appears to perceive it in *An Unfortunate Woman* as dimensional, molecular, conceptually geographical with a huge network of moments strung out like co-ordinates across some vast "calendar map" (2). "A lone woman's shoe lying in a Honolulu intersection" (108) is as much a part of this complex temporal landscape as a "threatening electrical storm" (95) in the skies of Montana. All these things exist and are tenuously connected, like contours or lay-lines, via the hub of any individual's life. None of them are necessarily more

significant than any of the others, but each exists along some conceptual parallel and together they constitute the physical terrain of personal experience.

There are, however, very significant implications inherent within the model of time that Brautigan is developing in his work. In the first instance, there is a tangible element of stoicism apparent in any system where past and future cease to have any real meaning. Brautigan's characters do not look back along a narrow timeline that emotionally focuses their own personal experiences. Instead, they reference specific co-ordinates, segments of the calendar map, almost as though they are plotting a chart from a much wider space. Obviously they do not look subjectively forward either because there *is* no forward, not in linear terms. They are instead located in the middle of a physical landscape, a timescape almost, aware of the space around them through which they can navigate. This awareness means that there is an emotional detachment between the author's characters, his narrators, and the events that constitute their lives. "I'm actually writing about something quite serious", claims the narrator of *An Unfortunate Woman*, "but I'm doing it in a roundabout way, including varieties of time and human experience, which even tragedy cannot escape from" (74). Of course, this is a character who is attempting to come to terms with the suicide of a friend, so it would seem that his appropriation of a non-linear perspective of time is in fact little more than a device for him to maintain an emotional detachment from his grief. There are similarities also between this situation and that of the narrator of *So the Wind Won't Blow it All Away*. In this latter novel, too, the protagonist entirely deconstructs the linearity of his own personal history, playing and replaying certain events in different sequences to try to arrive at a rationalisation and acceptance of the fact of his friend's death in a shooting accident. Indeed, the attempt to come to terms with events is all the more frantic in this novel because the friend died at the hand of the narrator. Ultimately, he takes a distinct step back away from the immediacy of his guilt and begins to interpret his past as some kind of movie, a narrative of somebody else's life that he can edit and cut in an objective manner. "I have a gigantic motion picture studio in my mind" he claims, before admitting that he has "been working on the same movie for 31 years" (74).

The question, however, is whether the only impulse towards a non-linear model of time is initiated by trauma, or whether there is a much greater aesthetic and intellectual significance to the endeavour. The answer lies really in the fundamental thrusts of Brautigan's philosophical intent. His aesthetic technique, when taken in its entirety, is geared towards a reconsideration of cultural absolutes: materialism, history, inherent narrative authority. As Alan Watts concludes, "all sorts of things that we believe to be real – time, past and future, for instance – exist only conventionally" (8). Truths are formed from particular necessities and only remain truths because they are neither questioned nor supplanted. This realisation is what compels Brautigan to challenge the absoluteness of time; this is what drives him to picture "a firmament of crows" and assert that "even when you arrive there / twenty minutes early [...] you are late" (*Mercury* 109). By which standard is the time of arrival at a lyrical conjecture being judged? On whose authority is it assessed? The declaration is deliberately absurd, it is presumptuous and preposterous, but it points towards the invisible tokens of control that underpin the way we perceive. It is just as preposterous to impose a model upon time and refute all other possibilities; it is just as stoical to accept this explanation and to experience existence as a sequence of finely balanced and measured units held fast by somebody else's definition of punctuality. Time, Brautigan urges the reader, is so much more than just a metronomic meter; it is the basis of our lives, the element in which we thrive. "Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river" (Borges 269). Something so fundamental to the human experience surely cannot be left under the control of others but should, Brautigan seems to assert, be reclaimed and utilised to fully experience the complexity of being. "We were the eleven o'clock news" he proclaims in his poem of the same name (*Mercury* 57), the personal experience exemplified in public terms to illustrate this shift in the relationship between the individual and the temporal sphere.

Arno Borst identifies the same dilemma in human awareness in his book *The Ordering of Time*:

> The living [are] repeatedly confronted by the old question of whether they should raise themselves above their momentary existence, come to terms with it, or lose themselves in it (Borst 130).

If the concept of time, of sequence and consequence and eternity, is complex, then the more immediate sensation of moment, of right here and now, is far less so. It is difficult to refute an idea that so effectively encapsulates the experience of awareness, and it is via this awareness that Brautigan primarily engages with theories of time, indeed with representations of anything. For him the moment is something quintessential, is representative of an expanse of temporality beyond this single instance, becoming almost akin to a gene or strand of DNA which resonates out into infinity. There is a very tangible sense in his work that a moment can be dissected and upon analysis can reveal the truth of existence itself. For example, as has already been asserted, one story in *Revenge of the Lawn* features a pair of friends that throw a transistor radio onto a bonfire in frustration after one of them has broken up with his girlfriend. Immediately, this character's personal loss is reflected in each of the songs played on the melting set: "It's an old song that's been played on all the juke boxes in America" (18). This moment, this single instant in the span of one man's life is indicative of the nature of human relationships and emotional pain throughout history. However, this conclusion does not explain the full extent of the connection between the moment and the wider temporal reality of time. It is not merely that the personal moment expands outwards to encapsulate the public experience, because the inverse is also true: the social sphere also contracts and seeps into the moment to give it form and structure. The songs playing on the narrator's radio in this instance are sequenced because they are part of a popular music chart. As the transistor melts he finds that the degrading receiver effects the ordering of this chart: "A song that was #9 became #27 in the middle of a chorus about loving somebody" (18). The jilted lover's reaction to his circumstances is not only an addition to a litany of such reactions but also a unique entry in the catalogue which effectively changes the content of the whole, if only fractionally, forever. The song about loving somebody slips eighteen places because the melting plastic distorts the sound and it appears as though it is at twenty seven rather than number nine; because the protagonist feels better now he has destroyed

something; because destroying something is now identified as a means to make the emotions involved in this particular song eighteen times less painful.

Certainly in the earlier part of his career, the notion of moment seems to have had for Brautigan this very clearly defined referential relationship with the wider mechanism of time. Perhaps the most famous example of his use of this technique is in the short story 'The Scarlatti Tilt', quoted here in its entirety:

> 'It's very hard to live in a studio apartment in San Jose with a man who's learning to play the violin.' That's what she told the police when she handed them the empty revolver (37).

There is no need for the author to present a full account of the events he is depicting here because the confession of the murderer and a description of what she hands to the police are entirely adequate as a representation. These two sentences are not only a snapshot of time as it spills off the page in all directions, but a fragment also of the narrative itself as it forms in the mind of the reader. 'The Scarlatti Tilt' is a story about the mechanism of understanding time, of attaching meaning to a sequence of events and how prudent a process that is, as much as it is about the economy of storytelling. Again, however, the story is a presentation of moment as something identifiably microcosmic, something that is immediately representative of a wider truth.

As Brautigan enters the latter stages of his career, there is a distinct shift in his work away from this technique. One of his last published books, *The Tokyo-Montana Express*, takes the form almost of a diary, a vast formless record of almost random entries chronicling one of his by then frequent trips to Japan. The use of moment in this work is far less representative and tends to devolve almost into an obsessive narrative detachment. The author's observations become very fractured and singular and there seems to be nothing which holds them together anymore. There is "no reason for the telephone to be ringing in the middle of the night on a Sunday" (31); "a menu is a description of a meal that never existed" (170); "PANCAKES WILL NOT BE SERVED FROM MIDNIGHT TO 4 AM" (192). There is no continuum, either linear or otherwise, to these observations. They are merely pinpricks in the mind of the author and direct textual responses to disembodied sensory stimuli. Indeed,

Brautigan admonishes the reader at one point in the text: "if you are expecting something dramatic [...] about chickens and their place in the firmament, forget about it" (89). It is almost as though his appreciation of time, of temporal continuity, has degraded to such an extent that it has all but disappeared entirely. Or has it? If, as Ursula Heise claims, "time is inherent in the event rather than an abstract dimension surrounding it" (28), then Brautigan is not missing the point at all here but is beginning rather to reach the crux of the matter. After all, what is temporal continuity but a sequence of instances, occurrences that do not necessarily bear any relation to each other? Whilst the author moves about Tokyo he is subjected to all manner of external stimuli which come at him from a myriad of sources and impose upon him conflicting impressions that have very little to do with cause and effect and much more to do with randomness and chaos. There is no meaning inherent in the order in which these events occur. The meaning, therefore, can only reside within each of the individual instances themselves. Time itself "can only be described and defined by entering into the event's internal structure" (28). It is the unit itself and not the sum total of units that holds anything even approaching any sort of significance. These units will inform each other, will stand in counterpoint to each other, but the complex web they comprise will not automatically contain anything beyond that which is provided from its component elements. The whole is not necessarily anything greater than the sum of it parts.

This argument, however, is not without its consequences. If time has no significance, no relevance beyond the individual components of moment, then concepts such as past and future, cause and effect, history even, become obsolete. Indeed, Ursula Heise concedes as much, claiming history to be at best an abstract notion, a string of "temporal phenomena that seem to be only randomly related to each other" (29). Brautigan never actually goes this far because even in his most focused interrogation of moment he cannot break away entirely from the idea that there is a resonance to these events that is experienced elsewhere, beyond the instant in which they occur. He cannot dismiss the conviction that there is a continuum of sorts which leads out away from this moment and flows to other places, other times. It is not possible for him to stand in one spot and admire a particular section of the

Yellowstone River without musing about how the water is "on its way to join up with the Missouri River, then onto the Mississippi River travelling down to the Gulf of Mexico, its eventual home, so far away from these mountains, this kitchen door and the knocking of last night" (*Tokyo* 112). Time is, of course, inherent primarily in the moment, it is not something that exists phantasmagorically. Each instant we exist we are "beginning endings" (*Unfortunate* 107), acting and reacting instantaneously. Individual instances are the atomic particles that constitute the matter of history. Without them there would be no matter, no sequence of time, no temporal reality. They are the component parts of a greater whole and contain within them individually the essence of that whole, but to dismiss entirely the way in which they relate is surely to misunderstand the properties of the product their combination creates. There is no definitive reason why the components of a complex molecule hang together in the combinations they do beyond the fact that if they did not the substance they formulate would not exist. At its very base level there is always a continuum in time because its molecular events are experienced by somebody, are perceived and perhaps rationalised. The continuity of *The Tokyo-Montana Express* is essentially provided by the narrator who navigates across this landscape of random signifiers and channels them into a sequence that is his life. This single point of consciousness is the constant that binds his temporal reality together and merely because the sequence does not fit a rational pattern does not mean that it has no form or personal transcendental relevance. Essentially, it is another exercise in imaginative cognition. The individual derives his own meaning in the sequences of moments that he puts together, that he *constructs*, when contemplating time from the objective rather than the subjective perspective.

Mark Currie takes the diametrically opposite view to Ursula Heise, asserting in his work *Postmodern Narrative Theory* that "there can be no such thing as a moment" (81), insisting that time cannot be segmented in this manner, that the whole is nothing short of a perpetual flux. To take a cross section of something that flows incessantly and indivisibly from one instant into another would be to deny and contradict the very nature of the entity and to mislead oneself as to its true form and inherent properties. For Currie, time is not molecular; its essence cannot be found at

the atomic level, but at the other extreme, only when it is considered in its totality. Whereas Heise's perspective seems almost to rest upon the image of the mechanical clock, clicking off the distinct metronomic seconds, Currie's is borne out by the electronic clock and its smooth and seamless sweep around the daily cycle. Ironically enough, this perspective is much closer to Brautigan's utilisation of time in the vast majority of his work – essentially all of his output excepting *The Tokyo-Montana Express*. There is a distinct sense in his writing of an ever-presence of time, a constant focal concentration of everything that ever was and everything that will ever be pinned down in every single moment that passes, every single instance of textualisation. An auction, for example, "smell[s] like the complete history of America" (*Revenge* 103). A waitress pours a customer a fresh drink because "the coffee needs taking care of right now and that is what she is doing for the benefit of all the generations of coffee drinkers to come" (*Revenge* 66). The present is fundamentally a snapshot of eternity; it is both precursive and historical, "bearing within it[self] the spectre of its own past and future" (Currie 78). This concept is something Brautigan explores extensively in *An Unfortunate Woman*:

> [...] the shadows in the house have been here for a long time, shadows to begin with and then decades of shadows added to those shadows, and also gathering, adding to them this day: Monday 15th of February 1982.
>
> The day after tomorrow, Wednesday, I go to Chicago, but today I'm here returned by the uncertainties and compulsions of life (51).

It is possible to isolate moments in time in a purely notional sense, using date and time stamps like degrees of longitude and latitude; but just as the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn only exist in the geographical framework of all other points of reference, so too does one instant of one day, one week in a month of the calendar year only become identifiable within an arbitrary system. Monday 15th February 1982 is not a distinct entity as and of itself. Monday 15th February 1982 is merely a convenient label applied to the compressed impression of events experienced by the narrator between ruminations upon a mouldering house collecting dust that is once again in his thoughts, and a trip to Chicago. In the subsequent paragraphs he muses

upon "the atmosphere of the house", brooding upon it, desperate "to become more aware of its role in eternity" (52). This is a crucial concept within Brautigan's work: eternity. The concept of moment is essentially a convenient device which enables textualisation of immediate sensory impressions. These impressions are loaded with countless intellectual preconceptions and vague portents and consequences which relate the moment backwards, forwards, sideways, in all directions, eternally. "Life cannot be controlled" claims Brautigan, "and perhaps not even envisioned" (59), but that is what his utilisation of moment accomplishes for him: a way to conceptualise that which cannot be envisioned, a focal point, a way in to this nebulous formation of time, somewhere to begin from, to navigate from. There can be no such thing as a moment except when the limitations of human perception make it necessary.

It is precisely at this point when considering the nature of moment and eternity, however, that Brautigan and Currie part company, which is hardly surprising in fact because Currie then begins to contradict himself. If there can be no such thing as a moment, there can surely be no such thing as a distinct, quantifiable present. Any notion of 'now' must surely rest upon some logically defined subdivision of time which does precisely what Currie deplores in that it divorces the past from the future and leaves a scrap of continuity behind which can only be labelled the present. How else can a linear concept of time exist? It follows, therefore, from Currie's theoretical point that he does not believe time to be linear. However, he claims in his work that any departure from precisely this linear model of time in an individual's perception is indicative of nothing short of schizophrenia. An appreciation of past, present and future, he insists, is "the basis of guilt and moral action" and much more than this, the very cornerstone of our sense of self, our "narrative of personal identity" (103). If there is no sequence to our experience of time, he claims, then there is no evolution of thought and experience, there is nothing left but a "theatre of signs and discourses which cannot exclude each other" (103) and the result is an ethical and perceptual chaos which cannot be conducive to mental health. This theatre of signs and discourses, though, is precisely the argument he uses to explode the theory of moment, the ever presence and totality of cultural signifiers that makes every instant, every instance, an eddy in the flow of all else. There are but two conclusions to be

drawn from his argument: either he is asserting that there is no sequence to time and we are all schizophrenic; or his theoretical point is deeply flawed – which is a shame because Brautigan effectively picks up on this same conceptual lead and resolves the issue much more satisfactorily. In his work ethical responses, cause and effect, *do* exist even though time has become non-linear, even though it is being depicted dimensionally. The key to this cohesion is the notion of the calendar map that has already been discussed in this chapter. According to this model, all moments are linked in time, just not necessarily sequentially. Cause and effect operates at a basic level in the direct lines of communication that exist between distant and not so distant co-ordinates in the landscape of eternity. The narrator of *An Unfortunate Woman* suddenly gets the urge to call an old friend, for example, and "never would have made that telephone call if the bus had not driven off without him, stranding him at the site of [a] fire, which he decided to investigate" (20). There is no apparent correlation between the missing of a bus and the witnessing of a fire to the phoning of an old friend, yet the former experiences result in the latter act. There is connection between the three events which is not elaborated upon by Brautigan but emerges anyway, emerges homogenously in the impenetrable cognitive processes of the character in question.

Much more significant is the persistence of morality in this "geography of time" (Brautigan, *So* 65). The narrator of *So the Wind Won't Blow it all Away* is capable of navigating at will across the terrain of his personal history, but he never loses sight of the immense guilt he feels regarding the accidental death of his friend. At one point he begins to obsess about a choice he made between buying a hamburger or the bullets for his gun that would ultimately kill the other boy in the orchard. Hamburgers become a recurrent image in his mind, in his daily thoughts, in his attempts to rationalise the world. "I believe that only a complete knowledge of hamburgers can save my soul" (81) he claims as he interviews short order chefs for an imaginary school newspaper. This obsession is surely Currie's guilt and moral action at its most vivid. The choice the narrator makes about what to spend his money on is not necessarily the immediate precursor to the accident, nor is it particularly the most rational event in the whole episode to fixate upon. But then guilt is never particularly

rational, and Brautigan's model of time is such that any of the tokens that the narrator has conceptually linked to this one instance can be appropriated from its position in the network of moments and emphasised beyond all reasonable doubt by the grief-stricken mind. His decision to shoot without properly aiming at a rooster may be a more logical point to pick when reconstructing the sequence of events and assigning blame to himself. The point is, however, that it is not really a sequence but rather a vast intricate framework of moments and relative events and decisions which all interrelate. The links between them can be identified and actively formed by the rational mind. Indeed, in this structure of time, cause and effect exist in a much more satisfactory and illustrative manner because multiple origins relate to multiple consequences in a way that is much more representative of the nature of existence. Certainly it is a method of textualisation that approximates the truth more closely than the flattening out of experience into a simplified, two-dimensional line.

The argument against Currie's assertion that non-linear time roughly equates to mental health problems is made somewhat more problematic by the fact that Brautigan was himself diagnosed with schizophrenia at a young age. It is certainly a well documented symptom of some schizophrenics that they struggle to retain "a sense of personal continuity in time" (Laing 69). According to Ronald David Laing, in many cases the patient becomes acutely aware of this problem and begins to attach a greatly exaggerated importance on being aware of oneself at every single instant:

> Sometimes the greatest reliance may be placed on the awareness of oneself in time. This is especially so when time is experienced as a succession of moments. The loss of a section of the linear temporal series of moments through inattention to one's time-self may be felt as a catastrophe (116).

Certainly this attention to the moment seems reminiscent of Brautigan's literary technique, but Laing is actually stressing here the tendency of schizophrenics to cling to a linearity between these moments when contemplating their personal existence, a reaction which, as has been discussed, is at odds with Brautigan's wider approach. In fact, Laing's findings seem to contradict Currie's claim that schizophrenia is linked with a movement away from linearity. In any case, several of the author's occasional biographers are at pains to point out that this diagnosis of their subject is a very

subjective one and is much more indicative of the social period in which the findings were declared than of the actual mental state of the author himself.[15]

The most striking feature of Brautigan's perspective upon time is that it remains, throughout his career, something fundamentally subjective. Past, present and future are not universally defined but are highly dependent upon the temporal awareness and intellectual projection of the individual as he strives to rationalise his existence in this framework. For example, the narrator of *So the Wind Won't Blow it all Away* experiences multiple pasts and futures, some of them nested and rather convoluted. At several points in the text he is suddenly transported by the vividness of his recollection to different moments in his childhood, sometimes back to infancy and then suddenly "catapulted into the future where [...] the February-17th apple-orchard event is history" (81). In reality, the entire narrative of the novel is relayed from a point in time far beyond the accident in the orchard, from somewhere in the narrator's adult life. Yet the majority of the events recalled in the text revolve around the period of time prior to this, essentially making 17th February 1948 a future waiting to happen. Once again, Brautigan is exploding the illusion of linearity in time by illustrating that the future does not actually have to follow the present, but merely requires a notional construct of past against which to exist as counterpoint. Every moment, every event is a future to some other past; every moment is potentially a present into which recollection can cast the subjective mind, effectively scrambling and realigning temporal sequences to fit the mood of the individual. It is not merely the life of the old man he visits in his shack that the narrator of the novel is able to "take apart and put back together [...] like a huge puzzle in [his] mind" (61). He is also empowered to do this for his own life, for the lives of everyone around him, deconstructing and remodelling the order of events in their personal histories in order to unravel the significance, the meaning inherent within them.

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[15] Accounts of this episode vary depending upon the source: his daughter Ianthe claims that he had himself deliberately arrested by smashing a window so that he could at least be fed and spend the night in some sort of bed. Lawrence Wright's version of events has the author arrested over a girl who criticised his writing. Whatever the exact motivation, it is evident that he was "diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic" during this period of imprisonment and eventually received "shock therapy" (Wright 59).

There is evidence of a historicist approach in Brautigan's technique when he tackles time in this manner because he begins to move away from abject storytelling and into theories of cognitive evolution. Here he is effectively "using one period of the past", albeit a distinctly subjective past, "as a metaphor with which to understand another" (Hamilton 29), the juxtaposition ultimately casting new light upon both sides of the equation. Time, he affirms over and over again, is a process of realisation that occurs within the subject and not a dimensional law of physics that dictates its own properties. As history forms almost as a byproduct of the human drive towards a rationalisation of chaos, time materializes organically, and changes, and evolves as episodes and momentary impressions are compulsively reimagined. It appears then that the postmodernist perspective of time is actually not too different from the modernist manifesto, as illustrated in the following précis of the character of Molly Bloom from Joyce's *Ulysses*:

> Her memory is not a faculty for bringing fixed ideas out of the past; it is one that enables her to transform them repeatedly in the endless creativity of her present consciousness, where all is fluid without separate thoughts or isolated moments [...] (Kern 28)

The crucial difference between the modernist and the postmodernist slant, however, lies precisely here. Whilst the former is content to place time within the imagination, this imagination being a prerequisite constant, the latter pushes its analysis further than this, taking nothing for granted, interrogating the very manner in which consciousness arrives at these definitions and the sensory material it appropriates in order to do so. The old couple who fish from the comfort of their living room furniture in *So the Wind won't Blow it all Away*, the "two American eccentrics freeze-framed in grainy black and white thirty two years ago at sunset" (93), are prime examples of this disparity. The narrator's memory of them is expressed through a cultural frame, the popular notion of the old, faded, sepia print that still barely holds the image of a time long past. In terms of true recollection, the couple were obviously not witnessed by him in this manner when he encountered them, and after all the memory dates from only thirty two years previous, they are hardly relics of the frontier. But during the course of a cultural existence which has imbued the narrator

with this connection between the past and this specific type of visual representation or artefact, the two concepts have become intertwined. The result is that his personal history assumes some of the characteristics of broader American history, at least as it is conceptualised in his mind. The memory of the couple becomes textured and exaggerated. They become a part of the greater cultural past, their eccentricities magnify and become representative of an era. The grainy black and white photograph the narrator holds in his mind is almost reminiscent of a tattered print taken of workers on the railroads, or during the Gold Rush, or of Native Americans on their Reservations. The point is that the method of expression does not merely convey memories to the reader, but actually alters them also. It cannot but taint the images it presents, and ultimately it has the effect of shifting certain points of emphasis and inferring entirely new things through the manner of representation it employs.

Of course, the contextualisation of memory is nothing more than another facet of the subjective nature of time. The personal experiences and cultural bias of the individual will dictate which signifiers, which metaphors will drive memory and temporal awareness. There is no "absolute time" (Hawking 38), only relative perspectives. In fact, this conclusion, as evident in the work of Brautigan, is rather like a literary and philosophical version of Einstein's theory of relativity. Intellectually as well as physically "each individual has his own personal measure of time that depends on where he is and how he is moving" (Hawking 38):

> When a body moves, or a force acts, it affects the curvature of space and time – and in turn the structure of space-time affects the way in which bodies move and forces act (Hawking 38).

In perceptual terms, as has already been discussed, when events in time are considered they evoke cultural frames of reference that relate to other, wider periods of time, and in turn these cultural signifiers dictate the manner in which events are considered. Ultimately, time is no different from any other physical or cultural phenomenon: its perception and its appreciation are always impinged upon by a myriad of external forces and stimuli. These forces will fluctuate depending upon individual circumstances, making a standard definition implausible. "What we mean by 'right

now' is a mysterious thing which we cannot define and we cannot affect" claims Richard P. Feynman (101), illustrating that the measurements and units applied to time are notional, a reduction of the truth for the sake of convenience. At one end of the spectrum, the standard second is nothing more than a maximum division of the observable time it takes the earth to rotate. At the other extreme, a light year is "the distance that light would go in one [year]" (Feynman 98). Both measurements are based on a different constant, making the very thing they represent "relative to the system by which it is measured" (Kern 18); in other words, arbitrary. The very theorems that attempt to make of time a uniform entity hold the key to their own destruction because they contradict themselves and prove themselves upon even a cursory analysis to be deeply subjective. They cannot but fail in their attempt to dispel individual and sociological alternatives because ultimately they cannot prove these alternatives to be incorrect.

So time is relative, both at an individual level and a cultural one. "The social relativity of time" (Kern 19) is indeed a theory promoted by individuals such as Durkheim who point to seasonal influences, the celebration of solstices in ancient civilizations, as evidence that time is perceived collectively in cultural groups. "Buddhist texts", for example, "say that the world annihilates itself and reappears six thousand five hundred million times a day and that all men are an illusion" (Borges 269). "The Maya of Central America believed that history would repeat itself every 260 years" (Coveney & Highfield 25). It is perhaps an overstatement to claim that Brautigan's perceptions on time are representative of the entire counterculture of which he was a part, but certainly his deconstruction of it parallels the challenges to physical institutions occurring elsewhere. He even goes so far as to frame his observations in specifically psychedelic terms: "The sixties [...] have become legend now like the days of King Arthur sitting at the Round Tables with the Beatles, and John singing 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds'" (*Tokyo* 97). Cultural thought and expression during this period is typically meta-referential in nature, and Brautigan simply takes this lead and applies the same techniques to intellectual and scientific subjects. Like cultural history, the authors finds within time a tendency for repetition, with every event and every instance experienced containing crucial similarities,

shared characteristics with previous periods and temporal points. Perhaps this is what Borges is attempting to convey in his assertion that "the number of [...] human moments is not infinite" (262). In his essay 'A New Refutation of Time' he theorises that time is repetitive in nature, that it loops back on itself perpetually and sensory impressions that appear familiar to an individual are not merely coincidental duplicates of earlier experiences, but rather the very same experiences navigated through a second or third time. Time is not linear, not a chain of events, but "a tireless labyrinth, a chaos, a dream" (256). In fact he goes further to claim that the only reason that the notion of time as a straight continuum exists at all is as a result of the limitations of language: "All language is of a successive nature; it does not lend itself to a reasoning of the eternal, the intemporal" (260). Curiously enough, Brautigan's attempts to break the spell of language and to weaken its hold over time appear to result in a confirmation of Borges' first argument. To transcend the flatline that sequential thought and utterance create is to cast the tokens of history up into the air in a three dimensional web. Between each reference point in this web is a strand that holds the structure together and these strands are the conceptual bridges that the mind uses to navigate across in its appropriation of similar or exact occurrences through which it rationalises new sensory information. The fact that it utilises pre-existent data in the process of understanding means that there is nothing truly new to its experience once it has become active, but only a regurgitation of prior knowledge. Admittedly, this prior knowledge is moulded into new combinations to create an evolution of understanding, but nevertheless the primary source, this storehouse of prior moments, is not truly infinite – it may fill with ever more examples for future reference but because nothing is new then these are really only additions or minor modifications to an unchanging core of knowledge. A primary example of this idea would be the shepherd in *Trout Fishing in America* who is described as "a young, skinny Adolf Hitler, but friendly" (45). Another example would be the attempt of a bookstore owner to rationalise the sexual experience a young man has just had: "You fought in the Spanish Civil War. You were a young Communist from Cleveland, Ohio. She was a painter. A New York Jew" (32). There are new ways of seeing, new metaphors to create, but only so many vehicles available on which to build them:

There
is
nothing new
under the sun
except
you and me (16).

Actually, there is nothing new under the sun *including* 'you and me'. But Brautigan knows this: his assertion in this early poem from *The Edna Webster Collection of Undiscovered Writings* is a romantic folly steeped in irony. Elsewhere in the same collection he refers to an affair as "an old story" – "somebody comes to this place", "somebody learns to love" (86-87). At the very least, after several thousand years of evolution there is nothing an individual can experience that has not already been experienced in essence by somebody else. In this sense, the scope, the potential inherent in human activity is actually very limited. There are only a finite number of moments and possible combinations of moments that awaits any one of us. Build into this hypothesis the limitations of the cognitive mind, and human existence begins to look very finite indeed.

The aim of certain branches of physics is precisely to find these limitations, to chart the future of the universe from the evidence at hand, to eliminate chance from existence and provide a unified theory which roughly equates to predestination. Indeed, Newton's laws are deterministic in nature, as is the notion of "Poincare's return" (Coveney & Highfield 68) – the theory that any system will ultimately return to its initial state. If the latter of these is taken to its logical conclusion, it represents the potential for "history [to] repeat endlessly" and for it to be eventually "possible, with enough information on a system, to predict all future and past events" (68). It is perhaps rather odd that the ambition of this area of science is to do no more than validate that which has existed as a belief in various religions for centuries: that is "everything which happens to us on this earth, both good and bad, is written up above" (Diderot 21). The only difference seems to be that the physicists are searching for fate somewhere other than with God; or perhaps it is that they are searching for a

different God. Either way they are seeking to eliminate choice and personal freedom, the ability to move through time in a self-determining manner.

The possibility that there really *is* no freedom is something that also appears to trouble Brautigan. There are elements of fate in several of his works, but most noteworthy is its appearance in *So the Wind Won't Blow it all Away*. To return to an example already used, at one point the narrator is talking to a casual acquaintance who has been punished by his parents for some misdemeanour and made to sleep in the garage. "I don't know what I'm going to do" (77) his friend tells him, certain that he is operating within a system of time where his destiny lies in his own hands. The narrator, however, does not see it this way, and in fact "ha[s] it all planned out": the boy's resentment over being expelled from the main house is going to fester in him and manifest itself in antisocial behaviour and petty crimes and "eventually lead to him doing three years in the pen for stealing a car and then a marriage with a spiteful woman ten years older than him" (77). He even goes so far as to describe the "five children who all grew to hate him" (77). The seeds of this character's entire future have been sown already by this one circumstance and all that is left to do is to watch them germinate and flower.

It is a vast oversimplification, however, to suggest that Brautigan merely resigns his characters to providence, thereby washing his hands of the complexity of their existence. Taken as a whole, the structure of *So the Wind Won't Blow it all Away* is so convoluted by the multiple periods of past and present and relative futures that the notion of fate becomes infinitely problematic in nature. The narrator is afforded a semblance of foresight in the text purely because he is constructing the story of his friend's life retrospectively. The present from which the narrative voice speaks is actually the past as far as the narrator's true location in time is concerned; the future that it speaks of is also the narrator's past, albeit a relatively more recent past. Brautigan is playing games with notions of temporal narrative location in a manner which opens up a range of issues regarding concepts such as fate and destiny and their validity as genuine conceits. After all, of the three tenses it is only really the past that can be accurately and exhaustively analysed (the future has not yet occurred and the present is unfolding at the same time that the senses struggle to process the data on

offer); and it is precisely this degree of intense interrogation that is required to draw conclusions on cause and effect, inevitability, destiny. In other words, fate is a concept that forms via the process of retrospection. It is only in hindsight that intricate chain reactions can be identified between different events, different moments. Or to put it another way, according to Poincare's return, it is only within fixed and finite systems that are known in their entirety that the future can be predicted. The intervening period between an initial event and the present moment of contextualisation is precisely such a closed system, as is a one hundred and thirty page novel written in 1982. Fate is not, in Brautigan's narrative, a mystical force at work in ordering the universe. Fate is instead yet another side effect of the human drive towards meaning and continuity from apparent disarray. Of course it is a losing battle because the physical world tends towards chaos, this is the "second law of thermodynamics" (Hawking 161), the inexorable dissipation of energy that occurs throughout the universe, converting order into disorder, ever increasing entropy. As was discussed in chapter one, Brautigan seems keen to utilise this physical law in his representation of the decline of counterculture. The erosion of personal ideals as increasing knowledge dissipates moral certainty reflects the theory perfectly. However this utilisation surely does no more than intensify the effort of rationalisation in terms of temporal awareness. As we seek to ward off the inevitable decline of clarity we draw ever more tenuous parallels between episodes in time and actively construct ideal scenarios such as destiny as a source of comfort and an act of denial.

In essence, Brautigan's assault on the limitations of how time is perceived seems geared towards a crucial intellectual evolution, a transcendence of time, a casting off of its shackles in order to free the consciousness. He attempts repeatedly to explode the myths of linearity and absolute time and to prove as arbitrary those commonly held notions of fate and history. Behind all of the different theories, the fact remains that "all time is time perceived by someone" (Borges 264), it is lateral and constructed by the individual, and perhaps if that perception is properly contextualised then the individual can move beyond it and into other states of awareness. Evidence of this agenda can be seen in texts such as *Sombrero Fallout*

where a self-determining narrative emerges from the discarded pages of a manuscript and begins to create of itself a parallel reality that exists outside of time, or *The Abortion* where the young narrator effectively opts out of his contemporary society and chooses to live instead in the seclusion of a library of unpublished books. Indeed, in the latter instance the library itself is depicted as "some kind of timeless thing" (75), a reality beyond temporal boundaries, an altered state almost to which the librarian aspires. All of which conspires towards a progression of Brautigan's aesthetic agenda yet further, beyond the mere challenge to cultural values, beyond an ideological confrontation with history and then time, and onto the visceral and primordial elements of consciousness itself.

5. Zen and the Art of Richard Brautigan

> The past cannot remember the past. The future can't generate the future. The cutting edge of this instant right here and now is always nothing less than the totality of everything there is (Pirsig 287).

In their perpetual search for new and alternative points of reference for their redefinitions of self and society, it was perhaps inevitable that many within the counterculture turned ultimately to Eastern philosophies and religious spiritualism. In terms of cultural definition and personal awareness it is difficult to imagine a greater fundamental divide than that which exists between the broadly defined commercial ideals of Western society and the incremental expansion to the geniality of the soul as offered and espoused by Zen Buddhism. In terms of counterpoint alone, it seems a natural choice. Brautigan is no exception to this wider trend, although the initial attraction seems for him to have sprung from the evident parallel between his notions of moment and the Zen principle of the ever constant now. It is only in the immediate present, contests Brautigan, that one draws breath, that one is aware, that one lives. All else that exists is merely conceptual, is an interpretation of previous impressions and prior knowledge to create an illusory sense of continuum that is really nothing more than the end product of a process of rationalisation. As Wong Kiew Kit proposes: "our consciousness acts as a link between our past, present and future lives" (Kit 46). In fact, in the work of Brautigan, it is the consciousness that *creates* some form of link between these three arbitrary states. Continuity is not something that exists in its own right in the physical world. Cohesion is a construct, is the output of a method whereby information is collated for intellectual convenience. As has already been discussed, Brautigan is aware of this fact – it appears time and again in his work. His characters bare the effort and frustrations of sequencing their lives, his narrators perhaps even more so. The significance attached to the actions of the narrator's lover in the story 'Women When They Put Their Clothes on in the Morning', for instance, is a prime example of this endeavour. Essentially, this nameless woman is doing nothing more in the text than redressing after sex but it is the spatial context the author constructs around her that loads the incident with significance. "She's got her clothes

on, and the beginning is over" (Brautigan, *Revenge* 118). It is not specified what this beginning is, it is just a beginning, a notional and almost flippant categorisation. Temporally speaking, the incident is being expressed here as the starting point of an imaginary sequence. To it is assigned a conjectured future which is imposed upon this single isolated moment by the narrative voice. A conceptual structure of beginning, middle and end is being forged for a chain of cause of effect which does not yet exist, which never will actually exist outside of the process of intellectualisation.

> [...] the soul is not inside the body. The body, rather, is within the soul. Your soul is the entire pattern of reality - of everything that is - focused at the point you experience as "here and now" (Watts, *Beat* 41).

In Brautigan's work, the past and the future emanate outwards from the instant of awareness almost like light refracted through a prism. The point of origin for how these two temporal concepts signify, and indeed the way in which they signify, is right here in the perpetual present of consciousness. The lives of the author's characters, our lives, are not just what we make of them: they are entirely our own inventions. The past is interpreted, the future conjectured, the genesis of each cognitive process right here in the present. Brautigan may not arrive at these conclusions through a defined ritual of meditation as a Buddhist might, but there is evidence that he does so via his own cultural version of a meditative act – whilst out fishing. "My mind drifted from place to place, past and present watching the fly as if it were my imagination" he expounds in *The Tokyo-Montana Express* (152). His appropriation of Zen values, it seems, is precisely that – an appropriation rather than a spiritual conversion. He engages in his work with "Bompu Zen" (Kapleau 49), or 'ordinary' Zen, the lowest recognised spiritual form which deals primarily with enlightenment in daily life rather than with a higher mystical ideal. On one level this seems almost a simple adoption of the Beat ethic whereby writers such as Kerouac and Ginsberg become obsessive about the attainment of Satori in their every deed and action: "the point of ecstasy that I always wanted to reach, which was the complete step across chronological time into timeless shadows" (Kerouac 173). Brautigan, however, approaches his Zen philosophy in a much more visceral manner. His focus is less upon that which one can attain and more upon the manner in which one is

prone to exist right here and now. Zen comes to inform everything in his writing, from the most bizarre instances of being right down to the most mundane. It is only through this relentless application that he can lead himself to minor epiphanies such as the fly on the end of his fishing line being a signifier of his imagination, and "the creek and its banks [as] products of that imagination" (*Tokyo* 152). Zen is the key to understanding that everything he in sees and experiences is imbued with the values and bias of Richard Brautigan. His appropriation of the theology is not about eternity as an abstract notion, but is much more about the manner in which the individual engages with his environment, how this method of engagement informs that environment and then, in turn, reaches out into a vast eternity of which this engagement is now an indelible part.

One of the founding truths of Zen is that reality is transient in nature. Everything is in essence impermanent: "life delineates itself on the canvas called time; and time never repeats: once gone, forever gone" (Suzuki 48). Existence is a perpetual flux of momentary impressions and the only constant through each of them is the captive mind, the consciousness that experiences and remembers and categorises these discrete units of being. Because of this, each moment the author's characters live through becomes microcosmic, interpreted and interpretable only by the rational mind via a system of cross-reference with pre-cognisant images and methods of understanding. Zen Buddhism enables Brautigan to expound upon his theory of lateral time because it gives him a precedent to work with. In this system, it is not just time that is lateral: ultimately *everything* is. "There is no knowledge of substance. It's just something we imagine. It's entirely within our own minds" (Pirsig 134). Robert Pirsig argues that nothing exists simply in its own right. Observation is not a passive act, but an aggressive application of values and "*a priori*" (135) knowledge in a complex construction of individual awareness. Upon each situation is brought to bear an intricate matrix of personal predispositions which makes reality a wholly individual experience in the first instance and a wholly artificial one in the second. It also proves the transience of existence: by affirming physical truth to be subordinate to predilection, it necessarily also becomes subject to the fickle nature of human consciousness. For instance, in *The Tokyo-Montana Express*, a female character

engages the narrator in a conversation about the landscape: "when she started talking about the mountains, they looked one way and when she finished talking about them, they looked another way" (20). This observation demonstrates that successive experiences add to the repository of knowledge brought to bear in any given situation. All subsequent engagements with the external world, whether they be new engagements or a recollection of prior ones, will be subject to the impressions generated in intervening moments. The fundamental data employed in the process of awareness is essentially subject to constant revision and nothing will ever remain the same in the eye of the beholder. In this instance, the mountains look different because they are now perceived differently, and if perception is what imbues them with their distinguishable qualities then it surely follows that they *are* different.

To illustrate the point about the artifice of reality yet further, Brautigan includes in one of his novels a narrative that writes itself. Discarded in the wastebasket whilst its author deals with the dejection of a failed relationship, the characters within the text of *Sombrero Fallout* continue to develop autonomously, the torn fragments of manuscript they exist within starting to glow and congeal. "It was a big decision but they decided to go on without him" (14). The surreal saga of a civil war that breaks out over a mysterious hat then unfolds, but much more significant than the narrative development is the parallel drawn by Brautigan between this melodrama and the physical life of its abandoned author – significant because this is no more real than the fiction he is evidently not writing. At precisely the same instant that these pieces of text are organising themselves he is sitting in his apartment wondering what to do next with his life:

> Then he knew what to do. He called a girl on the telephone. She was pleased that it was him when she answered the telephone (13).

He talks to this girl about the casual sexual relationship they have had together for years and she throws a log on the fire and "he put[s] his coat on and start[s] out the door" (14). Except that none of this actually happens: "he hadn't touched the telephone and there was no such girl" (14). All these scenarios are projections of his emotionally damaged consciousness, nothing more than wishful thinking. But they

call into question the effect that emotional distractions have on human awareness at any given time. Effectively there are always going to be psychological or biological impulses that will act as filters on any given external stimuli and these impulses will inevitably further cloud the issue as to what actually constitutes reality. Does the author in *Sombrero Fallout* actually have to put his coat on for that to become the truth of what happened in his apartment, or does he simply have to imagine a sequence of events that begins with this action for it to become a less literal, but no less significant, representation of what occurred: his state of mind, his lingering hope, his utter desperation?

Conversely, the author's ex-girlfriend in *Sombrero Fallout* sleeps peacefully throughout the entire duration of the novel. She dreams incessantly of her father, of Kyoto in the rain, and of a "beautiful spring day in Seattle" (143). These are her realities, the collective elements of her perceptual state of awareness, linked to the physical world of her bedroom by the purring of her cat upon which the state of mind conducive to these reveries depends. In Yukiko's dreams, Brautigan asserts, "her father [is] an unseen character", is "everything in the dream that you couldn't see" (131). Her reality contains not only knowable elements, but also unknowable and unrepresentable ones. Just as critical to awareness, the author implies, are those things that exist negatively, that are experienced only by their absence. In Zen these are categorised as *Mu* - in simple terms a sense of nothingness, although strictly speaking Zen students are instructed not to "construe Mu as nothingness" nor to "conceive it in terms of existence or non-existence" (Kapleau 83). In secular terms, however, the critical functions of human consciousness are founded on this divide between what is and what is not, when in truth the two are illustrated here as not only interchangeable but, in fact, the same thing. When something *is* it is so just as definitively because of what it is not. The two concepts are irrevocably intertwined and the impulse of Zen theology to push its students beyond the divisive terms in which they are traditionally contemplated echoes through Brautigan's text as a call to transcend simplistic notions of being. Yukiko's father is absent from her dream but it is nevertheless a dream about him. The physical motifs of the landscape and the weather are the essence of her memories from which her father cannot be extricated. Everything is linked.

Everything informs and denotes everything else. So it is easy to state categorically that a specific image does not literally feature in a thought process, and not so easy to establish that the same thought process is categorically not concerned with that same image.

For Robert Pirsig, a contemporary of Brautigan's, the moment of enlightenment in Zen Buddhism is associated to the awareness that reality is a projection from within. It is this precise instant when the realisation hits that "everything you think you are and everything you think you perceive are undivided" (Pirsig 146) that Satori is finally attained. This convergence is indeed a recurrent theme in Zen literature – the subject and the object being no more than elements of the same phenomenon, equal proponents of an organic reaction that produce this event called experience:

> The high distant cry
> of the stag tells the hunter
> how to blow his horn (Issa 78)

Without the one there would be no other: the two concepts exist in counterpoint only, reliant upon their mirror image for definition. If the hunter only exists because there is something to hunt, then it follows that the reverse is also true. Perhaps the stag does not need his pursuer quite so literally, but without him it would not have that definition – it would not be a stag in the terms that we understand that to mean. The cultural connotations of nobility and natural grace and worthiness of pursuit all hang off this innate relationship between the two sides of the equation. Brautigan employs the same technique:

> Here is something beautiful (etc.
>
> Its color begins in your hand.
> Its shape is your touch (Brautigan, *Mercury* 55).

Cause and effect become in Zen a closed circle, a means which has its ends contained within its own origins. Whatever it is that the subject of Brautigan's poem has "so

little left" of, its beauty is the end product of a process of appreciation come full cycle. The beauty itself is not a innate property but an experience, an incident between the subject and the object. Its colour only becomes so when categorised, its shape and texture are only as they are felt to be. The physical properties of the object inform the aesthetic verdict, and the verdict confers upon the object its value. Every instance of being is this way, every interaction with the physical world exists as a dialogue between two halves of the same instance of awareness. These 'two halves' are indeed almost a manifestation of Ying and Yang, a notion of fate that is not necessarily concerned with personal destiny but more with the inevitable consequences attendant upon ordering principles and the natural balance of the universe. Brautigan demonstrates in the poem cited above that nothing exists in a vacuum, and that all the elements that constitute our world belong ultimately to an equilibrium which enables relatively stable and unconfused states of consciousness. The moment of contact between human awareness and the physical world is both proactive and reactive. The mind works simultaneously to channel the influences that bombard it and to rationalise, categorise, and project back its own definitions.

A further defining principle of Zen is that of vocation, and it is here that the process of facilitation in the rational mind of the observer is duly acknowledged. If the assumption of a role in any given situation (whether that be a hunter or a passive onlooker) is a fundamental truth of the way consciousness works then it follows that the only way to enhance one's quality of being is to engage in this process as fully and productively as possible. Wu wei, "action in accordance with the character of the moment" (Watts, *Beat* 46), becomes the ideal towards which the Zen pupil must strive, performing each action as diligently, economically and characteristically as possible. One example of this in Brautigan's work would be the effort Lee Mellon and Jesse put into looking for a lost pomegranate in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*. As Jesse himself exclaims "there was nothing else to do, for after all this was the destiny of our lives" (141). Another example is the "hippie girl" (*Revenge* 90) of the story 'A Long Time Ago People Decided to Live in America' who passes the narrator on the street and "departs beautifully towards all the people that she will ever meet" (91). Each of these instances suggests that our fate is to live through a series of

moments (either predestined or random) and the only control we really have is over the quality inherent in the engagement we make with these instants in time.

Knowledge, however, is not the same as knowing and a glimpse of this truth does not necessarily, as Pirsig seems to imply, grant the Zen pupil his coveted state of Satori. This end is only achieved incrementally over long periods of time whereby the student gains ever stronger and ever more sustainable glimpses of the true nature of reality. Enlightenment is not something that can be taught and the pupil is not instructed but rather led by his master through an intricate series of self-discoveries. There are several documented methods used to promote this self-realisation, but none so universally employed as the koan:

> Koans deliberately throw sand into the eyes of the intellect to force us to open our mind's eye and see the world and everything in it undistorted by our concepts and judgements (Kapleau 76).

As Kapleau states, koans are designed to tax the rationality of the Zen student, to infuriate their logical synapses with unimaginable images and irresolvable riddles. Their purpose is to push the exasperated pupil beyond his preconceptions, beyond the rules of physics and commonplace truths that they have been conditioned with since childhood and out into a new transcendental awareness of the universe. The crux of the matter is that the definitions our cultures hold paramount are no more than interpretations, structures imposed upon the world that do not necessarily represent truth and should not be taken for granted when there are alternative methods of thought and experience which could, in the final analysis, prove to be just as valid. Koans are designed to provoke the rational mind and lead it not to any concrete definition of these alternatives but to an awareness that alternatives do at least exist. Upon this realisation the Zen student can then further build his enlightened vision. So the question may be asked as to how "the sound of clapping with one hand" would be (Kit 142). Or the student could be asked to contemplate an answer already provided to a question. 'Does a dog have a Buddhist nature?', for instance, the answer affirmed as "mu" (Kit 142) rather than yes or no. This response may seem highly illogical but the Zen koan is so devised as to defeat logic, to take away the primary faculty that human

consciousness utilises in its appropriation of the world and force it to work differently, to approach its task differently, and to arrive at different conclusions.

Brautigan utilises koans throughout his work, primarily to provoke his readers with an indication of the infinite potential of the imagination. In his story '1/3, 1/3, 1/3' he includes a very koanesque description of an implausible animal, a miserable "half-dog, half-cat creature" (*Revenge* 13) which somehow epitomises the sad and compromised poverty of the trailer park it lives in. When it "half-bark[s] and half-meow[s]" with an "Arfeow" (13), it becomes a less figurative object in the text and a much more literal one, defying reason and logic and common sense. The creature is as real as the "black ragged toothache sky" (11), or the trailer's dirty limp bed, "partner to some of the saddest love-making this side of The Cross" (13). The reader can imagine these other miserable tokens of a grim existence, and can do so because of the specific configuration of emotive words that Brautigan brings together in his sentences. The half-dog half-cat may be less plausible but is ultimately imaginable in precisely the same terms, and so it follows that there is really no difference between it and the bed, the sky or the trailer. They are all actually conceivable at some level within the act of comprehension. Nevertheless, there is an inherent irony in the fact that koans are also intended, in Philip Kapleau's words, to "liberate the mind from the snare of language" (76). Language is precisely the vehicle Zen masters use to impart koans to their pupils, as it is the vehicle Brautigan utilises to deconstruct logic. It is not so much language itself that is identified as the enemy to Zen Buddhist thought but rather what it represents in its role as the only viable method of communicating and propounding logic statements. Language is an intrinsically logical method: as has already been discussed in previous chapters, it has to conform to a standard and a defined set of rules for communication to be made at all possible. Consequently, it becomes another manacle clasped onto the free consciousness, its forms and customs informing the manner in which thought occurs rather than serving to support the process of awareness. This is why koans are minimalist in nature, presented to their audience with the least possible descriptive elaboration. They are not answers but arrows, hints and clues that mark the way towards realisations beyond the almost

incidental content of the anecdotes themselves. The following exemplifies the underlying technique of koan in Brautigan's work:

> I'm haunted a little this evening by feelings that have no vocabulary and events that should be explained in dimensions of lint rather than words (Brautigan, *Revenge* 101).

Koans are the "finger[s] pointing at the moon" (Watts, Spirit 50), the prompts rather than the focus of attention, and they occur again and again throughout the counterculture at this juncture as aids to social agendas and catalysts of psychedelic experimentation. The Diggers' street performances can be understood as a kind of physical koan, a jolt to the expectations of bystanders to make them conscious of their enactment of roles. Their free-store signs can be viewed as dialectic koans: "If Someone Asks to See the Manager Tell Him He's the Manager" (Grogan 374). Whatever form they take, they are all directed towards one goal: to take a concept which seems on the surface to be absolute and to explode its apparent truth, to reveal it as nothing more than an uncontested value in a much larger framework of uncontested values. For example, Brautigan identifies in 'The Wild Birds of Heaven' the notion of credit, that great Western technique of subjection, as something worthy of reconsideration. In the first instance, his character explains to the store clerk that he has perfect credit, a claim supported solely on the fact that he is "already 25,000 dollars in debt" (*Revenge* 39). It is now quite a commonly held view that credit is assigned not on the size of the assets available with which a borrower can repay their debt but on the amount of debt they have already accumulated, but the concept is no less absurd simply because it is commonly considered a capitalist truth. However, Brautigan then switches tack slightly and dispenses with notions of logic and illogic, choosing to illustrate his point instead in a rather more koan-like manner. What follows is an anecdote about how the consumer's shadow is removed as part of the credit arrangement and replaced with that of "an immense bird" (40). The imagery is bizarre, absurd, vaguely obscene somehow, certainly perplexing. Yet the removal of one's shadow is no more or less absurd than the unquestioning acceptance of concepts such as credit agreements, no more or less absurd than the willing submission to

methods of financial and personal control when in reality it is this submissiveness alone that makes them effective, makes them real. The bird shadow in the story is a form of tangible humiliation to which the consumer submits because he is so conditioned into believing that this is no more than his lot in life, that this is the only way it *can* be. He is saddled with an albatross and suddenly Brautigan's koan takes on an almost postmodernist significance: it is leading the reader towards a personal revelation, and just as it can only transmit its message through language, so too must it draw reference from signifiers that the reader can comprehend. Hence the albatross, hence the allusion to Coleridge and the bird hung around the neck as a curse.

Haiku is essentially an extension of this same referential aesthetic, whereby signifiers are stripped bare of elaboration and a very fine balance is struck between the perceptual capability of the reader and the void of description that encourages him to forge a personal visualisation. Haiku is evocative rather than illustrative because perception is rather more evocative than illustrative. "Zen is emphatically a matter of personal experience" claims D.T. Suzuki (362). So is existence, so are cognisance and comprehension: all of these occur on a distinctly individual basis. In Zen, as in the work of Brautigan, reality is the responsibility of the beholder: it can be no more than that which his perceptions inform him of. To understand the manner in which these significations are brought to bear is to become enlightened, is "to learn about oneself [and] to forget oneself" (Kapleau 21).

> We met at a bar. We talked for a while. We had a few drinks.
>
> We made love and she had a dog (Brautigan, *Tokyo* 187).

There is decidedly little for the reader to work with in the prose haiku of Brautigan cited above. The narrator meets a woman, drinks with her, talks to her, has sex with her. She has a pet dog. These are the bare facts. The significance of them is simply not something inherent within the text. The significance is something that the reader engenders, something that depends purely upon "the subjective condition of the one to whose ears it chance[s] to fall" (Suzuki 70). Whether the reaction of the reader is moral or emotional or indifferent is entirely unpredictable. What the anecdote

means is therefore indefinable, is arbitrary because it means in whatever way the reader wants it to mean. There is a distinct parallel here between Haiku and postmodernist technique: both encourage the reader to focus upon the terms in which they perceive and upon the act of perception itself, in order to transcend the passive role of the recipient of received meaning. The only difference really between the two schools is in the method of delivery. Postmodernism funnels a cultural eternity's worth of cluttered cultural signifiers into one point of compressed significance, whereas Haiku starts with the narrow end, the minimum amount of skeletal syllables which force the consciousness through and out into an infinity of awareness. As D.T. Suzuki states: "in one lion are revealed millions of lions, and in millions of lions is revealed one lion" (35). Ultimately, it does not matter at which end of the spectrum consciousness begins its process of rationalisation. From an analysis of multitude is distilled a quality common to all. From the single point of focus is projected this same quality, detected in isolation and applied rather than derived. Whatever the means, the ends are the same, and it is this close alignment of Haiku and postmodernism which appears to have drawn Brautigan to the form. Indeed, he often attempts to imbue his Haiku with postmodernist elements, almost to fuse the two concepts, or to assimilate Haiku in a truly postmodernist style of representation:

> A warm thunder and lightening storm
> tonight in Tokyo with lots of rain and umbrellas
> around 10pm (Brautigan, *June* 48)

The first half of 'A Small Boat on the Voyage of Archaeology' seems almost traditional in its evocation of Haiku. The imagery is sparse but evocative; it is elemental in nature – illustrative of the weather and temperature and water. The verse is very precisely located in time, significantly expressed as a moment rather than a temporal elapse. These are all common characteristics of Haiku and Brautigan seems to be adopting the form quite candidly here, with the syllabic rules being perhaps the only omission. However, there is something about this careful appropriation of the conventions of Haiku that almost seems to undermine the poet's sincerity, to suggest that it *is* an appropriation, a pastiche, a "bravura imitation" (Jameson 133) of the form.

The poem is about Tokyo, which suggests an element of cultural reference, an inter-textuality creeping into what should be a purely provocative stanza of bare images. The storm and the water and the humidity are all utilised with precision to trigger a recognition of the Haiku form on behalf of the reader. All that is missing from the repository of traditional Haiku signifiers is that of stone or season. The real postmodern twist to the poem, however, comes in the second half where the Haiku form is turned upon itself and effectively negated:

> This is a small detail right now
> but it could be very important
> a million years from now when archaeologists
> sift through our ruins, trying to figure us
> out (Brautigan, *June* 48).

From the transfixed moment, Brautigan switches effortlessly to the grand sweep of history. From the bare facts which cage the vacuum into which the reader rushes with his rationalisations, the poet leaps to a lengthy and prescriptive discussion of the significance of his observation. It is this swift change of tack that serves to illustrate the first half of the poem as nothing more than another element in the author's postmodernist conglomeration of signifiers. The Haiku form becomes for Brautigan but another tool in his invocation of a total cultural awareness. By undermining the first three lines in this way he draws further attention to the increasingly apparent artificiality of his Haiku, the formulaic and calculated nature of its imagery, whilst simultaneously opening the poem up to a wider cultural frame of reference with the archaeologists dusting off remains with their brushes. Surprisingly, however, this destabilisation does not actually negate the impact the Haiku has on the reader. Admittedly it is a departure from the traditional form, but rather than a true pastiche, the postmodernist element seems almost to enhance the poem, to take its principle aesthetic values and to translate them into a universal statement of intent.

To illustrate this accordance a comparison can be made between perhaps the most famous Basho poem (as translated by Wong Kiew Kit) and a rather similar endeavour of Brautigan's:

Ah! The old pond
A frog jumps in
The water's sound (Kit 169)

This Haiku explores the continuity of existence, the principle connection between all elements of being. The frog and his pond are indicative of what the poetic form represents: the "microcosm related to transcendent unity" (Stryk 12). Each line of the poem is perfectly self contained, a microcosm within the microcosm, but together they suggest new meanings, new complementary relationships between the components of awareness. As Basho's frog jumps into his pond he presumably creates a noise. The splash is the result of the physical properties of the frog commingling with the physical properties of the water. The poem, however, does not depict this as a linear sequence of events. It is more of a synchronous experience in the text, a blend of sensual impressions that together forge a moment of awareness. The frog jumps into the sound of the water. He does not create the sound, he enters into the middle of it: the aural and kinetic elements of the incident happen concurrently, too concurrently for a logical rationalisation of linearity to be at all valid. In this manner Haiku emulates Zen by prompting the reader to engage more directly in the spontaneous moments of existence. Pirsig expresses it thus when describing the construct of a moment: "there is no subject and there is no object. There is only a sense of Quality" (294), an immediacy of experience composed of multiple points of stimuli. Brautigan, in turn, emulates this sensual synchronicity in some of his Haiku, and then extends the principle to denote a cultural synchronicity:

Their eyes are filled with the sounds
of what she is doing (*The Pill* 65).

Some bacon is frying.
It smells like a character
that you like in a good movie.
A beautiful girl is watching
the bacon (*Mercury* 70).

Brautigan's Haiku is less microcosmic than that of Basho, is certainly less refined in terms of the rules of the poetic form, but essentially it strives to make the same aesthetic point. The work of each poet attempts to illustrate a unification of existence, a harmonisation of the subject with the objects he perceives, with the manner in which he perceives them, and with the intellectual products of this process of perception. Whereas Basho's technique is primarily visual, aromatic, tactile, Brautigan's method is more rational, essentially cultural and sociological in nature. In his appropriation of the form, however, the latter seems almost to be highlighting a direct line of ascendance, a lineage between Haiku and postmodernism. After all, a frog jumping into the sound of water is not that different conceptually to a rasher of bacon frying in a pan and smelling like a film star. Each image invokes in turn a notion of continuity, of synchronicity between different elements of a disparate world. Whether that synchronicity is sensual or cultural in nature is really irrelevant. Moreover, in each instance the emphasis is always placed squarely on the observer: it is the observer's senses that fire simultaneously; it is the observer's cultural synapses that trigger a multitude of connotations stretching back over the span of their experience. As Pirsig states: "we take a handful of sand from the endless landscape of awareness around us and call that handful of sand the world" (85). This microcosmic process of reference is what Zen, and in turn Haiku, strive to reverse, encouraging its followers to transcend the reductionist tendencies of consciousness and open themselves up to alternative modes of awareness. This is what postmodern signification strives for also: an evolution of the intellect so that it develops knowledge of the manner in which it knows and in that way enriches the experience of perception.

The apparent schism between Haiku and postmodernism lies in the common perception of the former as an essentially intuitive method of awareness whereas the latter is often maintained, by Jameson and Chénetier and others, to be a fundamentally intellectual exercise. This apparent juncture, however, is only really a semantic problem, and one which Brautigan manages to skirt around with some ease:

An empty
checkbook,
a new

dress,
and a bottle
of
aspirin (Brautigan, *Edna* 105).

In the poem 'still life 2', cited above, Brautigan presents the reader with a very scant repository of images. The nouns have few adjectives attached to them which is again reminiscent of the conventions of Haiku. But the title adds a dimension of cultural reference, the still life tag indicative of various schools of painting, in this instance Cubism perhaps, particularly in light of the subject matter. The ordering of the objects provides an almost skeletal narrative: the lack of money caused by a purchase and resulting in a headache, or resulting in a suicidal depression. The direct manner in which the poet moves between the objects so fluidly lends a certain tone of desperation to the text, an apparent despair on the part of the subject that she has been so casual with her finances. Most significantly, all these realisations about the potential meanings of the poem occur simultaneously in the consciousness of the reader. The narrative significance and the intuitive sense of doom are not consequential discoveries: they coalesce in the mind at precisely the same instant, as does the awareness of the cultural allusion of the title and the bearing that this casts over the rest of the text. In effect, there is no actual difference here between intellect and intuition: the two are but complementary elements in the totality of perceptual awareness in precisely the same way that Basho's frog and the sound of the water are indivisible components of the same whole. What "transcending the intellect" (Suzuki 45) actually means, in light of this example, is not that the conceptualising function of the mind should be discarded but that it should be appreciated for what it is: a containment method of the senses that can, and should, be understood, and in being understood should be imbued more fully with the other data processing routines that are occurring at the same time. To transcend intellect, then, is to merely rescind its primacy, to equalise and harmonise this component of the genetic makeup of human perception with other, equally valid reactions. This multiplicity is one of the driving ambitions of postmodernism: to understand why any given stimuli produces an intellectual or emotional response and to create of this knowledge an equilibrium

which unifies all experience. Indeed, Jameson propounds the same ideal, albeit in decidedly more literary terms, expressing it as the ambition to "abolish the boundary and the distinction between fiction and fact, or art and life" (Jameson, *Cultural* 75).

Another characteristic Haiku shares with postmodernism is that of lineage. Obviously, the very existence of the latter is dependent upon this concept – cultural heritage is the medium in which postmodernism lives, for without it there would be no vast repository of signifiers from which to draw iconoclastic and ironic points of reference. It is only through social lineage that a narrator's grandmother can "shine [...] like a beacon down the stormy American past" (Brautigan, *Revenge* 1); it is only by approaching the subject matter "in a roundabout way, including varieties of time and human experience" (Brautigan, *Unfortunate* 74) that an author can endow his illustrations with a sense of universality and allow his imagery to resonate. The concept of lineage in Zen Buddhism is infinitely more metaphysical than this. Time, as ascertained above, may never repeat, but it is nevertheless both temporal and temporary: "the only permanence is impermanence and change" (Hamill xiii). The only constant in this endless progression is the individual consciousness, perpetually aware and engaged in a rationalisation of these temporal changes which gives them the semblance of continuity:

> I mark passing time
> beating straw to weave beneath
> this cool summer moon (Issa 16)

Yet we ourselves are perhaps not as constant as we assume. As Wong Kiew Kit points out, if the cell replacement ratios that biologists lead us to believe are correct, then we are all ourselves in a state of permanent flux: "the physical body you have now is completely different from the one you had seven months ago" (26). So what *is* the source of continuity? There must be one or else there would be no Buddhist religion, no teachers and no disciples, no wisdom to pass down and no method of passing it. The answer, put simply, is that the doctrine is the constant: the body of knowledge which directs each individual who comes into contact with it towards a personal realisation of consciousness. It is Zen Buddhism's attempt to transcend self, and in so

doing to transcend mortality and therefore time, that ensures continuity of its teachings:

> We [...] come and go like leaves on a tree, but the tree remains: and we are the tree (Watts, *Beat* 43)

It is this timelessness, this perpetuation of universal truth at a level that bridges the limits of any one individual's physical existence that again ties the principles of Zen so closely to the aesthetic goals of Brautigan's postmodernist method. After all, it is precisely to this same state of timelessness that this latter technique aspires, drawing on cultural signifiers in so indiscriminate a manner as to simultaneously evoke a cacophony of different cultural eras and draw from them a significance common to all. Brautigan's postmodernism seeks to make the author's truths universal by locating them outside of, or above, the physical sequences of time. The Zen Buddhist seeks to immerse himself in a truth that existed before him and will go on existing after him in an attempt to transcend the insignificance of his own short existence. "There is more to life than meets the eye" asserts Brautigan (*Sombrero* 173), there is experience and significance and truth beyond the banality of everyday awareness, and it is towards an illustration of this that both Zen and postmodernism aspire.

It would be easy to dismiss this commonality of purpose as purely coincidental if the two schools of thought did not use at least some of the same methods in their respective means towards the same ends. There is one element, however, that seems more significant than any of the others: that of humour. In Zen "the comic is deliberately used to break up concepts [...] to teach what cannot be taught in words" (Kit 23). Just as the koan is used to illustrate the artificiality of existence, comedy is utilised to make clear its patent absurdity. They each represent a way of encouraging the student to free himself from his assumptions and his repressions. To be truly free one has to be liberated from oneself, freed from ingrained perspectives and personal neuroses, and the most effective method of dispelling phobias is to realise how ludicrous they are and to laugh at them. Zen is a process of awareness that throws its students deliberately into confusion in the hope that they will emerge on the other side with a realisation that this confusion is resolvable in a given context. Comedy is a

useful tool because it alleviates the stress that this procedure inevitably invokes as well as aiding in the journey towards enlightenment itself. Brautigan has more of a social than a spiritual agenda, but he utilises the same comedic technique throughout the entire body of his work:

> USED TROUT STREAM FOR SALE.
> MUST BE SEEN TO BE APPRECIATED (*Trout* 139).

The lengths of folded stream, the waterfalls with their individual price tags, and the inevitable "box of scraps" (*Trout* 142) in the conceptual sale cited here are all intended to parody the commercialisation of American society. They are reminiscent of water features on sale in a garden centre, but even more obscene because they are not replicas of natural landscapes but the natural landscapes themselves, ripped up and sectioned and valued. It is precisely because the image is so comical that the parody delivers so effective a message. The joke is not so much about teaching what cannot be taught with words but about illustrating the irrationality of American culture in its own terms: irrationally. Potentially everything is susceptible to commoditisation in a capitalistic society and the author's rather extreme illustration of this relays perfectly the absurdity inherent in the mechanisms of commerce. "How much are the birds?" asks the narrator, to which he is advised "they're used. We can't guarantee anything" (*Trout* 140). The joke is so well executed that it cuts right through to the heart of its subject. Natural resources are not only being seized and then sold back to the populace who initially had free access to these resources anyway, but those doing the selling will not even take any responsibility for the quality of the stolen goods they are providing. The humour is connotational in nature, intended to surprise the reader into a realisation in precisely the same way that the methods of Zen masters are intended to "make the disciples' minds flow into a channel hitherto altogether unperceived" (Suzuki 237).

Alan Watts provides an informative critique of Zen humour in his work *The Spirit of Zen*. Therein he describes the manner in which Zen masters are often initially revered by their students and are then forced to refer to themselves comically as "old rice bags" (34) because holiness is an arbitrary distinction they wish not to be

endowed upon themselves. In Zen Buddhism, everything is in essence holy, but it is this intellectual classification on the part of the young scholar that bars the way to enlightenment. So humour is used to mock the method of demarcation, to poke fun at the "tyranny and misrepresentation of ideas" inherent within it (Suzuki 270). It is precisely the same technique as applied to Brautigan's trout stream. To sell a natural object, to demand money for something that should be freely available to all, is obscene. Yet it has long been common practice to sell food and water, organic natural resources. The idea of sections of stream for sale is not really so different from charges levied for other 'commodities'. To point this out is surely no more than to poke fun at the "tyranny and misrepresentation" of these traditions.

In many ways Brautigan's appropriation of Zen is not unique – Kerouac, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti all incorporated the notions of Satori and wu wei into their work – but it is only Brautigan in his application of humour and connotational consciousness that captures the real essence of the philosophy in tangible terms. "We are not ordinarily aware of how we are aware" claims Alan Watts (*Beat* 43). It is this lack of awareness which impedes enlightenment; it is this which stands as a barrier between the individual and a liberated consciousness. Brautigan recognises this juncture implicitly and brings both Zen and postmodernism to bear on the problem in a unified application of method. This is what makes him unique and this is what makes him less "the John Lennon of the hippie novel" (Bradbury 217) as previously cited and more the Basho of the postmodernist counterculture.

6. Historical Romances and Gothic Westerns: Brautigan, Jung and Genre

As discussed in a previous chapter, the fundamental problem with time is that, like so many governing principles of society, it is so deeply ingrained in the human psychic experience of reality that it defines itself and perpetuates itself inexorably. Even when attempting to break down its indelible structure, Brautigan finds himself nevertheless bound by its conventions and its intrinsic laws. Any debate on the topic, for instance, has to proceed from the tacit understanding that "there has to be an October 25 between October 24th and October 26th" (Brautigan *Notebook 32*). This sequentialism is simply how the system of actualisation works; it is "the natural order of our expectations" (*Notebook 32*); and it is indeed these very same expectations that the author is both constantly challenging in his work and inevitably bound by in his method of re-examination. Despite his best endeavours the writer can only project his aesthetic agenda in the intellectual terms within which his audience is primed to receive it. There is a constant tension in all literature between originality of thought, originality of expression, and the cognitive capabilities of the reader. This is in no greater evidence than in the progressive and psychologically challenging type of work such as that produced by Brautigan. It leaves the author with a quest for signification, a search for techniques of articulation which build upon a foundation of commonality yet push back the common limits of the reader/writer dichotomy to accommodate new thoughts and new methods of understanding. In effect, artists only really have a limited palette with which to work: in music, for example, there may be a myriad of different melodic patterns and constructs but these are all built from a finite number of notes. Whilst Brautigan may well play with "exploding metaphors to contrast the implosive nature of one's day-to-day progress through existence" (Klinkowitz 358), he is nevertheless similarly bound by conceivability when engaged in this exercise. He is subject to the tenuous relationship between "tenor and vehicle" (Klinkowitz 357) and the manner in which they are capable of supporting each other conceptually. But this is hardly a handicap. The signifiers are all in place – the wealth and diversity of twentieth century culture makes that provision – it is just a matter of finding equal

tenets that are capable of projecting significance upon each other. The most abundant source of this type of basic material is of course the human psyche, the processes and synapses of cultural memory. More specifically, it is within the unconscious mind that the most fundamental appreciation of signifiers and how they inform one another is to be found:

> Everything of which I know, but of which I am not at the moment thinking; everything of which I was once conscious but have now forgotten; everything perceived by my senses, but not noted by my conscious mind; everything which, involuntarily and without paying attention to it, I feel, think, remember, want, and do; all the future things that are taking shape in me and will sometime come to consciousness: all this is the content of the unconscious (Jung, *Nature* 112).

Furthermore, the unconscious necessarily consists of a multitude of common elements: social, moral and instinctual codes which enable co-existence and perpetuation of a species as it evolves and strives to balance individuality with social dependencies. "We call everything a river here. We're that kind of people" (2). The residents of Brautigan's iDEATH assume their nouns communally because they share an understanding of how these nouns represent, and are sufficiently indistinct as individuals to each adopt the same interpretations of their landscape. They do this because they *are* relatively indistinct, they are variations on a theme of humanity. As discussed in Chapter One, some of them "do not have a regular name" even (4); they are faceless, lacking identity, little more than a representation or an essence of mankind. They name things together and they forget things together. Until the rebellion begins they are a society moving together as one organism and there is nothing unusual about that. *In Watermelon Sugar* is essentially an allegory of the manner in which community operates. The characters co-exist because they share so much in the methods via which they conceptualise the physical world around them. The unconscious provides the key to precisely this same trait of commonality on a wider scale, across much broader social sects and generational legacies.

In his studies of mythology outlined in the volume *Four Archetypes*, for example, Jung identifies a variety of recurrent imagery and archetypal concepts which

serve to demonstrate a universality of human psychic aptitude. They transcend cultural or historical epochs. Archetypes such as the mother, the wise man and the hero appear time and again in myths from across the world, signifying respectively "the magic authority of the female" (15), the sanctity of age and experience, and the nobility and moral strength in triumph over adversity. It is indeed the consistency with which these images represent that leads Jung to his theory of the "*collective unconscious*", the "common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us" (2). In turn, it is precisely this commonality that gives Brautigan's postmodern technique its power. As illustrated in chapter three, by drawing upon a wealth of fractured cultural images the author provokes the innate methods of comprehension that exist in the unconscious of his readers to illicit emotional and impulsive intellectual responses. In *So the Wind Won't Blow it all Away*, the reader is presented with a classic archetypal figure in the shape of an old hermit who is initially treated with wariness by the local children. The hermit is an eerie character, shamanistic, with his long tobacco stained beard and his shack on the edge of a lake. However, he is presented by Brautigan as shamanistic in nature, described by the novel's narrator as "an ancient breathing statue of Huckleberry Finn" (62). He is situated entirely outside of society and its conventions, and even outside of time, unsure of "what day, month or year it was" (62). When the narrator overcomes his caution and speaks to the hermit, however, he experiences a primordial sense of awe regarding his wisdom and his articulate manner and the economy with which he has furnished his life with nothing beyond that which is necessary to him. The encounter is simultaneously an episode in the life of one child and an episode in the adolescence of every member of the human race. Here, a common evolution in social awareness is actualised: a development of empathy and respect that crosses the generational divide. Through this invocation of archetype Brautigan manages to tap into one of the core mechanisms that enables human society to persist over time – the reverence of wisdom which enables a young audience to receive and preserve that knowledge which existed before them. The wise man archetype exerts such psychological weight precisely because of its sociological criticality. Therefore its resonance is instinctively recognised by the reader.

In a very real sense this is the manner in which the author finally manages to seal his hypothesis on the nature of time. His other techniques of fragmentation and delineation do not quite manage to do what this illustration of the eternal process of human cultural growth does manage: by appealing directly to the instincts of the species, Brautigan finally succeeds in rendering time irrelevant. Beyond signifiers that evoke a certain historical period, beyond mixed metaphors and eclectic cultural allusions that attempt to create an aesthetic space outside of specific temporal zones lies this purely timeless truth that speaks to everyone in its own terms. It is a truth inherently appreciated and understood without the need for inventive but ultimately digressive allusions and it is as close to a method of authentic and seamless communication as is possible to achieve in the written form. After all, economy is probably the most prominent of Brautigan's artistic aims: both economy of style and economy of thought. If 'The Scarlatti Tilt' represents a prudence of expression, two sentences evocative of a much fuller narrative, then the utilisation of "primordial types", "universal images that have existed since the remotest times" (Jung, *Archetypes* 5), surely represents an attempt on behalf of the author to make the very act of intellectual projection more concise. These images harmonise the communicative link between Brautigan and his reader so they become almost one consciousness in terms of projection and comprehension. The following description of the character Yukiko in *Sombrero Fallout* operates on precisely this premise, evocating duality with perhaps the oldest and most fundamental symbolism available:

> Her physical presence was like a meeting place between day and night where day was the majority and night's minority was her narrow eyes and her midnight starless hair (48).

The imagery draws upon an ancient mysticism of twilight as signifier of the suspension between two states of being. Yukiko's beauty is at once both tangible and alluringly mysterious, shrouded in the enigmatic qualities of darkness. In many ways the allusion is not entirely original and obviously draws inspiration from a wealth of Romantic and Classical poetry with its evocation of the stars and the moon. However, Brautigan recognises the latent power in the metaphor he selects. Yukiko is not

simply compared to the mystical beauty of a moonlit scene; she is instead very specifically likened to a lightless dark, an all enveloping blackness the like of which would hold the unconscious mind in thrall. The technique seeks to exert an instinctual prompting of this same emotive captivation in the unconscious of the modern reader. The author's utilisation of twilight here is entirely in line with Northrop Frye's hypothesis of archetypal images as "associative clusters, [...] complex variables" (102). The enigma of the darkness informs the subject, and the subject's beauty in turn imbues its descriptive quality with a mythical attraction.

Indeed, archetypal images permeate Brautigan's work, from the great 'hero' Lee Mellon, to the shaman of *So the Wind Won't Blow it all Away*, to the character of Vida, the narrator's lover in *The Abortion*. Rescuing the narrator from his library, from his lonely celibate lifestyle, Vida is described by the author as "so perfect and beautiful as not to be with us, as to be alone in some different contemplation of the spirit or an animal stepladder to heaven" (119). This character is immensely evocative of Jung's perception of the mother archetype: the aforementioned "magic authority" inherent in his principle; the "wisdom and spiritual exaltation"; "all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility" (Jung, *FA* 15). Brautigan, however, complicates the representation by sexualising Vida, proclaiming her to be "developed to the most extreme of western man's desire in this century for women to look" (43). *The Abortion* is essentially a text that explores male perceptions of the female and how sexuality is bound up in gender roles. The mother is also a lover, she has simultaneous roles in society; they co-exist, and Brautigan explores in the text the extent to which they are inseparable and even indistinguishable. He is at pains to point out that the figure of Vida does not simply constitute a maternal surrogate for the narrator – those characteristics are reserved for "the ghost of [a] dead mother" they encounter in a guest house by the Mexican border, "sitting on the bed knitting a ghost thing" (153). Vida is more the personification of a full and inclusive femininity which is broad enough to contain a sexual energy as well as a generic maternal potency. She is the perfect woman according to the two basic principles that define her gender, and as such conforms to the anima projection of the narrator, the author, and the male reader, who are all operating upon the same level of awareness and projecting the

same ideals upon this character. It is not the specifics of Vida that make her so perfect, it is rather the evidence of her conformity to the emblematic qualities of femaleness. Here, it is the commonality of desire that springs from instinctual values prized in the selection of a mate that Brautigan is seeking in his readership. Archetypes "keep our highest and most important values from disappearing into the unconscious" (Jung, *FA* 29), they are borne of necessity and serve a distinct social purpose, whether that be ethical or educational or whether they concern procreation itself. Of course, archetypes are also a mixed blessing to the artist because on one hand they provide possibly the clearest channel of communication available, and yet on the other they represent a distinct constraint, a core of knowledge that cannot be eradicated and cannot, therefore, be transcended. Eternal they may be but their static nature is such that it repels any attempt at redefinition or re-examination; they become check-points along another intellectual perimeter, one more expansive than the concept of time but finite nevertheless. Brautigan's allusions need not be archetypal in nature but they must fall at least within the shadows of these monolithic structures of instinctual thought if they are to be in any way understood by the rest of the species. Vida would not, after all, be the most beautiful woman in the world based on random characteristics such as forgetfulness or more archetypal male traits such as honour or bravery. To be beautiful she has to conform on some psychological level to the common aesthetic, which is perhaps another way of expressing the lowest common denominator.

It is not merely the characterisation of Vida, however, which endows *The Abortion* with its significance in the body of Brautigan's work. Indeed, the novel forms part of a series of books within which the author addresses the concept of genre. Indeed, Brautigan utilises genre extensively in two novels, and less prominently in a further two, to advance his intellectual project. He subtitles several of them with specific genre tags: *The Abortion* is heralded as 'A Historic Romance', *The Hawkline Monster* as 'A Gothic Western', and *Willard and his Bowling Trophies* as 'A Perverse Mystery'. By foregrounding the generic fusions in this way, he ensures that the technique is highlighted as an intrinsic part of the message he wishes to convey in these texts. As Berger asserts in his work *Popular Culture Genres*, "readers

bring expectations and knowledge to their reading" (34), and by informing those readers up front that they are about to engage with one or more specific genres enables the author to manipulate those expectations. Scott McKracken asserts that meaning in genre texts "is achieved out of the structural relationship of signs which refer not directly to anything outside themselves but to each other" (57). In this sense, they can be argued to act as microcosms of human consciousness. They operate in the same way that the codification of signs and signifiers interrelate within the psyche. For instance, let's take the premise of John Swales that any genre piece, whether a western or a thriller or a science fiction novel, comprises "coded and keyed events set within social communicative processes" (38). This can be compared to the assertion of Jung that the human psyche, when broken down into its constituent parts, comprises "*patterns of instinctual behaviour*" (Jung, *Archetypes* 44). In both cases, the key concepts are codes and patterns, frameworks of data that are applied in order for the species to begin to make sense of the world. Both the genre text and the psyche are subject to their own regulatory laws, their own internal systems, which bind together disparate images into a conceivable reality.

Like archetypes, genre rules are not explicitly defined but are rather more like skeletal structures, patterns and frameworks into which are projected individual representations. There are several definitions of these structures, but for the purposes of illustration here, McKracken's vertical and horizontal model will be utilised. In his scheme, the horizontal axis comprises the "syntagma" of a narrative, the way in which it is "ordered syntactically as a sequence" (56); the vertical comprises "its associative or paradigmatic features" (57). The following extract from *Dreaming of Babylon* demonstrates the horizontal of McKracken's theory perfectly:

> I was standing there in front of radio station WXYZ "Cinderella of the Airways" thinking about Sydney Greenstreet and Peter Lorre, roast turkey and dressing, when the Cadillac limousine that had driven by me earlier in the day when I was going into the morgue pulled up in front of me and the rear door opened effortlessly toward me. The beautiful blonde I'd seen leaving the morgue was sitting in the back seat of the limousine.
>
> She gestured with her eyes for me to get in.
>
> It was a blue gesture (*Dreaming* 114).

The passage is immediately recognisable to the reader as an episode in the life of a private investigator. The narrative elements distinguish it as such: there is a limousine, a mysterious and beautiful blonde, an opening door inviting him to enter the car and enter the unknown. The blonde offers him a "blue gesture", an oblique but somehow sardonic use of syntax that is entirely in keeping with the hard-boiled detective genre. Vertically, the passage is steeped in allusions that would be all too familiar to fans of the detective genre. Sydney Greenstreet and Peter Lorre are figures highly evocative of Hollywood detective movies from the Forties, and the blonde, when connected to the morgue, becomes a motif of noir suspense. The scene as a whole works to establish the boundaries of the ensuing text before it has even really begun: by invoking genre conventions the author is transmitting to his audience a précis of what he intends to explore and, more importantly, what he considers to be outside of the scope of this particular work. The "system of classification" Brautigan has chosen determines this, it has set the boundaries for "what we see and do not see and shape[d] the way we see things" (Berger 45). Furthmore, the boundaries have been accomplished by little more than a simple trick of phrasing. It is not that which is expressed that gives the passage its power of evocation but rather the manner *in which* it is expressed, the pacing of the prose and the relationships between the signifiers that are utilised. Brautigan employs here a fundamental truth about the mechanism of genre: "utterances simultaneously convey a meaning, possess a force, and elicit an effect" (Berkenkotter & Huckin 64). An event which basically comprises of a car pulling up alongside an individual on the pavement becomes a significant genre episode when that car is an expensive limousine and its passenger is a beautiful wealthy woman who was last glimpsed in an unusual location. Again, the author relies on the cultural awareness, the acumen of his reader, to recognise the import of these symbols and to derive from them a significance which will then resonate throughout the rest of the narrative.

There is nothing unusual in the way Brautigan achieves this: it is a fairly standard genre approach. Of genuine interest, however, is *why* Brautigan adopts these techniques here. After all, he is not an author who typically produces work within a consistent genre. In fact, *Dreaming of Babylon* is the exception to his body of work in

that it is his only novel that does not explicitly reference more than one genre in its subtitle. Unlike the other texts it is presented to the reader as 'A Private Eye Novel 1942', a subtitle which places the events of the book very precisely in terms of cultural history. It is evidently a period selected because it evokes the work of authors like Raymond Chandler and Dashiel Hammett and the great Hollywood adaptations of their novels – *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Big Sleep* and others. If genre texts are, as McKracken asserts, best understood "as historical and relational" (12), then placing the narrative so specifically in fact aids the setting of genre parameters by Brautigan here. Because it soon becomes clear in the narrative that this *is* in fact a mixed genre novel. The narrator begins to imagine plots involving "shadow robots" and the sinister "Dr. Forsythe" (*Dreaming* 63) who is planning to take over the world in a manner reminiscent of pulp science fiction stories. The precise invocation of the 1940s noir narrative serves to establish a foundation for the text that is then more dramatically undermined by the invocation of this secondary genre. The shadow robot subplot essentially occurs in the text as a series of daydreams the narrator has whilst trying to place order on his conscious state. He sabotages the opportunities he has in life with dreams about an alternate reality at inappropriate times. However, even whilst not sabotaging his real life in this way, he is still seen as attempting to define his reality in the terms of a "a pulp detective story" (122). This too is undermined by episodes of banal reality. His rent is due, his landlady posing "a bigger threat to [him] than the Japanese" (2), and he constantly struggles against a lack of money and a persistent "immediate need [for] some bullets" (7) with which to load his gun. The point is, neither set of genre rules seem to serve him particularly well. He is neither suave nor successful – "not many people want to hire a detective who's only wearing one sock" (19). He persists with these conventions, however, because ultimately he has nothing else at hand with which to attempt any form of self-definition. He is trapped by the rules and codifications he has derived from these generic sources, his imagination limited by the ideals that are already in place and have been inherited by him via a life of cultural consumption.

Cawelti claims that "genre is the result of strategies of mimesis" (95), but for C. Card, the narrator of *Dreaming of Babylon*, the strategy is failing[16]. It is failing precisely because genre conventions are associated to the mimesis, not the reality that is being reflected back. As McKracken asserts, genre conventions can indeed supply "some of the material through which narratives of the self can be sustained and revised" (8), but they cannot provide a wholesale alternative for the chaos of reality. As McKracken also states: "there is a gap between the experience of reading the detective narrative and the experience of living within modernity that throws into doubt the legitimacy of the fictional solution, which must perform an artificial closure" (69). Genre rules are artificial abstractions that reflect back existence, but do not replicate it. In *Dreaming of Babylon*, Brautigan contrives to deconstruct the genre rules of the detective novel by both pitching them against the banality of existence in the modern world and by contrasting them to another set of equally unhelpful genre conventions, in this case those of science fiction. Each is a conflicting system and as such serves to highlight the limitations of the other, the absurdity of the other, synchronously. His aim, however, is not merely comic. Beneath the parody lies a much broader point about the mechanics of social existence. Ultimately, there *is* "something about a private detective walking or taking the bus that lacks class" (134). C. Card may well be taking his search for authenticity to its extreme, but the fact remains that the stereotype of a successful detective does exist and accomplishment in one of society's defined roles does demand conformity to a pattern of behaviour and a socially acceptable set of resources. The narrator's method of self-actualisation is something common to us all. It is indicative of how we assess ourselves and how we measure the success of our endeavours. There is a parallel between the manner in which Card regards one set of genre ideals as daydreams whilst simultaneously trying to appropriate another set as a creed by which to live, and the manner in which the reader is amused by his naiveté whilst engaged in precisely the same application of value judgements in his own social existence.

According to Jerome Klinkowitz, Brautigan apparently reached the conclusion during his career that "language no longer communicates as it should" (357). This is a

[16] Cawelti draws the term mimesis from Aristotle's theory of the imitation of life in art.

difficult claim to validate, but certainly the author sought new methods of articulation in his work, and genre is clearly a tactic in his larger strategy. If he did deem language to be broken, then fixing it would have to begin with understanding the problem. Because genres stand as examples of "abstracted conceptions of structure" (Cawelti 101), because they are essentially "nothing other than the codification of discursive properties" (Todorov 14), they perhaps offer the perfect starting point for just such an evaluation. Codification in genre is so evident, the rules and conventions so finite: a genre text is a closed system which provides an ideal laboratory for experiments in signification. Of course Brautigan breaks these rules by mixing genres, by making the forms self-referential and by undermining the inherent values with comedy. These tactics, however, invalidate nothing. "Transgression requires a law" (Todorov 14) and does little more than to make that law so much more evident, to define it by exception. Indeed, it can be argued that a perfect illustration of how the law should not be applied is the first step to understanding how it should and why it is. Similarly, an understanding of how genre rules signify within that closed system is another step towards a realisation of how archetypal concepts operate on the interpretive functions of writers and readers.

Brautigan provides in the body of his work a novel which analyses both genre conventions and archetypal truths in the same narrative. In keeping with its duality of genre, the events of *The Hawkline Monster* take place both out on the dubious frontier of Hawaii and within the confines of a typical gothic mansion replete with dusty exotic artefacts and the laboratory of an eccentric scientist. The majority of the narrative occurs in this latter environment, and in the Gothic tradition, this setting feels to be barely a physical location at all. At first glimpse of the house the two bounty hunters Greer and Cameron acknowledge it to be "the strangest thing [they have] ever seen", "a fugitive from a dream" (68) rather than a home for the Hawkline family. Whenever it is discussed, the mansion is always subjected to a mode of actualisation, a framing technique which draws attention to the manner in which it is perceived by the characters that navigate their way through it. For instance, one of the Hawkline twins brings Cameron a drink from the liqueur cabinet and this becomes "a delicately choreographed event like making different prints of a photograph" (146).

The characters can only engage with their environment from an objective vantage point. The physical reality of the place is once removed, perceived stylistically in every instance. The environment of the house is indeed "unstable, unfixed and ungrounded in any reality" (Botting 111). Surreal episodes occur within, creating very sensory experiences for the Hawkline twins' father. His experiments with the chemicals in his laboratory spark off the appearance of "black umbrellas", "green feathers", "a piece of pie suspended in the air" (127). The materialising objects are all very tactile in nature and there is something hallucinatory about them. Indeed, the house and the objects it contains – elephant-foot umbrella stands, giant butlers who shrink to the size of dwarves when accidentally killed – are entirely dreamlike and Surrealist in nature. They are reminiscent of the unconscious itself with its surplus of random cultural artefacts and its propensity for unlikely events, for bizarre conceptual links between wildly opposing images, and for the transgression of the laws of physics. It is almost as though "this huge yellow house standing in a field of frost at the early part of this century" (148) is designated by Brautigan as a place outside of geography. It is instead a physical representation of the human psychological domain itself, one that "explodes what we know to be certain and true so that anything imaginable may happen" (McKracken 129).

The ends to which he prepares this metaphysical space are not immediately clear. Like several of the author's books there seems at times to be an allegory forming which then dissipates under a creeping complexity of narrative perspectives. One constant reference point in the novel, however, appears to concern the use of recreational drugs. Professor Hawkline disappears whilst concocting a chemical formula, "a batch of stuff" (209), that directly effects the human brain and makes people do "things that [are] completely out of character" (173). The results are catastrophic for him – he turns into an umbrella stand – and the monster he creates from his chemical experimentation runs riot through the mansion, within his control no longer. This is not an untypical narrative turn for the gothic genre:

> Did anyone indeed exist, except I, the creator, who would believe, unless his senses convinced him, in the existence of the living monument of presumption and rash ignorance which I had let loose upon the world? (Shelley 342)

In *The Hawkline Monster*, the scientific catastrophe in question seems to allude to a very contemporary issue: the danger of misplaced faith in hallucinogenic substances. "Witchcraft and modern science" (Brautigan 127) have gone into the creation of the chemicals just as stolen corpses and harnessed electricity went into the construction of Frankenstein's monster. The parallel is relatively clear and certainly the representation of drugs as a destructive force is entirely in keeping with Brautigan's own opinions, as revealed by Greg Keeler in his memoir *Waltzing with the Captain.*[17] The nature of Hawkline's monster, however, is such that it becomes appropriate to illustrate its mischief not on the outskirts of a peaceful village or on a lonely ship nearing the arctic but in some internalised space outside of time. Within the house "a Victorian clock [is] pushing twentieth century minutes towards twelve" (166) and notionally "changing the world into July 14, 1902" (172) whilst failing to change anything within where "the past and present" (127) coexist inextricably. Essentially, it seems the chemicals exist in a psychological sphere, haunting the mind, and so it is within the mind that they must be challenged and overcome. They assume the mantle of the monster, and as the monster they develop their own subordinate persona, "the Shadow" (163), that which exists as an integral component of the monster's consciousness. Of course the notion of the psychological shadow is a predominantly Jungian one, the repository of all "the hidden, repressed, and unfavourable (or nefarious) aspects of the personality" (Henderson 118). The shadow, therefore, represents the psychological struggle in each of us between the nobler aspects of personality and the baser, selfish, amoral elements that are also present; it represents "the battle for deliverance" (Henderson 118) that is going on perpetually in us all. Again, this is rather typical of the gothic tradition, the exploration of "uncertainties about the nature of power, law, society, family and sexuality" often played out (Botting 3). So malevolent is the Hawkline monster in its fundamental nature, however, that its shadow is the repository of all that is ethical, good and merciful in its psychological makeup. Eventually, this grows weary of its subservient nature to the

[17] When confronted with a student smoking marijuana Brautigan points out that this is "indulging in an illegal activity" and might not seem so trite a pastime "from behind bars with a baby face and an asshole three inches wide". (Keeler 66)

monster and endeavours to destroy itself rather than continue to witness the evil that is being done in its name. "The Shadow just didn't give a fuck anymore" (Brautigan 183), "the Shadow had a burst of unbelievable physical fury" (202).

Unlike Frankenstein's creation, the monster's nobler unconscious rises up against its evil ego and eventually does the right thing by its creator and his daughters. It "reassert[s] the values of society" in true gothic tradition (Botting 5). However, the narrative twist Brautigan inserts, with the monster (or at least an integral part of the monster) proving to be the saviour of its own victims, is something less associated with the gothic and much more attuned to the conventions of the western. There is indeed a curious interplay of the genres in this novel, a crossing over of their conventions between the two halves of the narrative. Cameron and Greer are presented initially as ruthless bounty hunters, quite at ease with "killing a Chinaman that a bunch of other Chinamen thought needed killing" (14). They are lured to the Hawkline house by the promise of money to perform a job for Magic Child but are then seduced by the Hawkline sisters and hence change motivation so that they are no longer bounty hunters but western heroes attempting to slay the creature that is haunting their loved ones. Their more chivalric and heroic qualities come to the fore in the same way that the monster's marginalised but innate nobility has overcome its more predominant cruelty. The point of interest is that one set of genre conventions can evidently be brought to bear on another and still have the same communicative effect. It is precisely because these conventions are so universally recognisable that they can be cross-pollinated in this way. Indeed, Cawelti claims the western, of all genres, best "expressed basic cultural myths" (80), and in conjunction with the ability of gothic conventions to challenge "familial and sexual relations, power and suppression" (McKracken 13), the representative power of the two endows their methods an almost archetypal stature. The anti-hero of the western is, after all, only a variation of the classical figure of the Hero who transcends his moment of doubt to achieve his glorious ends. In each case despair and bitterness are overcome by relative moral certitudes that give the characters greater strength and the ability to rise above even their own fallible natures:

"I can't do it," Greer said.
"It's a bastard all right," Cameron said.
"I can't shoot a man when he's teaching his kid how to ride a horse," Greer said. "I'm not made that way" (9).

By exploring genre signifiers alongside Jungian concepts, Brautigan is able to draw comparisons in this novel between the two levels of codification. The illustration of heroism arising out of dubious morality communicates directly with the reader's awareness of human motivation and ethical dilemma. The invocation of the heroic signifies the author's "process of typification", his genre technique wherein "similarities become constituted as a type" (Berkenkotter & Huckin 5). The device is entirely in keeping with Jung's own definition of the archetype – "an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear" (*Archetypes* 5). Genre characteristics, Brautigan appears to assert, are essentially derivations of archetypal patterns. From these primordial structures are distilled smaller, culturally specific ideals upon which typical scenarios are hung. Genre signification and archetypal awareness are all part of the same process: the appropriation of prior systems of comprehension to add structure to newly assimilated information, "to stabilize experience and give it coherence and meaning" (Berkenkotter & Huckin 4). Both systems work implicitly, reliant upon the conceptual frameworks that the reader will already have in place. "Human beings consistently overlay schemata on events to align those events to previously established patterns of experience" (Swales 83). In this case the previous experience in question is a combination of inborn archetypal shadows (the ghosts of the species), and the tokens of cultural osmosis – a lifelong exposure to different sets of sociological conventions and ideals. In the great debate of whether nature or nurture acts as the primary force in the formation of identity, it could be assumed that archetypes and genre sit at opposite poles on the axis, the former comprising inherent values and the latter culturally acquired ones. However, Brautigan appears to illustrate here that this is not the case. Both systems are in fact interchangeable, both are essentially manifestations of the same thing. The rules of each genre may be superficially different, but they are all formed from the same deep-

rooted psychic preconditions that archetypal codes are. When an individual is exposed to these genres he is in effect merely receiving back transmissions of the same conceptual ideals that he is already aware of. According to McKracken, "popular fiction has the capacity to provide us with a workable, if temporary, sense of self"; "it can give our lives the plots and heroes they lack" (2). In Brautigan's utilisation of popular fiction techniques, the codes and patterns of the genres he employs can be seen to give form to the deeper archetypes of the psyche.

That Brautigan utilises a common cultural hero motif to defeat the social menace of drugs in *The Hawkline Monster* could be taken as evidence of a reactionary stance on the part of the author. The technique is not uniquely inventive; it is subject to the same objections that plague popular fiction and claims that its "dependence on convention makes it ephemeral" (McKracken 185). However, any discussion of archetypal influences is essentially reactionary in nature as it is reductive: it involves a stripping away of unlimited potential and reduces everything to a set of finite founding principles. The manner in which Brautigan manipulates and explores the devices of signification in his genre work is effectively an aggressive rebuke to methods of enlightenment that do not draw inspiration from the fundamentals of psychological perception. He insinuates that he finds the common social practice of attempting to expand consciousness with hallucinatory chemicals very much the wrong tactic and seeks instead to push via his aesthetic agenda a re-examination of the methods with which this consciousness operates. Significantly, however, Brautigan does not align himself overtly with any specific social stance on drugs within the text, suggesting that he views the analysis of perceptual capability as an exercise with significance beyond anything as superficial as moral ideology. Indeed, he engages with numerous contemporary issues within his work that almost demand an ethical assessment, and in each case he refrains from providing one. In *Willard and his Bowling Trophies*, for example, he uses genre to challenge several representative elements of twentieth-century society at precisely the same time, and neatly avoids moral debate upon any of them. Perhaps the most obvious example of this amoral representation lies in his illustration of materialism. The Logan brothers begin life "as wholesome, all-American boys" but become bitter and cynical when they lose

something they possess – "three lost years looking for their bowling trophies [has] changed them" into obsessive thugs (27). From a genre perspective this is a rather typical device for a mystery novel: it is essentially the exposition which explains why the arch nemesis has become a villain. It is a standard narrative turn which illustrates precisely how and why a 'normal' perspective upon the world has become so skewed that a compulsion has arisen to commit violent and malevolent deeds to exact revenge. Such a turning point is what Swales identifies as a prototype, one of "the most typical category members" (52) of the set of rules and plot devices that constitute this particular genre. Brautigan utilises this twist, however, to demonstrate how these prototypes inform, and are in turn informed by, a much broader set of connotational precepts. The Logans become potential murderers because they have had their faith in the world they inhabited shattered by the theft of their most beloved possessions: "OH GOD! THE BOWLING TROPHIES ARE GONE!" (Brautigan 65). They cannot believe that someone would steal something so personal to them, so representative of achievement in their social sphere. The theft becomes indicative of a failure of the entire value structure they live under, the elaborate construction that is the nostalgic middle class of America. Their world is the screen door, gingham, small town, bowling league reality of the extended atomic family, "three brothers", "three sisters", "their mother and father" (47). "Mother Logan was a pleasant woman who minded her own business and did a lot of baking" (48), they are the epitome of American mainstream society. The insular nature of their existence has facilitated the evolution of this closed system of principles, the transgression of which leads necessarily to overreaction and extremism. The version of moral certitude that the Logans operate within stands in the text as a subset of the finite laws of the genre itself. They are both isolated systems that actively promote certain archetypal values whilst repressing or distinctly ignoring others. The Logans' awareness of their world is intrinsically limited and reflects perfectly McKracken's notion that a mystery text "negotiates between an idea of modern life as ordered and comprehensible and the fear that such an order is fragile, and that a pre-existent disorder will break through" (52). They accept their ideals without question, without any consideration of how or why they might apply. The ensuing stunted moral state they find themselves in is

ultimately harmful, to themselves and to those around them. The prototype, the collapse of fundamental certainties that triggers violent extremism in the mystery genre, runs in direct parallel with the overblown significance the brothers place on their material possessions. By amplifying their reaction to the theft, by making of them the villains of the work, Brautigan effectively illustrates the absurdity, and the danger, of materialism in Western society.

As he does in *The Hawkline Monster*, however, Brautigan also uses the same mixed genre technique in *Willard* to criticise more apparently liberal attitudes. Running alongside the tale of the Logans' search is, as has already been discussed, the story of Bob and Constance who are desperately trying to reignite their sex life after an affair. The protection they have to use now that they have contracted genital warts constitutes a physical barrier which in turn has created an emotional distance between them. Their exploration of new sexual practices to overcome this problem effectively constitutes the erotic part of the mixed genre narrative and yet it can hardly be called erotic at all. Bob ties and gags his lover but does it in a way that is unsatisfactory to them both. The whole act is rather staid and implies that they are merely simulating sexual excitement rather than actually experiencing it: "Then he put the belt down beside her on the bed. That part was over" (36). There is a distinctly mechanical and meticulous manner to the way in which they have sex, a manner which belies the fundamental law of erotic fiction that sexual encounters should be explicitly detailed and sensually descriptive. The representations are, after all, intended to trigger the same emotive responses in the reader that are being simultaneously aroused in the characters of the text, as this example from Alexander Trocchi's *Helen and Desire* illustrates:

> The small smooth disc of my belly rose and fell with the graceful movements of my long satin legs and my full creamy haunches trembled with each step. Suddenly my limbs were invaded by the desire to turn myself into sex's instrument, and, rotating my hips in a motion of heavy sensuality, I glimpsed my powerful sex, at the centre of my white body, circling like a bee uncertain where to alight (50).

Critically enough, however, *Willard and his Bowling Trophies* is not subtitled 'An Erotic Mystery'; it is labelled instead a 'Perverse' one. The significance of this identification is twofold: on the one hand it designates a specific quality of the narrative – that it is sado-masochistic, a sub-genre of eroticism; on the other it serves to unite the two genre traditions under a common value statement. The irrational thirst for revenge of the Logans is just as perverse as the obstinate and fruitless efforts of Bob and Constance to achieve some state of sexual satisfaction. By extension, the set of principles that the Logans cling to and use as justification for their violent actions is as flawed as the liberal attitudes of these other characters in their pursuit of happiness and personal expression. It is the sexual permissiveness of Constance and its consequences that has led to their current state of ennui and nothing, not even a sense of sexual adventure, can pull them back from this brink. Like the Logans, they have experienced a breakdown in one of their fundamental beliefs – in this case sexual liberation – and are clinging stubbornly to this fading truth in the hope that it will eventually reignite and save them from the inertia that has crept into their lives. Bob's old book of poetry fragments is certainly not going to do it – his "book of ancient poetry [is] a symptom of the warts" (Brautigan 67), is reminiscent of something forlorn and pathetic, like "tattered window shades in old abandoned houses" (66).

The fact that the genre signifiers in the erotic half of the narrative are so limp and turgid lends even greater weight to the theme of false hopes and unrealistic aspirations turned sour. The reality of being is not an ongoing realisation of pure ideals and perfectly representative types. It is instead a slow erosion of these ideals occasioned by the disappointments of the physical world and the sporadic emergence of contradictory certainties. Genre may be "a 'rage' for order" (Berger 46), but the chaos of being continues to repudiate that desire. If the projected signifiers of genre, and by extension the psyche, are so revered that the weight of all expectation is hung upon them, then they are certain to lead to disappointment. The physical manifestations of our ideals will never match the exact form of the archetype they align with and an unwillingness to accept this inevitability is the precursor to our ultimate dissatisfaction. Jung conceptualises the unconscious mind thus:

> The collective unconscious is anything but an encapsulated personal system; it is sheer objectivity, as wide as the world and open to all the world. There I am the object of every subject, in complete reversal of my ordinary consciousness, where I am always the subject that has an object (*Archetypes* 22).

The psyche is always open to the receipt of transmissions from the external world, ever ready for confirmations of its projected values. The problems arise when these values outstrip the external world's capability to validate them. If archetypes are triggered and brought through to consciousness by influences that are essentially idealistic in nature, they are almost certain to remain unfulfilled. Bob and Constance's sadomasochism undoubtedly stems from an anticipation of erotic rewards. The reality, however, does not match the fantasy and cannot live up to the illicit sense of excitement that the dark sexual content of their unconscious has suggested to them. A common disjuncture in Brautigan's texts lies precisely here between the fanciful, as represented by genre symbols and the stylisation of imagery, and the brutally prosaic. His characters are exasperated by the resilience of the physical world and its nonconformity to their ideals and expectations. Their existence within genre narratives, and simultaneous awareness that the system of codes that constitutes their reality does not fulfil their emotional needs, is indicative of the author's broader point that intellectual and spiritual equilibrium does not lie in the pursuit of inherited or unconscious ideals for their own sake. It is instead in the realisation of our own psychological mechanisms, the methods and processes at work when we engage with the ideals that the unconscious mind throws up. It is only in understanding how we understand that the truths of existence begin to emerge. Only a full appreciation will suffice, one that acknowledges perception as a bipolar process whereby stimuli floods into the conscious mind and unlocks unconscious structures of thought which are then projected back out to contextualise and to apply value judgements. The trick, Brautigan seems to suggest, is to participate more consciously in this process of projection, thereby reducing the risk of abject disappointment, dejection and despair.

This prompt to participation is perhaps no more fully illustrated in the author's genre texts than in *The Abortion*. In this novel he presents the reader with a geographical space that seems again to be located outside of time and removed from

wider society. The narrator curates a library of unpublished texts, the lost thoughts and dreams of several generations. Living there is, as expressed earlier, "like being in some kind of timeless thing" (75), a repository of ideas, a physical manifestation of the collective unconscious of humanity. The narrator immerses himself in "the unwanted, the lyrical and the haunted volumes of American writing" (96) because he cannot face the world, he is too introverted for the garish explosion of culture that is going on outside the heavy wooden doors of his sanctuary. *The Abortion* is Brautigan's 'Historical Romance', another mixed-genre narrative which reinterprets the tenets of its subtitle to significant effect. The text is historical only in the sense that it represents the contemporary concerns of the "last years of the seventh decade of the Twentieth Century" (110), a cultural epoch which has since become of some renown. The romance element to the novel is handled in a rather sardonic manner also, revolving as it does around a single incident, an unwanted pregnancy that results in abortion. Again, however, Brautigan utilises this technique of confounding genre expectation to trigger a transcendence of accepted ideals and a broader awareness of the ways in which the reality of situational existence can inform and expand one's psychological limitations. The narrator is drawn out of his unconscious environment into a world of aeroplanes, "the Beatles" (225) and the "Benny Bufano statue of peace" (130):

> The San Francisco International Airport Terminal is gigantic, escalator-like, marble-like, cybernetic-like and wants to perform a thing for us that we don't know if we're quite ready for yet. (131)

His wariness of the technological world stems from his previous experience of insular topics and books on "Growing Flowers by Candlelight in Hotel Rooms" (14). His impressions of the "medieval" airport, "a castle of speed on the entrails of space" (129) are all informed by his prior frames of reference. A balance must be struck somehow between the internalised platitude of existence and the more tumultuous variety of influences the external world brings to bear. Significantly, it is the narrator who must strike this balance – it is entirely down to him to find a way, to create a mechanism, with which to reconcile the two halves of his psyche. In exactly the same

way, it is entirely down to the narrator to define the romance that exists in the novel's subtitle within this chaos of signs and signifiers. He must engage with the "primary function of wish-fulfilment" (McKracken 75) that the romance offers up and decide what, in fact, his wishes are. He is the aforementioned "object of every subject" (Jung 22) and the responsibility of definition resides with him and him alone.

The only way to experience, Brautigan seems to assert in *The Abortion*, is to be out in the world experiencing. It should be the stimulus that informs the principles, the archetypes, the quality and value systems of the unconscious, and not the precondition which incessantly detects flaws in the manifestations of its own desires. Each of the author's genre novels extends itself beyond the boundaries of its identified genre precisely because this is what he believes the consciousness of his readers should be doing. Just as he recognises the forms to which he should be conforming so that he can spectacularly choose not to conform, so too should the reader seek to gain an understanding of the codes and systems of their unconscious in order to choose not to be defined by them alone. As Brautigan asserts: "we have the power to transform our lives into brand-new instantaneous rituals" (*Abortion* 109). We think, we respond, we act in ways that are commonly structured for our species: emotionally, contextually, and ritualistically. It is not within our power to change these processes, but it is in our power to understand, and in understanding to harness the inherent potential of our methods and to achieve a heightened state of awareness and contentment. The mixed-genre novels of Brautigan are constructed in a manner entirely analogous to the experiences of social existence. Sets of codes and conventions are sharply contrasted to illustrate not only that they are part of a much larger picture, but also that they are in and of themselves wholly inadequate as principles by which to live one's life. The underlying forms and patterns of our understanding are precisely that – forms and patterns. For Brautigan, it is entirely our responsibility to gain an appreciation of how they inform our awareness and to use this knowledge constructively to achieve a state of mental acumen and emotional stability.

7. Blue Whale Movers:
Brautigan and Surrealism

"Good work", he said, and
went out the door. What
work? We never saw him
before. There was no door. (Brautigan, *Mercury* 45)

Nothing is really as it seems. Our world, our reality, is a construction aided by language; a system of priority, and a categorisation of words and perceptions into existing schemas in order to conjure up the phenomena we call meaning. The primary function of art and literature in the twentieth century seems to have been the communication of this very message: the emphasis upon not what a work signifies but *how* it signifies, what it tells the audience about their own methods of engagement. In the poem above, Brautigan is explicitly warning his reader not to trust him. It is through his words and his words alone that we are led to the meaning and the significance that we assume will follow. But there is nothing to stop him abusing this authority: the schema is his and he is free to fool us as he sees fit. The premise of his poem leads nowhere; it is not even a premise, it is a declaration which is immediately undermined, an instance of hyperbole unmasked as a lie. The device, however, points the way to the function of the poet and, more importantly, the function of the reader. The former collates his experiences in an articulate manner and whilst the latter remains primed to receive this, he should also remain aware of the process in which he is partaking and of the intent with which the information is transmitted. Intellectual liberty does not grow out of an unquestioning receipt of knowledge; it stems instead from an awareness of why this particular perspective upon the available information is being assumed, how this perspective is woven into the form of the communication, and how it is intended to be perceived and understood at the receiving end.

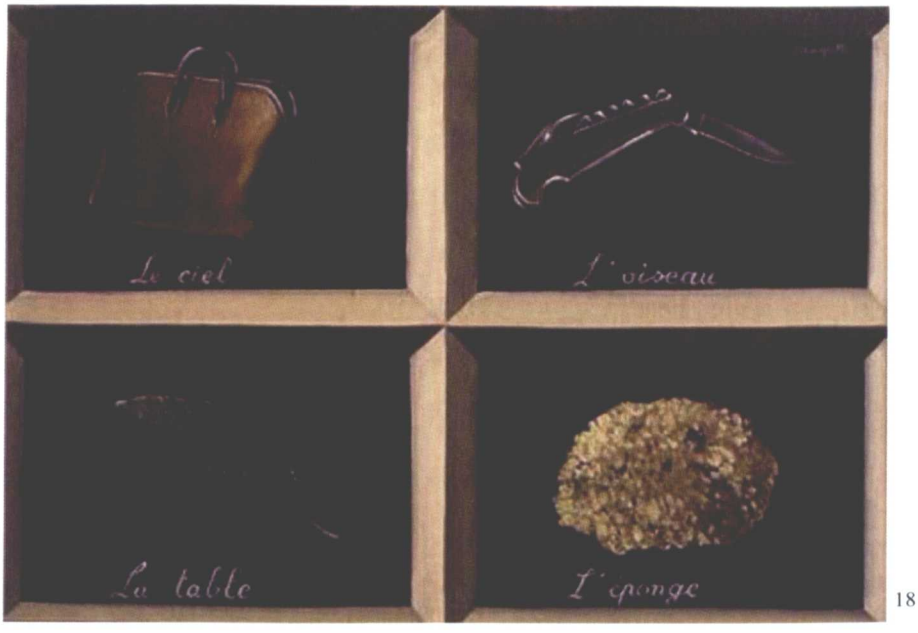
Like the Surrealists who displaced the focus of their work away from "the perfect, self-contained work of art" and onto "the procedure through which it was created and the ideas it conveyed" (Klingsöhr-Leroy 25), Brautigan is here provoking his readership into a realisation of the manner in which they trust and assume rather

than analyse and deduce. Ultimately, the goal of both Brautigan and the Surrealists springs from the same principle: to prompt, rather than to lead, towards a questioning of social practises and standards – "the myths on which capitalist culture depends" (Rosemont 186) - and thereby light the way towards "human emancipation", "the only cause worth serving" (Breton 143)."We still live under the reign of logic" asserts Franklin Rosemont, "but the methods of logic are applied nowadays only to the resolution of problems of secondary interest" (166). Breton and Brautigan alike would contest that there is so much more knowledge available to us than that which is conveyed in the social templates and pro-formas that logical and intellectual expression offer. These templates are essentially no more than filtering mechanisms that restrict the breadth of experience into digestible packages of data. The great dilemma in the expansion of consciousness is that language and structure are the cogs which turn this machine in a very specific manner, and yet language and structure are all we have at our disposal. Frustratingly, the goal becomes a transcendence of the very laws that bind us with nothing more than those same laws as tools. The solution for Brautigan is to begin to use language as a vehicle which careens ever closer to the edges of sense and reason in an attempt to almost derail his own methods and to light the way beyond, as evidenced in the following poem:

> Lions are growing like yellow roses on the wind
> and we turn gracefully in the medieval garden
> of their roaring blossoms.
> Oh, I want to turn.
> Oh, I am turning.
> Oh, I have turned.
> Thank you. (Brautigan, *Rommel* 35)

Of course, this is not a significantly new technique. In fact, it resembles rather closely the agenda of the aforementioned Surrealist artists of the Twenties and Thirties, in particular René Magritte and his juxtaposition of the mundane and the poetic to uncover "the fracture in the system, the thin crack in what we see as normal and customary" in order to "provoke [...] the thought process" targeted (Klingsöhr-

Leroy 62). Magritte's painting, *The Key to Dreams*, for instance, depicts four banal images: a bag, a knife, a leaf and a sponge.



[18]

Each of them is labelled but with an incorrect noun, except for the sponge. Precisely why this is so is in no way made clear within the painting itself, it simply is. However, the labelling illustrates explicitly the authority of the artist in his projection of meaning and in turn the arbitrary nature of this exercise. To label is to categorise within a known frame of reference and that frame of reference is one which has been constructed out of nothing, a system which has no more or less validity than any other that we may choose to appropriate. Brautigan's yellow roses evoke an image of lions, so we may as well call them lions. They are lions. They could just as easily *be* lions in our intricate method of reference as anything else. The name we attach to them is unimportant, for the name is not what they signify. Our appreciation of their beauty and of their impression upon us and of their very being is beyond all that. "In reality, an object's image [...] and its name [...] have different functions" (Klingsöhr-Leroy 62), however, we are not aware of this disparity, because we match the image to the classification and when that satisfies the criteria of our understanding the matter reaches conclusion. This is the process that Magritte is trying to expand in his art.

[18] Rene Magritte, 'The Key to Dreams', 1927

Brautigan takes this premise one step further, deliberately abandoning his substituted metaphor after the first three lines (in the poem above) and delving instead into an obtuse and extended deliberation upon the act of twirling. He wants to turn, he is turning, he has turned. Turned around what? His "medieval garden" (Brautigan 35)? Turned into what? Why does he break the action down in this way into future, present and past tense? Perhaps he is referencing the switch of tenor and vehicle in his metaphor. Perhaps the turning is indicative of a reversal in his perspective. Whichever interpretation the reader places upon this section of the verse is precisely that – an interpretation, a conjecture. The poem takes Brautigan's aesthetic point to its logical, or rather illogical, conclusion: the reader's understanding, his very comprehension, is in the author's hands, dependent upon the author's designation of significance. If he chooses to withhold information he can do so, and does. We do not get the full picture because in truth we *never* get the full picture – neither from the author, from the person we are communicating with in any given circumstance, or from ourselves. The very process is flawed and the sooner this truth is made apparent, the sooner attention can be switched away from the trappings of perceived truths to what Breton terms (in *What is Surrealism?*) an "expanded awareness of reality" (51).

Whilst working with genre, Brautigan was perpetually instructing his reader in the ways and means with which they understand. His Gothic Western, discussed in chapter six, deals with formal constructs, codes and conventions that we are hardly aware that we are innately aware of. Where, however, does this revelation lead the author and his audience? Brautigan does not seem sure himself. Genre awareness is a way in, or a way out; a keyhole, a portal to something entirely other than the coordinated world of reason we inhabit:

> I like to think of Frankenstein as a huge keyhole
> and the laboratory as the key that turns the lock
> and everything that happens afterward as just the
> lock turning. (Brautigan, *Rommel* 17)

According to J. H. Matthews, the Gothic novel represents in absolute terms a "protest against an Age of Reason", and "the full development of desire outside the restrictions

imposed by social and moral conventions" (27). This theory is borne out by Brautigan's Gothic text and indeed the principles of the genre itself. His "chemicals" (Brautigan, *Hawkline* 100), like Frankenstein's monster, are the product of a scientific enquiry that transgresses science, that skirts the realm of creativity and results in an unleashing of pure, unadulterated chaos. The laboratory has turned the key. In an attempt to push the limits of reason and logic the thin veneer of our hierarchical system of knowledge has been breached and proved fragile. From beneath the frozen exterior erupts a maelstrom of irrational imagery, "the fruitfulness of imaginative play" (Matthews 27), "a pure expression of 'the marvellous'" (Ades 126). For the Surrealists this irrationality represents the essence of human awareness and capability in its most primeval state. The images and visions so unlocked are gloriously illogical, fantastical, and horrific because they are so closely associated with our primordial selves – the impressionistic animal impulses and instincts that we have repressed in order to organise and co-exist along civilized models of conduct. Strictly speaking, the Gothic novel is the ethical antithesis of the Surrealist cause because the unleashing of this chaotic energy is always portrayed in the genre as a threat rather than a welcome "release [...] from the restraint of reason, morality and social convention" (Matthews 12). Brautigan's Hawkline Monster is a menace to the members of its household, is intent upon its "epidemic of mischievous pranks" (127) and is finally overcome by its own Shadow, its innate rationale, the method in its own madness. Frankenstein tracks his abominable creation to the ends of the civilized world in order to destroy it and restore order to creation. The Gothic text is at least a beginning, an initial tentative foray into the territory beyond our precious logic, "a marvellous environment ensur[ing] freedom of action for personages motivated [...] by the passion of desire" (Matthews 8). The genre does indeed represent the lock turning, the momentary chance to give reign to our desires before it is turned back and they are confined once again.

Contrary to the solemnity usually inherent in Gothic texts, Brautigan's engagement with both the Gothic and the Surreal is at its most direct in his application of humour. His is a black humour, entirely in keeping with Breton's definition of the term as a wilful juxtaposition of images that demonstrates "the mind's superior

revenge against the law and order of the Real" (Rosemont 101). His narrator of *A Confederate General from Big Sur* confides that the Digger Indians "didn't bury their dead or give birth to their children" (7). Elsewhere in the text are presented crews of Norwegian seamen who "trade [...] a rainy spring morning in Oslo for 163 cable car hides from San Francisco" (15). His method is built strictly upon the realisation that comedy is irrational, that it springs from the sudden fissure that is created when logical expectation is thwarted and a conventional resolution of thought is cleverly substituted with a transgressive alternative. The absurdity of his imagery springs not merely from a flattening of conceptual distance but from the appropriation of one premise into an entirely new context, often a multitude of times in the same complex metaphor: "the waves [...] were breaking like ice cube trays out of a monk's tooth or something like that" (137). There is a constant "violation of Symbolic Law" (Purdie 37) at work in Brautigan's writing, a continuous breach of the "endless, interconfirming structure that is one's understanding of experience" (Purdie 19).

Evidence of this violation can be found everywhere, in the author's texts and even in his possessions. Amongst his journal entries he alludes to "a [Monty] Python album" (Notebook 33), and with his personal papers can be found a humorous business card, a remnant of his friend Price Dunn's business venture (Notebook 37):

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He exhibits a love affair with the Surreal comic image, and this resonates with his wider aesthetic goal of opening the mind to alternative forms of expression and alternative modes of awareness. Language, it seems, is to Brautigan the key to understanding the psyche. As Susan Purdie contests – "what is primarily constructed in language-use is the human mind" (23). Communication, language, expression –

these are not merely the methods we use to articulate, but also the methods we use to formulate. Knowing and conceptualising are in her assertion one and the same, homogenous elements of the same process. Like any other author, Brautigan writes to understand what he is writing about. His awareness informs the words he selects which in turn inform his awareness of what he means. The Surreal image encapsulates this as it is triggered by a sense of possibility, of imaginative potential, which then signifies back to that imagination a confirmation of its supremacy and its latent power in defining the world:

> SURREALISM, n.m. Pure psychic automatism through which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true functioning of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside any aesthetic or moral pre-occupation (Breton 49).

There is no documentary evidence that Brautigan was a disciple of Surrealist doctrine as espoused by Breton, yet to this core principle of automatism he appears to hold firm throughout his entire career. He is, in essence, one of what Franklin Rosemont identifies as a large number of "'implicit surrealists'" (Rosemont 174), artists and writers who align with the broad aesthetics and ideological pursuits of the movement without categorising themselves explicitly. In fact, Brautigan is too idiosyncratic a writer to align himself to any constrictive school of thought or expression. Surrealism is for him merely another device – like Postmodernism or genre – to get to the root of the most important philosophical question of all, which is how we understand and of what this phenomenon of understanding is actually constituted. There are examples of surreal images littered throughout his writing. For example, in *An Unfortunate Woman* the narrator finds himself watching "a crow with a hot dog bun sticking out of its mouth" (49) in Alaska. This sight may be the self-confessed destiny of his trip to the state, but what is more important about the episode is the way in which it is articulated. The crow is not a crow at all, it is a blackbird, the narrator admits as much, but has decided that the scene has more undefined symbolic resonance if he expresses it and even perceives it with this different species of bird. "I'm going to call the birds crows and please picture crows whenever I use the word

'crows'" (48). If he had not confided his substitution to the reader then we would not have any difficulty in picturing crows whenever that designation was used in the text. Brautigan, however, wants the reader to experience a difficulty in engaging with his image, he wants to invoke a dualistic awareness of what is being stated and what is being meant. Moreover, he wants to provoke an engagement with the process that has led him to recategorise his object to bare the device of his technique and, in turn, bring the reader closer to an awareness of his own psychological processes. It is not even important why he thinks crows are a more emphatic image than blackbirds in this instance – perhaps they are less classically refined than the species utilised by Keats, more prosaic, more scavenger like. Perhaps the crow thrashing around with a hotdog bun provides a more complete dichotomy with the image of the blackbird singing sweetly in the dead of night, a dichotomy which reflects Brautigan's broader rebellion against the existing canon. The speculation is potentially endless. The significance lies in the fact that the author *has* chosen to substitute, a decision that exists beyond logic, beyond ethical reason, and beyond "the commonly accepted meanings of words and things" (Meuris 73). The switch of species is an artistic decision, and one which cannot be easily rationalised and understood in the terms that communicative behaviour is often gauged because those terms and methods are inconclusive, they do not represent all the means by which we arrive.

Indeed, the strongest link between the aesthetic of the Surrealists and Brautigan's literary method lies in their common quest to explore "the limitless range of awareness for which we now have no words" (Leary 14). Whereas the former strive as a collective to utilise "the picture as a corrective to language" (Meuris 37), the latter evidently endeavours to persist with language, to re-examine words, to conceptualise this great uncharted psychological space in the terms of his chosen artistic form. There is little doubt, however, that language is identified as the problem, its restrictive properties and formal constraints overtly representative of the limits placed on human consciousness. As Ken Kesey comments, reported by Martin Torgoff: "Tim Leary, Bobby Dylan, John Lennon, Bill Boroughs [*sic*] – we were all reaching in to wrench the language apart" (95). Kesey's assertion is indicative of a prevailing mood, an artistic zeitgeist of the American Sixties. Marc Chentier's

conclusion that Brautigan regarded writing as killing has already been discussed in chapter three, but Brautigan's ambivalent relationship with the power of words continues to pervade his engagement with the physical world in parallel with his contemporaries:

> When she has finished folding all my wounds
> she puts them away in a dresser where the
> drawers smell like the ghost of a bicycle. (Brautigan, *Rommel* 73)

Brautigan's constant effort to "destabilize the system of reference" (Chénetier 43), as evidenced above, is matched only by his quest to develop "some isomorphic relationship between doing, being and saying" (Chénetier 35). As illustrated in the quoted extract from 'In her sweetness where she folds my wounds', he remains convinced that language can be harnessed, despite its innate conservatism, to serve the expanded consciousness and adequately represent the method of cognition. In turn, language can then inform perception both directly and indirectly, "uniting the reality of what is with the thought one has of it and the knowledge which results" (Meuris 80). A persistent feature of his technique is to name his poems in a seemingly sloppy manner, substituting a formal title with a replication of the first line of the first stanza. When the phrase is self-contained there is nothing particularly remarkable about this device. 'We are in a kitchen', for example, or 'There is a darkness on your lantern' seem little more than tags that set the tone, indicators of the verse that follows. When the line becomes disjointed, however – for example, "'Good work', he said, and" – it is evident that there is a greater intent behind the technique. These titles represent a conscious denigration of the formality of the poem, of the rules of the form, and of the great lumbering monster language itself, of which these conventions form but an annex. The poem, when titled in this manner, is no longer a precious entity but a projection of the process of thought. As such it cannot be assigned a neat, formulaic, or pretentious heading. The poem simply is, as a random impression simply is, not something to be shaped, packaged or presented but simply something to be acknowledged. Just as Magritte's paintings are tortuously designated "a title which accorded with the mental process which had led the artist to paint [it]" (Meuris 120),

Brautigan's titles are hewn from the very same material that constitutes their spontaneous invention. How else can they be named? If the poem is complete as a representation of thought in and of itself, anything other than an element of this thought would be little more than a distraction, a diversion away from the meaning inherent in the utterance.

Brautigan is not working in isolation when he tackles language directly in this manner. Indeed, as with postmodernism. There seems a common cultural awareness amongst his contemporaries of the association between language and consciousness and how the very act of articulation compresses the variety of impression into digestible morsels that cannot sate the appetite. Language is a learned system, a finite system, it does not encourage the individual to engage with the totality of their awareness. Instead, it encourages them to lazily substitute the purity of experience with common clichés and euphemisms: the disposable templates of common speech. Robert Pirsig is painfully aware that "we sense objects in a certain way because of our application of *a priori* intuitions" (135), intuitions that have been expressed to us previously through language. According to Martin Torgoff, Timothy Leary was even more despondent, convinced that "all of human behaviour was most accurately understood as a culturally determined 'game' that consisted of learned behaviour" (81). However expressed, the concerns are all the same:

> *Speaking is speaking.*
>
> We repeat
> what we speak
> and then we are
> speaking again and that
> speaking is speaking. (Brautigan, *June* 88)

Expression is, for Brautigan and the Surrealists, a perpetual cycle from which we struggle to escape. We are given the means to propound our thoughts and never dream that these means come to define that which they are meant to convey.

The way out of this paradox for many artists at work in the Sixties was via use of psychedelic substances, chemicals that seemed to encourage consciousness to leave

behind these rules and bureaucratic codes, to wash them away in a wave of sensation powerful enough to re-engage the mind with the primary material of its senses. The principle function of these drugs was to shatter the filter of inherited cognitive tropes that exists between the external world and the receptive psyche. The drugs could be used to usurp the rationalising portion of the brain and allow all those impressions and experiences usually discarded (because of our cultural conditioning to value only that which is logical) to be finally realised. The primary aim was to reach the state of mind coveted by the Surrealists via a convenient, chemical shortcut. In this respect, psychedelia seems almost the illegitimate child of the Surrealist movement. Both attempt to get at "something ordinary reason has been as yet incapable of explaining" (Meuris 122). Both rely on the absurd image, the juxtaposition between unfeasible combinations of images, to tease the mind out beyond its cosy and conventional vegetative state. From the Beatles' Eggmen to Dylan's "brilliant kaleidoscopic flashes of poetry" (Torgoff 135); from Dali's soft clocks to Brautigan's version of the Messiah "sung by eighteen chickens" (Brautigan, *Tokyo* 90) – each concept resonates with an indefinable identification for the reader or the audience, one that pointedly defies cognition of a "single message or ultimate meaning" (Torgoff 135). In the final analysis, Brautigan may well distance himself from those "people who have been wiped out by taking too many drugs or living a lifestyle that's just too estranged from reality" (*Tokyo* 125), but he nevertheless shares their desire to break new conceptual ground, to "express pure thought, freed of all controls" (Waldberg 12) and realise a more complete state of consciousness than that to which we are accustomed.

What is perhaps remarkable about the last few examples of Surreal and psychedelic images is that it is only Brautigan's that are truly comic. The significance of this singularity is twofold as it recalls on the one hand Henri Atlan's conviction that the next development in Surrealist doctrine must be the development of "a humour which takes seriously the multiplicity and relativity of games of knowledge, of intellect, of the unconscious and of language" (Meuris 130). On the other, it demonstrates the author's awareness of the importance of communicative efficiency. In order to convey his message, to impart this knowledge of a wider sphere of consciousness, he has to engage the reader in a manner in which they are willing to be

engaged. He has to prime his audience for the shock that is to come, and he has to deliver his insights carefully, via a vehicle that they will already be in a position to comprehend.

Comedy is just such a vehicle. In all of the existing applications of language, it is the joke, the "manipulation of words or concepts into unlikely but suddenly acceptable juxtapositions" (Purdie 6) that is best suited to the derailing of the rational thought process. Ultimately the reader is familiar with the convention of the punchline, the anecdote that very precisely draws his attention along a pedestrian line of reasoning, only to suddenly subvert his expectations at the last minute with a sharp departure to alternative meaning. What better way to demonstrate the arbitrary nature of our logical faculties on a wider scale than to do so through this convenient and pre-existent trick of language? As Brautigan laments upon passing a stranger in *The Tokyo-Montana Express*: "the only thing that separated us from being good friends was the stupid fact that we had never met" (58). Furthermore, comedy works solely on the basis that the audience *realises* they have been tricked. A joke is a communicative game whereby the recipient has to labour to catch up with the conceptual twists and turns being offered. The effort involved in this activity makes one painfully aware that every available cognitive ability is being brought to the fore, that all the accumulated methods of connection between disparate abstract notions, the ideas and images that constitute the totality of one's cultural frames of reference, are being invoked. The joke is an acute lesson in maximising the brain's latent potential and it demonstrates absolutely that consciousness, in its broadest sense, consists of so much more than a series of isolated exchanges between the logically processing mind and its immediate environment.

Brautigan's comedy indeed operates precisely along this intellectual model, shattering what Susan Purdie terms Symbolic Law, the psychological convention of attributing "one construction per perception" (Purdie 41). The poem, 'Critical Can Opener', for example, calls upon the genre constructs of a riddle, or even a spot-the-difference puzzle:

There is something wrong

with this poem. Can you
find it? (Brautigan, *Rommel* 10)

The stanza begins with a prompt and ends with a challenge, but the problem is that there is nothing else in there for analysis, no material that the warned error could possibly exist within. This minimalism forces the reader to think laterally: is it the structure of the poem that is wrong, is it the grammar, is it perhaps the very fact that there is nothing that *can* be construed as a mistake or a deception? In any case, the reader of the poem is "paying attention to [their] own activity of signification" (Purdie 48). This is what makes the verse funny, and it is also what stimulates the perceptive mind and broadens its awareness. Poems like this are quite literally mental exercises that train the reader, and the author, in methods of perceptual transcendence. They point towards alternative modes of understanding and more genuine and idiosyncratic approaches to comprehension. There is an indisputable parallel between this technique and one of the primary rules of Surrealism, which demands that the artist "be conscious of himself as an artist" (Meuris 53). When an individual becomes aware of himself as an effective and unique cognitive force he moves that much closer to a true liberation of the self and a realisation of his own psychological potential.

Surrealism is the self-professed servant of intellectual liberty: "the cause of Surrealism is the cause of freedom" claims Rosemont (168), and liberation can only truly begin within the confines of the self. Psychedelia, with its shared ambitions, likewise focuses the entirety of its efforts upon the exploration of the psyche, and in turn Brautigan projects his critical eye ever inwards, intrigued with the world only insofar as it refracts through his own senses. At the very least his narratives are all (with the exception perhaps of *Sombrero Fallout*) constituted from the impressions, desires and interior monologues of a narrator. If these narrators are not strictly representative of the author himself then they are certainly extensions of his persona, substitute animas utilised to investigate commonalities of thought. The vagaries of consciousness are given free reign in Brautigan's texts in a manner reminiscent of the automatic writing of the Surrealists, but always with the intent of investigating whether or not that which emerges reveals anything interesting about the constitution of that consciousness. For example, in the *Tokyo-Montana Express* the narrator

laments: "I have better things to do than think about rubber bands. What about my eternal soul and its day to day battle with the powers of good and evil? And besides, I have plenty of my own rubber bands" (85). Just as Leary's house and psychedelic laboratory, described by Martin Torgoff, was almost "a dimension of consciousness as much as a place", a physical location "where space and time could be suspended so that medieval kings could materialize to mix with ancient prophets and space-age philosophers" (103), so too are Brautigan's novels often emblematic, conceptual spaces where aesthetic concepts can be thrashed out haphazardly. The commune of *In Watermelon Sugar* is a prime example of this technique, or the gothic mansion of *The Hawkline Monster*, both already discussed. Ironically, the most prominent example is perhaps that of the entirely fanciful town of *Sombrero Fallout* which exists only in the discarded thoughts of a jilted writer and yet, in spite of this, manages to encapsulate in its brief history the whole breadth of human social experience and community politics. The riot, siege and eventual revolt that stem from a source as innocuous as an ownerless hat provide a telling commentary on the nature of collective psychosis – the crowd mentality, the tribal impulse. They reflect the student rebellions and riots of the author's contemporary reality, but once removed, an objective assessment worked through in "a fourth-dimensional" sphere (56). The story within the story has no single narrative voice, but it exists in its entirety in the psychological space of its disowning creator. Events within the town are allowed to unfold organically and out of this process fall insights into the nature of despair. The inhabitants begin to "los[e] all composure when they [see] their ambitions starting to vanish" (52); "rhetoric" fades in significance when "territory" is threatened (42); and the entire town finds itself "yelling punching screaming smashing kicking for no reason except the fact that other people [are] doing it" (104). The scene recalls at once the mass delusion of fascist Germany, the race riots of the Sixties, the neuroses of the Cold War. The extremity of the reaction is indicative of a deeper truth about human motivation and the fragility of independent thought when prevalent social attitudes are not sufficiently challenged. The surreal construction of an unfolding fantasy on a piece of waste paper, a fantasy sparked into violence by a sombrero, allows Brautigan to arrive at conclusions unfettered by the opinions and allegiances, public or personal, that would

attend upon a direct representation of any of the specific incidents listed above. In true Surrealist fashion he has freed himself and his art as much as possible from pre-existent patterns of perspective and is able therefore to reach beyond incumbent ethics and draw out what would be an otherwise obscured realisation.

Ultimately, the whole dilemma of art, and in particular Surrealist art, hangs on the definition of meaning. Is meaning something indigenous to an image or a series of events, or is it something that is imposed upon these phenomena by the observer? More importantly, how are these interpretations applied, and why? If a functional human society depends upon effective communication, then it naturally follows that an incumbent common awareness is critical if this communication is to achieve its ends. There is little point in the speaker (or the artist) articulating himself via an obtuse system of unintelligible signs and metaphors. Both parties have to be aware of the rules of the exchange and the success of the exchange itself requires an endemic commonality of thought. Meaning, therefore, becomes little more than the most likely, most demonstrable deduction that can be agreed upon between the individuals involved; it is reduced to a logical equalisation, a mathematical process almost where x in conjunction with y most probably signifies z. As soon as this formulaic approach is brought to bear, however, meaning becomes finite: there are only so many acceptable explanations that can exist within a system of feasibility. Anything too outlandish, too far beyond the rational convictions of one or other of the participants in the process, will be rejected as implausible. Just because it is implausible, however, does not mean it is not as viable a solution to the riddle as an answer that sits more squarely within the comforts of accepted experience. The Conan Doyle model of deductive logic is therefore critically flawed: rejecting that which is impossible to arrive at that which must be truth may work for Sherlock Holmes, but it breaks down when applied to the psychological experience of the species because it hinges upon a definition of possibility that simply does not exist. Almost everything is, to some extent, conjecture, as evidenced in the following poem by Brautigan:

> Fragile, fading 37,
> she wears her wedding ring like a trance
> and stares straight down at an empty coffee cup

as if she were looking into the mouth of a dead bird.
(Brautigan, *Rommel* 52)

The scene presented here is, in essence, nothing more than an interpretation imposed upon a situation by the poet. The silence between the married couple across the table from one another is construed as an awkward one, and from this single decision follows all of Brautigan's other assertions that the woman is fading, that her life is unhappy, that she is staring into a cup as though facing her own mortality through the image of the putrefied bird. Her perceived fate is no more a truth than any other number of possibilities but the poet is not concerned by this as it is *his* truth, it is what he observes and perceives and is resonant for this reason alone, no other.

In his notes on Dali's essays, the editor Robert Descharnes writes that "objects in themselves do not have any necessary cohesion; it is the culturally conditioned intellect that organizes perception" (*Oui* 168). In the poetic example above, it can be argued that Brautigan interprets the life of the apparently saddened woman in the way he does precisely because he exists in a social reality where marriages do become lifeless affairs. There is a precedent he is working with. If he was not so culturally conditioned, if he had not witnessed this previously or was not aware of it as a conceptual possibility, then he would almost certainly arrive at a different conclusion. Dali himself takes this same precept as the basis of his Paranoid Critical Theory. The thrust of his argument is that all thought is essentially paranoid in character – we not only believe solely that which we are capable of believing, but we actively distort the information available to our senses in order to support that which we have already decided is the truth. As he explains: "the paranoic who believes himself to be poisoned discovers in everything that surrounds him, right up to the most imperceptible and subtle details, preparations for his own death" (112). Those of us who do not consider ourselves paranoic are no different, he concludes. When confronted with a riddle of meaning we all operate in the same manner, placing definition after definition upon it until we find one that fits most convincingly. Then, upon this theory we proceed to actively seek out supporting evidence and load it with secondary tokens and weak conceptual links until it becomes a solid, indisputable mass. Thus, we are fundamentally incapable of arriving at intellectual conclusions that

even remotely resemble any form of absolute truth. Indeed, absolute truth as a concept is patently absurd. Things are, reality is, and the tenuous thread we draw out of experience is nothing more than that, a thread, a singular internal narrative that it suits us to focus upon, to believe, in spite of all the contradictory signs we have dismissed in order to arrive at our conclusions.

Dali's assertions are expressed slightly differently from those of Brautigan, but they share the same fundamental perspective. In each case everything is a fabricated truth. In *An Unfortunate Woman*, for instance, there is an episode where a random figure passes the narrator on the street. "What if I am lying" Brautigan asks the reader, what if "I just made him up and his elusive pastry eating?" (69). But why lie about so inconsequential an event in a wider narrative? It is not necessarily important whether the man eating a pastry ever actually existed, the significance of the incident lies in the manner in which the author subverts his initial premise. The view the reader has of Brautigan's fabricated reality is entirely dependent upon the unsubstantiated data provided by the narrator/author, and it is in this sense that we are being lied to here because in the absence of any definitive truth there are only a myriad of untruths. Furthermore, the author is just as incapable of identifying exactly why he assigns the meanings he does as he is of validating these meanings as absolute. "Belief in self-understanding is only a delusion" (99) he asserts later in the text. "I started off with a lone woman's shoe lying in a Honolulu intersection. So what...?" (108). There is no inherent significance to any of this, only conjecture, and a conjecture that will shift depending upon the cultural experiences and the frames of reference of each individual perception. In one sense this fact invalidates it all – Brautigan's texts, Dali's paintings, this thesis. On the other hand, subjectivity makes valid every potential interpretation. Singular perception is the only method via which the consciousness can function, there is nothing else available to help forge awareness. This relativism is not necessarily a problem as long as it is understood in its own terms: a subjective experience of reality in which licence has to be made for alternate subjections. This is why Dali paints melting clocks in a desert, or why Brautigan depicts "a man in a café fold[ing] a slice a bread as if he were folding a birth certificate or looking at the photograph of a dead lover" (Brautigan, *The Pill* 107).

These are examples of conceptual links, metaphors that would not necessarily be drawn by other individuals from the same sources. They are successful attempts to "systematize confusion and to contribute to the total discredit of the world of reality", to open the door to a "delirium of interpretation" that empowers the consciousness of us all by making us peers in the definition of our worlds (Dali 115).

The psychedelic experience, as interpreted by Leary, is also one which promotes a discovery of the self. It is intrinsically concerned with the consciousness, "the cortex [that] contains file-cards for billions of images from the history of the person, of the race, and of living forms" (Leary 49). It seeks to unlock a multiplicity of meanings by removing the cultural filters and the supporting structures that we utilise to keep this data in some sort of order. Leary describes this multitude of formless impressions as existing "below verbal awareness" (70), and therefore repressed elements in our evolution of language and rationality. What they represent to the exponents of psychedelia, however, is "the creativity and power of the brain" (Leary 135), the assertion of self-empowerment, a long awaited freedom of "men from their life-long internal bondage" (Leary 110). It would be difficult to associate Brautigan to this generational movement if it was defined by hallucinogenic substances alone. However, as Leary proclaims, "the drug does not produce the transcendent experience" (Leary 11), it merely facilitates it, enabling those that are unable to move their consciousness beyond its immediate boundaries via other methods to engage with a broader reality by use of a chemical prompt. Just because Brautigan *is* able to achieve the same ends without such a tool does not preclude him from the loose association of artists and counter-cultural spokesmen of this intellectual agenda. He is just as aware as Leary or Kesey that hallucinations "are old friends" (Leary 139), or that instances of guilt and paranoia are "the result of [one's] own mental set", one's "*Karma*" (Leary 149). As previously discussed, Brautigan's narrator in *So the Wind Won't Blow it all Away* is crippled by guilt, yet constantly engages in ways and means of evading it. He obsesses about hamburgers because these are the objects that would have saved his friend had he chosen to spend his pocket money on them instead of the bullets that killed him. More importantly, he is aware of his own avoidance tactics. His narrative may become consistently "more

difficult because [he] is still searching for some meaning in it" (92), but of his guilt he is absolutely certain and oddly comfortable. Brautigan's hallucinations, on the other hand, are represented as surreal manifestations of individual behaviour, such as the elderly couple who unload a truck of furniture every evening, creating their own living room on the banks of a river. They are more visceral than the purely mental images produced by psychedelic substances, but none the less significant for this, depicting as they do a physical enactment of one's surrealist vision rather than a purely psychological impulse.

More specifically than the majority of psychedelic artists, however, Brautigan assigns the loss of human imaginative creativity to a very distinct source in his work: the commercialisation of American culture as typified by the television which has "turned people indoors and away from living out their own fantasies with dignity" (130). "Now our dreams are just any street in America lined with franchise restaurants" (130) he bemoans. These assertions, however, do not really represent a simplification of the issue on the part of the author, they are merely rhetorical instances, the identification of symptoms which are indicative of a process that has been occurring over a much broader time frame. Brautigan's premise and that of the psychedelic and Surrealist artists and critics is one and the same. They all recognise the constraints placed upon individuality by the forces of social cohesion and cultural co-operability. They all claim that the manner in which we exist and formulate thought has been codified and commonalised. We are, they assert, instructed how to feel and how to express these homogenised feelings when in truth there is an ocean of human experience ignored by this system. We remain aware of an undefined incompleteness to our being, and have to work to recover these suppressed elements if we are to achieve any state of wholeness.

Brautigan's world is ultimately one in which the theories of the Surrealists and the ambitions of the psychedelic generation are aesthetically realised. His rejection of mainstream cultural values and his deconstruction of logic is not as visceral as the approach taken by The Diggers, and not as theoretical as the manifestos of Breton and Dali. Despite this, however, his technique seems somehow more subversive. "It was a very beautiful spring day in Seattle in Yukiko's dream" (Brautigan, Sombrero 143), in

a narrative within a narrative within a series of words strung together by an author. His work has a directness that elicits a response from his readership and whilst still managing to convey a very clear sense of his intellectual agenda. His fictional worlds are refractions of his contemporary environment, presented through a whole series of distorting mechanisms. Every poem, every narrative, is akin to a hall of mirrors: layer upon layer of conceptual challenge until reality, as it is conventionally understood, is erased. When the real can no longer be distinguished from its imitations the concept of 'real' disintegrates and a new definition takes its place. Brautigan does not really urge his readers to take up arms against the forces that bind them. He simply prompts them to understand that they are bound and suggests how they may disentangle themselves. It is the direct manner of his engagement with the perceptual core of his audience whilst doing this, however, that proves so invasive. The "Judeo-Christian power monolith" (Torgoff 104) that Leary set in his sights was always more likely to fall if a significant percentage of the population it dominated reached their own conclusions about its inadequacy. Brautigan was the purveyor of this social awakening, having prompted rather than led his readers to determine their own fate.

8. Dust...American...Dust:
Brautigan and the nature of biography

I've written my life. What are we going to write about? (Ianthe Brautigan 142)

Perhaps more than any other writer of the twentieth century, Brautigan is an artist incessantly aware and perpetually expressive in his work of himself as an individual cognitive entity. For him, the revolutionary urge of the counterculture is focused very distinctly within the self and can only begin with a personal revolution of the soul. Hence, in his writing, intellectual digression and sensual interpretation are geared towards the representation of a consciousness in transit. The scenerios and narratives of his novels, the imagery and physical stimuli of his poems, are secondary to the manner in which the narrator or the authorial voice perceives and rationalises. The device is bared at all times: "expressing a human need, I always wanted to write a book that ended with the word Mayonnaise" (*Trout* 10). Brautigan inhabits a synchronously self-aware and disposable world, a riotous landscape of evocative symbols that trigger the processes in his mind which become his primary source of interest. How these symbols manifest themselves is purely arbitrary: they can be anything from an umbrella or a seagull to an airport terminal. Terence Malley categorises this technique as a "fascination with everything and anything", "a lack of proportion" (87), but it is a much more significant feature of Brautigan's writing than this suggests. As Bokinsky asserts, it is more an illustration of the cognitive method itself – Brautigan "looks at life in terms of analogies", "one form of experience, or one particular observation, is like something else" (97). Cross-reference is how he, and how we all, "impose [...] order on the world's chaos [...] giving meaning to the meaningless" (97). The author's sensory inhibition represents, in fact, an attempt to redefine the concepts of the autobiographical or impersonal text, to challenge the very purpose of the written form itself in the same way that all manner of other cultural institutions were being challenged and deconstructed during the period.

Brautigan's work, when taken as a whole, is entirely autobiographical, but in the truest sense of the term. The texts do not recount the events of his life in a linear or synchronous manner, but engage the reader instead with the very fabric of the

author's awareness: how it engages with the physical world, how it assimilates the information being fed to it via its senses, and how it constructs meaning from this raw data through an application of previous experience and knowledge. Elements of the author's own past emerge as he brings these preconceptions into play and strives to impose order to this haphazard stream of consciousness. Because these elements are never explicitly rationalised, however, they retain a distinctly disembodied character which is entirely in keeping with the objectivity inherent in Brautigan's model of perception. In essence, his novels are all autobiographies of the present tense in which the personal history of their author is but an indistinguishable element in the much more elaborate fabric of concurrent awareness. It is therefore difficult to find the validity in Terence Malley's assertion that Brautigan is "curiously elusive" (18), when in fact he seems anything but. "I was about seventeen" claims the narrator of '1/3, 1/3, 1/3', "I was about seventeen and made lonely and strange by that Pacific Northwest of so many years ago" (*Revenge* 10). He does not elaborate on what exactly it was about the Pacific Northwest that made him this way, but the reasons do not matter in the context of what the author is trying to convey here. Consciousness exists only in the present: it may recall previous instances of its existence, previous present moments that it has moved through and beyond, but these are no more than mere components in the myriad of influences that inform its current state of being. It is this astounding convergence of impulses and interpretations that constitute the current moment that interests Brautigan. For him, this is the essence of the human condition that must be set down and expressed, and quickly before it passes, "so the wind won't blow it all away" like so much "dust" (*So* 49).

Perhaps the most striking example of the fusion of Brautigan's art and consciousness can be found in his posthumous novel *An Unfortunate Woman*. In fact, this text can hardly be categorised as a novel at all as it has no discernable plot or clearly identified characters. Indeed, it is little more than a series of narrative passages buried amongst half-thoughts, notes from the author to himself, journal entries, and a self-conscious commentary on the progress of the unfinished textual content. "If I don't write the following", he claims at one point "it will never get written" (23). The book resembles some sort of hybrid between an appointment book, a diary and a

literary journal, and the reader would be forgiven for assuming it to be compiled from scraps of paper found about the author's person upon his death. In many ways, however, it is the perfect Brautigan novel because not only is the content of it indicative of a fractured consciousness at work, but the very structure of the book itself reflects this same premise. For example, it begins with a rather straightforward autobiographical element, a friend's suicide, and the recurrence of this fact throughout gives the book its structure. The narrator consistently alludes to and then evades further rumination upon this death, and gradually a sense emerges that all his intellectual diversions and divergences are in fact nothing more than an avoidance tactic: "the dead woman's kitchen demands its own time and attention and this is not that time" (11). It is never that time and as the novel progresses both the frustration of the reader and the anxiety of the narrator seem to build:

> I'm actually writing about something quite serious, but I'm doing it in a roundabout way, including varieties of time and human experience, which even tragedy cannot escape from (74).

For the Brautigan reader this indirection is an all too familiar development, reminiscent of the narrator of his previous work, *So the Wind won't Blow it all Away*, who hides from the guilt of his friend's accidental shooting in an unhealthy obsession with hamburgers. The point is that Brautigan presents here, yet again, a consciousness aware of its own actions. Furthermore, it is a consciousness acting out a very distinct pattern of behaviour and the narrator not only knows it, he encourages it in himself.

Interestingly enough, this form of "active avoidance behavior" is identified in medical science as symptomatic of almost every recognised form of obsessive compulsive disorder, a psychological defence mechanism that is triggered by "a fear of criticism or guilt" (Rachman 144). There is no direct reference to the condition to be found in any of the records pertaining to Brautigan's life, however there are a number of indications in both this novel and his wider body of work suggesting that this tendency does indeed impinge upon his engagement with the world. The narrator of *An Unfortunate Woman* compulsively counts the words he has written and painstakingly records his progress: "the first page has 119 words, the second 193" (76). Cameron, one of the protagonists of *The Hawkline Monster* is described as

"count[ing] all the things that need to be counted" (154). In *A Confederate General from Big Sur,* Jesse "count[s] the punctuation marks in Ecclesiastes" (63). There is surely no coincidence to this recurring personality trait. Indeed it seems evident that the act of counting, for the author as well as for his characters, is a ritualistic and comforting psychological mechanism that enables them to disengage momentarily from the overwhelming momentum of their awareness and to steel themselves for the next assault. An unidentified clinical study conducted in 1978, reports Padmal de Silva, concludes that "a large proportion of normals", almost "80%" of them in fact, display similar symptoms of obsessive compulsive disorder to those individuals recorded as clinical cases (31). Brautigan's place within this statistic seems not wholly unfounded as even his daughter records suspicions in her memoir: "my father records what he was writing" (110); "my father records what he ate for breakfast" (119). Perhaps even more revealingly she also comments upon her "father's fear", "a certain look in his eyes along with the hesitation in the way he moved his body", an unfounded and irrational panic that she often watched "materialize and grip him" (171). Of course, any theories regarding Brautigan's personal state of being over a period of time would surely be nothing more than pure speculation. With close reading, however, it seems evident that his representations of consciousness are so intricate and inclusive that his own predispositions have bled into them. In a very real sense the artist and his art have become almost indistinguishable. The writing is not only a product of his psyche, it is also practically a blueprint of it, and his neuroses are no different from his aesthetics or his cultural patterning in that traces of them can be found scattered amongst all the other tangential impulses and associations that form the sentient state.

Perhaps significant is the documented diagnosis of schizophrenia that occurred early in Brautigan's career. This followed an incident in which the young author smashed a police station window for characteristically obtuse reasons – one account has it in reaction to negative criticism of his writing by a childhood sweetheart, while others claim it was a result of his poverty and the need for a bed and a meal, both of which a police cell could provide. In any case, the result was a couple of "regular meals, and shock treatments, and nightmares for the rest of his life" (Ianthe Brautigan

162). It seems fairly evident in retrospect that the author was not "a paranoid schizophrenic" (Wright 59), at least not in the clinical sense, as he was never treated for the illness in later life nor are there any documented symptoms from this period. Yet this diagnosis exists. Superficially at least, the classic definitions of a schizophrenic actually align rather closely with the preoccupations and intellectual trends evident in the author's work. For example, as R.D. Laing expresses it, the sufferer is very often "not able to experience himself 'together with' others or 'at home' in the world" (15). Furthermore, "he may lack the experience of his own temporal continuity" (43), or have a skewed "sense of personal continuity in time" (69). Perhaps most significantly he becomes "preoccupied with [...] phantasies [*sic*], thought, memories" (86). These are not just features, but *trademarks* of Brautigan's writing. His status in the countercultural community was always one of loose association, an existence on the fringes, as is borne out by his lonely narrative existence in *The Tokyo-Montana Express*: "I bought two light bulbs, which was one of the greatest adventures of my life" (138). He constantly deconstructs and hypothesises different models of time in order to try and rationalise his "own role [...] in history" (150), his own engagement with eternity and what that means. Much of his canon concerns itself with the processes via which thought and memory engage with immediate external stimuli to produce the phenomena of mental and sensual impression. It would be absurd, however, to deduce from these characteristics of the work that Brautigan was schizophrenic. It is much more likely that the diagnosis rather than the condition will have been the trigger for his subsequent aesthetic concerns. The young Brautigan will have undoubtedly been made aware of the symptoms by which his condition was apparently identified, and it is perhaps inevitable that these very symptoms would become fixations, questions to be answered as the artist embarked on his intellectual project. After all, "self-criticism is essentially social criticism" (Mead 255) and vice-versa. It follows, therefore, that the conclusions of any social institution cannot be ignored by the individual, they can only be accepted or incessantly questioned and challenged. Perhaps this is what Brautigan is doing throughout his career: challenging his diagnosis and, by extension, the principles of a technocratic mainstream society.

Interestingly enough, it is documented that nineteenth and early twentieth century diagnoses often categorised "OCD [as] a variant of schizophrenia" (KrochMalik & Menzies 14). Given that OCD was also "found to be the fourth most common psychiatric disorder in the U.S. population" (KrochMalik & Menzies 18), this suggests that Brautigan's state of consciousness was far less unique than that of a schizophrenic. The author's psyche, whilst idiosyncratic, seems far from unusual. From the evidence in his work, it seems subject to the same processing of information and to the same fundamental limitations and physiological flaws as any other. The only difference is that Brautigan chose to analyse this entity in a manner that most other artists and auto-biographers do not. He sought to understand, from his own experiences and doubtless those of others, how the immediate state of awareness is formed. Memory is a part of that process, as are second hand referents from the surrounding culture. Ingrained social ethics inform the results of perception, psychological preconditions inform the results of perception, and so does the arrangement of random data acquired during a life of cultural consumption. In Brautigan's auto-biography, the synapses of the narrator trigger in unexpected ways to produce abstract connections that cannot then be unthought. In short, Brautigan utilises this technique of momentary biography to attempt to answer the ultimate question: the manner in which he exists, and by extension, the manner in which we all exist. Lawrence Wright disregards the author's physical relocations and constant travelling as "the alcoholic's tendency to seek geographical solutions" (38) – evidence of Brautigan looking for the easy options to resolve his personal problems. His work, however, stands as a direct rebuttal of this claim, seeking as it does a rather more conclusive and encompassing psychological solution to both individual issues and the broader human condition.

One of the most startling characteristics of Brautigan's work remains, however, its distinct lack of cohesive structure. It repudiates any attempts at systemization and appears to exist just at the outer limits of the narrator's or the author's control. On the one hand there is the autonomous momentum of Brautigan's metaphors which resembles nothing less than a chain reaction – once the imagination and the infinite power of connotation have been triggered there is absolutely no

accounting for where they will lead. "Eventually the seasons would take care of their wooden names like a sleepy short-order cook cracking eggs over a grill next to a railroad station" (*Trout* 27). On the other hand there is a commonality of powerlessness to each of Brautigan's narrators, every one of them struggling to reconcile the random firing of their synapses to the social experiences they find themselves forced to participate in:

> "Let's have some breakfast", somebody said. Perhaps it was me. I could very easily have said something like that for I was very hungry (Brautigan, *Confederate* 98).

In this example, Jesse is struggling so much for control that he cannot even be sure of what he has or has not said regarding his own hunger. The same is true for Smith Smith who repeatedly tries, and repeatedly fails, to fit his own experiences into the referential structures of different genres in *Dreaming of Babylon*. "This whole thing was just like a pulp detective story" he claims, except that really it is not, and perhaps it is more like a science fiction conspiracy or a baseball rags-to-riches tale as also suggested to his conscious mind by his daydreams (122). In both instances, Brautigan can be seen to explode the myth of self-control. Hamilton quite rightly asserts of *A Confederate General from Big Sur* that "the theme of the novel is the ambition to control one's life and destiny", and that it is an ambition, it seems, that cannot be realised (292). We do not drive our awareness, Brautigan's work reveals, it drives us – it informs the manner in which we perceive with the temporarily finite yet ever expanding and infinitely cross-referential resource of information it has at its disposal. The most ominous aspects of this perceptual model are its apparent complexity and its absolute dominion. The author's narrators cannot block or curtail the myriad of conceptual links that are formed every instant and although they can dismiss them it is essentially a losing battle in the face of an all-conquering force. Perhaps this is precisely why the counting rituals previously illustrated provide such an invaluable function of relief, however temporary this may be.

In any case, Brautigan's characters are united in their powerlessness, floundering "uncontrollably" through their lives, "pass[ing] from one place to

another" (Brautigan, *Unfortunate* 20). They are not just consistently on the move geographically but also psychologically, blown along before the overwhelming force of the unconscious. Malcolm Bradbury identifies this as a distinctly postmodern trait of the writing, an expression of "the language crisis of the age, the loss of exterior referent and the human subject" (209). For him, it signifies a retreat into the mechanisms of the self as some sort of flight from projections of assurance in an intellectual world where certainty and absolutes have broken down. This is a credible argument, but it really only tells half of the story. Brautigan *is* an artist who seems much more concerned with the intricacies of the individual psyche than he does with the unfurling sagas of the human condition on a social scale. His intellectual position does seem to be one of inherent inconclusion with regards to what meaning is and how meaning is derived and applied. However, he has far from turned his back on the exterior referent and neither has he abandoned the overriding significance of the human subject. What he attempts in his fiction and in his poetry is to delve deeper into the signification of these referents and how they are rationalised and quantified in the process of awareness. The emphasis may shift from an assumed universality to a more localised derivation of potential meanings, inherently pluralistic and individual in nature, but the signs and symbols that stimulate this analysis remain the same. The human subject remains, it is simply subjected to a greater critical analysis from a single point of consciousness. Indeed, Brautigan's work is solely focused upon the human subject, but at a more fundamental level. It seeks not to illustrate the superficial diversity of the species macrocosmically but to locate elements of commonality within the single consciousness that inform all those other single consciousnesses that constitute the collective race.

What this means is that the facade of linear thought and sequential being breaks down irrevocably in Brautigan's work. This is because he proves linearity and the truth of existence to be two very different things. The author's characters, and the author's readers, tend not to progress logically from one precept to the next. Their impressions do not form an orderly queue in which to present themselves in turn to consciousness. Instead, a maelstrom of images and ideas crowd perception at any one time and clamour for attention simultaneously. According to George Herbert Mead,

we are all capable of an awareness of multiple interpretations inherent within any given sign or circumstance, and aware of them in a synchronous manner. He expresses this layered characteristic of comprehension in terms of an example whereby an individual engages with the symbol of a horse: "the horse is not simply something that must be ridden. It is an animal that must eat, that belongs to somebody. It has certain economic values" (12). Understanding is a much more complex mechanism than a theory of universal signifiers suggests, and Brautigan's appreciation of this basic truth is what drives his aesthetic technique: "Born 1706 - Died 1790, Benjamin Franklin stands on a pedestal that looks like a house containing stone furniture" (1). His metaphors and similes acknowledge that the reader is capable of synchronous appreciation, as evidenced in this example from *Trout Fishing in America.* As readers we are aware of how a statue looks, we know that it symbolises social importance, we understand its perpetuity and place outside of time. The properties of its materials are known to us, as are its cold, impersonal and intimidating qualities. All of these elements coalesce to form a tangible impression. To arrive at something as simple as an atmospheric description, Brautigan draws on the full range of emotive engagement, making use of the full psychological palette, so to speak. His writing is dense and heavily loaded because it reflects perfectly the density of thought itself. The reader perceives in a dense and convoluted manner, and in textualising the phenomenon the author is driving us closer to an appreciation of who we are and how we are. Such an agenda of self-awareness is the pre-requisite of any personal or cultural revolution; it could perhaps be the revolution itself.

The complexity of Brautigan's endeavour in analysing and representing consciousness evidently did not come without a price for the writer as an individual. His daughter recalls a confession from her father wherein he explains that "the type of thinking he did was so difficult that it formed steel spiderwebs in his mind", complex structures of thought so intricate and mentally exhausting "that drinking was the only way he knew how to get rid of them" (88). Ultimately, Brautigan was a self educated writer chipping away intellectually at one of the most complicated topics imaginable: that of the human psyche. Terence Malley does the author somewhat of a disservice when he asserts that the sum of his achievements was to "show [...] us how to see

something in a new way" (34). Brautigan's contribution is much more profound than that. Indeed, it appears that rather than present the reader with a refreshing new angle on his subject matter, he was much more intent on articulating that which we already partially suspect and are instinctively, yet vaguely, aware. His ambition seems to have been to set out a truly representative illustration of the conscious human state, and to get as far as he did in his analysis is really quite an achievement. However, it is hardly surprising that it evidently took its toll on his mental health. After all, "conceptual thought" is as much a curse as it is a blessing – it is the development that "drove man out of the paradise in which he could follow his instincts with impunity" (Lorenz 177). The burden of knowledge is a heavy one, perhaps even more so for this particular strain of knowledge as once realised it becomes impossible to expunge. Once aware of its own mechanisms, how can the consciousness refrain from conjecture upon the conclusions it brings to bear on every single perceptual process it finds itself performing? Introspection becomes a vicious circle where diagnosis informs the next response which triggers another diagnosis and on and on ad infinitum. It is no surprise that his description of the utopian society in *In Watermelon Sugar* sets "knowledge and curiosity" as the enemy of peace (Leavitt 22). The problem is that Brautigan is all too aware, as Leavitt suggests, that "civilization [is] an elaborate rationalization process" and whilst iDEATH stands as evidence that a "return to the good life must allow for the destruction of the accoutrements of the rationalistic society", the notion remains an impossible one (20). Nothing can ever be unlearned, it can only be transgressed, and Brautigan's work is all about the means via which this transgression can be achieved.

Several of Brautigan's unofficial biographers assert that in social situations the author was "random and contradictory" (Keeler 164), "a coyote figure, an archetypal trickster who was bound to go off in any direction at any minute" (Keeler 79). On the evidence of his writing, and the conceptual leaps and tangents on display, this is hardly surprising. He was obviously an individual fascinated with the concept of intellectual possibility, and committed to the power of random thought and action. These attributes lend further weight to the argument that his art and his being were in a very real sense intricately intertwined, but the relationship is not without its

contradictions. A letter from his agent held in the Berkley archive seeks to agree with the author's conviction "that an artist's private life and his work should be kept separate in the public press" (Brann). The irony of this assertion is fairly self-evident. After all, this is the same author who thinly veils his own sexual dysfunction, the fact that "love-making often caused him to tear the tip of his too-tight foreskin" (Thomas 19), with the representation of Bob's genital warts in *Willard and his Bowling Trophies*. With so much of the author's personality and personal tragedy on display in the texts it is perhaps rather naïve to attempt to make such a distinction publicly, especially once so much of this material had already been published. But then Brautigan's self-allusion is never overt. His technique is ultimately an extension of the principle that anything "which takes place in present organic behaviour is always in some sense an emergent from the past" (Mead 98). Sexual apprehension is one of many triggers within the writer's consciousness and there is no way of proving the origins of this or any other trigger, unless the specifics of the author's private life were to be unearthed. The great paradox of art is surely that in attempting to strike chords of universality the artist invariably reveals the most personal elements of his own personality and opinions. Undoubtedly this is why Brautigan strives so hard to maintain a balance of candour and detachment in his writing, focusing upon the processes of being rather than upon the specifics of any given inspirational circumstance.

To conclude that obfuscation of personal circumstances is Brautigan's primary concern here is, of course, to form a rather simplistic view of his technique. Much more significantly, his utilisation of an objective detachment enables the author to investigate more fully the relationship between the individual consciousness and the broader tenets of social reality. Jay Boyer categorises Brautigan's work as an experiment in relating "cultural myths and personal realities than can inform one another" (49) and this seems a much more satisfactory conclusion. Meaning is far from inherent in the signifiers that the author picks from the external world, it is forged instead entirely within the response, the engagement of the individual psyche to these signifiers. Brautigan uses this truth to great effect: "the Red shadow of the Gandhian non violence Trojan horse has fallen across America, and San Francisco is

its stable" (*Trout* 132). The links between the principles of the counterculture and the politics of Gandhi are drawn conceptually in the personal consciousness of the narrator here. He has both a common and an individualistic appreciation of cultural history. The counterculture is compared ironically to the red menace because, ironically, it presents the same threat to mainstream America, albeit from within – hence the classical allusion to the Trojan horse. However, in drawing these parallels the author is not only presenting his own idiosyncratic conclusions on the situation in San Francisco, he is also giving the events their own credence, a certain stature, a place of their own in the lineage of Western history.

Association is the key here. By making something comparable the artist bestows a legitimacy of association, a legitimacy that previously belonged only to the vehicle that is being utilised but now expands to encompass both sides of the metaphorical equation. This is what Boyer means when he talks about the personal and the public realms informing each other, and it is a device that Brautigan uses almost to exhaustion in his writing. A flock of sheep becomes "the banners of a lost army" (*Trout* 47), a shepherd "a young, skinny Adolf Hitler, but friendly" (*Trout* 45). In his work, history is personalised because it has to be – the process of awareness necessitates it. Information flows inwards via the senses and has to be codified in a way that can be reconciled to the individual frame of reference. Because of the mechanisms involved in this process, even the most trite of observations becomes ludicrously elevated in significance. Furthermore, the illusion of self-importance that is developed by any cognitive consciousness is further enhanced. It is a fatal axiom of the human condition that to be aware is to aggrandise: the self is necessarily self-promoting and inevitably forges on its own behalf an artificial narrative that speaks of itself in significant terms. Brautigan's habit of taking this signification to its extreme is a method of deflation. He makes the comparatives between cause and effect so vivid as to be absurd. An example of this technique would be the character in *Sombrero Fallout* who labels himself "General License Plate" (159), the high rank contrasting with the most mundane artefact to parody the man's delusional ambitions and less than admirable intellect. By foregrounding these disjunctures in a comical manner, the author undermines both the aspirational nature of the ego and the great

concepts that it works with. The aggrandisements of others that have come before are deemed no more or less valid than the conclusions of the self which are themselves inherently invalid. There is ultimately no accounting for proportion – all we have to work with conceptually is what there is to work with: the narrative structures we remember and the situations we have experience of. Our awareness is an evolving autobiography of ourselves just as the Brautigan canon promotes itself as the document of a transient self in the endless process of becoming. His body of work can reach beyond its own boundaries only as effectively as any of us can reach beyond our own insular patterns of thought and consciousness.

There is not, however, any significant evidence in the work of Brautigan to suggest that the human condition is entirely introverted. Indeed, the texts are riddled with threads of social awareness and social dependency. When Lee Mellon and Jesse steal from a "rich queer" in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, for example, the character's primary focus throughout the episode remains upon the "wonderful story" he will have "to tell his other rich queer friends" (13). His perception of the event is wholly formed from the narrative he will have to relay back at a later point. His cognitive function is entirely structured by this gleeful anticipation of a future anecdote. As George Herbert Mead puts it: "mind arises through communication by a conversation of gestures in a social process or context of experience" (50). In other words, thought patterns itself in a manner analogous to narrative, either germinating from received communication or channelling itself automatically into words or concepts that can be readily submitted. However idiosyncratic a single consciousness is, it is nevertheless bound by these conventions, otherwise it would prove defective in any manner of social environment and would ultimately self-destruct as a cognitive entity. The terms of reference of the individual are ultimately aligned with those of their community, intrinsically linked to time and place. The degree by which they are out of kilter with this process of social normalisation becomes the measure of eccentricity, maladjustment or even insanity. The community of iDEATH, prominent in the novel *In Watermelon Sugar*, is a perfect representation of this assertion. The inhabitants are bound by their language: "we call everything a river here" (2). They are bound also, however, by a common evil that exists outside the perimeter of the

commune. "Without the tigers there could be no iDEATH", the narrator concedes, "the tigers [are] the true meaning of iDEATH" (93). Their idyllic lifestyles are a direct response to the violence that has driven them here and those that reject their values are immediately categorised as mad. inBOIL and his gang are interested in the remnants of a former life, the civilization that existed before this one, and because this interest contradicts the founding edict of the commune – that of forgetting – they cannot be understood and cannot, therefore, be tolerated. Their failure to communicate or conform leads to a breakdown in their reasoning and they end their lives in an orgy of self-mutilation and suicide. In order to exist cognitively, argues Mead, "we require objects which are recognised to be independent of our own vision" (29), in other words a commonality of our own ideas. inBOIL may be capable of conceptualising the world in ways other than those propounded by the social majority, but he has to somehow validate his conclusions or buckle under the weight of them, never knowing if they are reasonable or rational. The suggestion is that we see ourselves only through other people's eyes – "the individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly" (Mead 138) – and without endorsement the soul cannot be reconciled to itself, cannot find comfort in its own being.

Brautigan's own social or political perspectives have been quite openly questioned, even reproached by some critics. He is constantly personified in critical and biographical texts as an outsider, "wander[ing] the Haight" in splendid isolation (Coyote 78). He was denounced by the Diggers as a profiteer, concentrating as he did on his own fame rather than the anonymous social good. Jay Boyer comments on the "community that he sought but never quite found" (12), and the overall impression is of a lonely, if not aloof, character, an intellectual outcast with an idiosyncratic take on his world. The author's period of fame and celebrity, however, indicates that for a short time at least he did actually find the social validation that eludes inBOIL. Curiously enough, this seems to have sprung from this same status as a social outsider. "The flower children weren't political figures at all, but rather misfits", contests Boyer (14), and so too is Brautigan a misfit, in his responses to cultural stimuli, and in his singular categorisations and codifications of external data. He was heralded as the voice of a generation precisely because his alternative methods of

conceptualisation and expression resonated with the discord so many experienced with the existing cultural values of American society. The depression reported by his daughter, the habit of finding he had "sat up drinking all night long and shot out all the hours" (70) on the clock, is something that emerged later in his career when his work was evidently less resonant. As Ianthe categorically asserts at the beginning of her memoir, it is impossible to "try to force a hypothesis" on the motives of her father's suicide (viii), but it is also true that by the time of his great depressions in the eighties "people were distancing themselves from the sixties and confused this time with [her] father's writing" (126). Brautigan found himself again, at least artistically, back in the same situation as inBOIL: at odds with the cultural zeitgeist and struggling for critical approval of his perceptions of the world. What this reveals, in fact, is that the author's quest to liberate the self required a parallel effort on behalf of the counterculture to emancipate itself culturally, and to develop new modes of being on the social scale, in order for his ideas to retain their resonance. Once that effort had floundered, Brautigan lost not only his audience but the terms of reference in which he could communicate effectively with that audience. The prerequisite appetite to reject and redefine culturally dominant ideals had diminished, swallowed by the unapologetic capitalism of Reagan's America. The author evidently found himself propounding a cause that would have been, to many, of secondary concern when compared to cold, hard, material wellbeing.

Brautigan's work is indeed steeped in references to, and signifiers of, the dwindling counterculture of the period in which he lived – from the beat nirvana of Big Sur that draws Lee and Jesse to its womb in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, to the music of the Beatles as experienced for the first time by the narrator of *The Abortion* when he finally "join[s] the mainstream of American motor thought" (128). Brautigan is as much a product of his time and place as his time and place is a product of his own imagination. He is drawn, for example, to the notion of the American West, both in his writing and in his choice of home. Montana is described by his daughter as a place where "the ties to the past [can] be plainly seen" (80), from the small Western towns and scattered ranches to "the small bridge built by the WPA workers during the depression" (82). The author's catalogue includes a Gothic

Western, a Private Eye novel (set in 1942), and a work which is essentially, or conceptually, about the Civil War. The frontier, the history of the great American outdoors, is also a recurring motif. Keith Abbot characterises "the hippie scene" as "pro-American, but with a distinctly western vision of America", representing as that does notions of "individualism" and "anarchistic freedom" (38). Brautigan uses the American past to define his own identity in precisely the same way as the rest of the counterculture around him. If his intolerance of drug use and intermittent anti-socialism seem at odds with the cultural ideals of this group, this is perhaps more because of the mythology that has arisen regarding the socially active movements of the period rather than indicative of a friction between the author and his contemporaries. Timothy Leary's thirst for celebrity, as denounced by Emmett Grogan and The Diggers, and the "ingrown sexism and fascism" of the communes provide evidence of "an innate right-wing bias" (Abbott 39) at play in the movement. Ironically, this would move Brautigan and his critiques of revolutionary thought and action, as illustrated in *Sombrero Fallout* and *In Watermelon Sugar*, even closer to the dubious honour of being spokesman for his generation. The point is, his attitudes and the attitudes of the culture he existed within, at least during his formative years, were not radically different. They complemented each other in a manner that is in no way coincidental, proving that however unique the author's artistic vision or communicative technique, his consciousness was nevertheless working with sensory information and conceptual frameworks particular to that period of social evolution.

The symbiotic nature of the author/environment relationship is an important point in terms of assessing the influences upon Brautigan's lifestyle and later work, which is markedly different in tone to the earlier novels and poetry. Effectively he moves from a riotous depiction of the life of a poverty-ridden beatnik with a "gifted faculty for getting his teeth knocked out" (Brautigan, *Confederate* 10), through the social realities of abortion and sexual disease, to depictions of "tedium approach[ing] a kind of blank religious experience" (*Tokyo* 72). There is a distinct trend towards inertia and stoic pessimism. His career, at least in terms of publication, begins with a novel that exalts in possibility, "186,000 endings per second" (*Confederate* 142) no less, and ends with intellectual torpor, "countless beginnings" (*Unfortunate* 60) that

simply cannot be fashioned into anything meaningful. Perhaps the cultural shift to capitalist politics alone cannot really be held accountable for this. There indeed seems a clue to this devolution in the text of *Willard and his Bowling Trophies*, a novel written roughly in the middle of the author's career. As previously explored, one of the characters in this text contracts genital warts and the sexual disease begins to erode his lust for life: "he stood there staring at the warts in his penis", "the sun was going down too" (23). His mind retreats from the situation that is causing him mental anguish, backs away from reality, back to a "rainy afternoon in his childhood" (23). The pages in his scholarly texts "turn [...] like leaves in an absent-minded wind" (24) and his enthusiasm for all the things that constitute his life visibly drains away. The point is that a single event is enough in this instance to shake the very foundations of Bob's soul and to make him lose faith in his own being. There is no suggestion that Brautigan's own sexual condition, or indeed any singular event in his life, is the defining factor in the shift of tone to his work, but what Bob's story does illustrate is the latent power of isolation. It is when he is forced to use a condom and can no longer connect with his lover without barriers that he begins to unravel intellectually. Keith Abbott asserts that in a similar fashion Brautigan's "mind [...] turned in on itself" (132) in his later life, and furthermore that this was a consequence of the incessant pressure upon the author's imagination and its "ceaseless conflict with social and economic worlds" (165).

It certainly seems as though the author's own optimism and artistic clarity suffers the further away from the countercultural Sixties he moves in time. His vision becomes increasingly at odds with the cultural values of the Seventies and Eighties, a fact which is evidenced in his decline in popularity during this period. Bob's physical isolation is indeed reflected in Brautigan's increasing artistic exile, and with a dwindling audience it is perhaps no surprise that he began to write more for himself than for the reader, confining his topics to an ever-decreasing scope of immediately personal interests and singular momentary events:

> This is a hard thing to say about American popular culture [...] but the temperature was much more interesting than television (Brautigan, *Tokyo* 233).

Accounts of Brautigan's time on his ranch in Montana reveal a figure much more akin to a reactionary recluse, a Hunter S. Thompson character, than the "gentle poet of the young" (Stickney 49) presented in his earlier days. His social gatherings were characterised by a "macho behavior which Richard felt his Montana friends required of him" (Abbott 112). He began to ruminate upon the causes of social ills such as vandalism – in this particular case the "American mother abandoning breast feeding"; "perhaps as a culture we are not quite ready for the bottle yet" he concludes (Brautigan, *Tokyo* 202). Reactionary thought is the symptom of a consciousness that has not kept pace with the cultural shifts occurring around it and as a consequence hankers after the seemingly more clearly defined social values of an earlier phase. However much his daughter claims autonomy from the Sixties for her father's work, the fact remains that Brautigan is an artist steeped in the attitudes of the period that marked the prime of his career, at least in commercial terms. As these attitudes dissipated he began to reject that which took their place, and indeed he appears to do this with some relish: "now our dreams are just any street in America lined with franchise restaurants" (Brautigan, *So* 130). Television is deemed the rather stereotypical culprit. For Brautigan it is television that has "crippled the imagination of America and turned people indoors and away from living out their own fantasies with dignity" (*So* 130). This charge, however, is precisely an indication of the cultural shift rather than a perceptible change in the author's perspective. A denouncement of television made in the Sixties has connotations of countercultural thought, the mainstream content of the medium representative of the social ideals of the majority. Television was intrinsically linked with the 'wholesome' values of an affluent America, the social status inherent in owning a new improved model with higher performance tube: in short, all that the hippies sought to reject. A similar tirade unleashed in the Eighties seems much less revolutionary, infinitely more cantankerous and stubbornly unfashionable. In short, the author's identification with a figure such as Mark Twain and his "enraged and disgusted" stance on "the state of society" (Abbott 133) has not in essence changed here, rather the levels of tolerance and contempt that such a figure is held in culturally. The shift ultimately makes

Brautigan's autobiographical project all the more interesting because it illustrates consciousness as a fixed pivotal point that moves through different cultural landscapes and struggles to rationalise its responses to ever-changing connotational referents. Superficially it presents a picture of an author growing old, but perhaps more significantly it reveals the process of moral certitude that evidently reaches an apex at one particular point and then only has limited capacity for adjustment once it has been subjectively refined by the individual in question.

Whether revolutionary or reactionary, Brautigan's work does consistently engage with processes of becoming. Each circumstance his characters encounter is generally presented as the latest link in a conceptual chain stretching back to their birth, to before their birth. A simple decision leads to a consequence which engenders a secondary consequence and so on until the event made inevitable by all that precedes it finally occurs. There is a sense of fate on display in the following example from *The Abortion*:

> Fourth street had waited eternally for us to come and we were always destined to come, Vida and me, and now we'd come, having started out that morning in San Francisco and our lives many years ago (167).

The author deals in cause and effect on a grand scale and events that are impossible to fully comprehend because of their complexity and boundless continuum. His narratives have no distinct beginning or ending because existence has no distinct beginning or ending. Brautigan's characters are akin to his readers in that they are born into a sequence that stretches back imperceptibly and become aware of this only when it is already too late to try and consciously control that which has already been participated in and already contributed to. It therefore follows in his writing that the true measure of being lies not in the ends that one arrives at – conceptually speaking there are no ends – but the means by which one arrives at this great inconclusion. The decisions one takes in each instance become all significant: the minutia of existence becomes the purpose of existence. Likewise, the specifics of each individual moment are suddenly elevated in their importance, signifying as they do all that there is to our purpose in life. As he writes in *The Tokyo-Montana Express*: "welcome to the

Yotsuya Station. It's just another stop on the way" (111). Brautigan, it seems, is acutely aware that being is a means with no ends and it is possibly this that drives his depression when weighed against his own mortality and the decline in critical appreciation of his work. There is an apparent conflict between the results of his Zen experiments, which doubtless helped inform him of this fact, and his reported "continual fascination with fame" (Abbott 67), an ambition which by its very nature is at odds with the stoicism of the theology. This interplay of ambition and transcendence is yet another paradox in the role of an author who attempts to illustrate the futility of a human notion such as purpose when doing so is itself to attempt to fulfil a purpose. Every assertion that Brautigan makes, it seems, is problematic. Every attempt to disclose the true state of being brings with it a further complexity, a new paradox that cannot be resolved. This is hardly a failing on the part of the author, however, but rather an intrinsic condition of awareness that he has managed to uncover. His work is essentially concerned with challenging the limits of consciousness, and in many instances he proceeds to prove that these limits are far beyond what is commonly held as absolute. In other instances he demonstrates precisely where those limits are, the point beyond which intellect, or at the very least articulation, cannot progress without tying itself in knots. This is just as critical a discovery for the cause of understanding as are his other findings. Novak asserts that Brautigan appears to be illustrating to his readers over and over that art "can't tell you anything". Certainly it can't tell you everything, "it can only wake you up and make you respond" (50).

Conclusion

Superficially at least, the canon of Brautigan's work appears widely divergent in both theme and subject: from pseudo-Beat novellas to ironic genre pieces; from Haiku to discarded narratives that write themselves in waste baskets; from psychedelic deconstructions of the counterculture's communal ideal to disjointed journal entries and self-referential measurements of words written, commas typed, pages filled. The author's world is laid out across a vast yet tangible grid of momentary perceptions and punctuated with seemingly random snatches of cultural stimuli and intellectual theory. It is a complex reality and to approach it along one of the many strands he unfurls renders it almost impossible to discern its underlying unity. Yet each of his aesthetic techniques can be seen to traverse outwards from, and ultimately back into, a tangible core supposition. Brautigan's writing, this thesis contests, directly reflects the counterculture's drive for transgression beyond social conformity and does so by interrogating the mechanisms of the individual consciousness. What constitutes awareness? How does perception actually occur? To what number of limitations are our psychological processes subjected? Only in understanding these things can one transcend the inherent codes and suppositions of the psyche and achieve some sort of personal freedom. Ultimately, for Brautigan, the physical world is a chaos of chance events, a maelstrom of stimuli and signifiers, and engagement with it is by necessity a process of reduction, a sequencing of disparate elements into a notional cohesive structure. In this process is forged significance, meaning, cause and effect – precepts that have no substance beyond that which is bestowed upon them for the sake of some manner of comprehension. But if the component parts of this comprehension are critically flawed, it surely follows that comprehension too is somewhat redundant as a concept. This redundancy is the very crux of Brautigan's aesthetic dilemma. Perception operates in a very specific manner and creates of its situation a convenient lie. The question is whether the cycle can be broken and an alternative mode of engagement with one's environment, and with one's own awareness, can be established.

In Brautigan's work, everything that is perceived, whether from immediate stimuli or cultural preconception, occurs within a concurrent moment of awareness. The past is nothing more than a set of previous concurrent moments – the chance to engage with them directly has passed. All that is left of them is a faint residue of the influence they wielded when they were upon us. What they offer in the present is an impetus towards some new realisation, a catalyst upon this concurrent perception that will commingle with all the other available influences and help shape this latest transitory instance of being. It is in this sense that Brautigan offers his readership a perpetual 'historical present'.

> Historical Present
> - *noun*
>
> The present tense used in narrating a past event as if happening at the time of narration (Dictionary.com).

The cultural past has relevance only to the contemporary psyche, meaning that the terms in which this relevance is defined are wholly at the discretion of that psyche. Authenticity has little meaning. Those that would dispute an inaccurate reading of the past are perhaps missing the point – there is no accuracy, there is only the sometimes common and sometimes idiosyncratic symbolic association of significance that occurs in the single consciousness. If Jesse, Brautigan's narrator in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, has a presupposition about the American Civil War that seems borne out in the behaviour of his very contemporary companion, then that companion may as well be a Confederate General. In fact, to all intents and purposes he *is* a Confederate General. There is no definition of truth any more credible than that which is arrived at through concurrent awareness: "The American Civil War, [was] the last good time this country ever had" (132). Of course, this would depend on one's definition of a good time, and Brautigan's statement here is obviously steeped in irony. However, the fact remains that a single interpretation is by its very nature a truth. With nothing to set against it as a more authoritative reading it has to stand as a valid notion.

Perceptual subjectivity is a complex notion because at the heart of it lies a chaos of contradictory realities. Nevertheless, the natural state of being, as represented by Brautigan, is chaos. The author's hypothesis simply serves to illustrate this. In so doing he may well inadvertently put forward the benefits of the same reductionist methods of perception he is attempting to deconstruct, but it is a necessary step in his aesthetic agenda. Subjectivity lays the foundation for his analysis of postmodernism – an approach where all emotional and intellectual impulses are of equal stature – which in turn is critical to his interpretation of cognitive process. Of his experience with LSD, Tom Wolfe writes that the drug enables an individual to "enter [...] a moment in his life and know [...] exactly what is happening to his senses now, at this moment" (42). He determines consciousness to be a barrier between the self and the external world and views "*the brain [as] a reducing valve*" (57). On the one hand, Brautigan's view would seem to be diametrically opposed to this. For him, consciousness *is* the world. Yet there is commonality to be found in the notion of the reducing valve. In Brautigan's model also, the brain reduces its source material: it refines and reorders the stimuli presented to it into something more palatable to the comprehension. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the mechanics of Brautigan's postmodernism because here, specifically, complex phenomenon is condensed and compacted into a simple memorable token of itself. A cultural intricacy becomes first a notion and then a symbol small enough to be stored in the repository of the unconscious. This technique allows the eighteenth century to be whittled down to a vision of "people with three-cornered hats fishing in the dawn" (Brautigan, *Trout* 3). It could just as easily be signified with images of Trappers, or Puritans, or witch trials; but it hardly matters because the signifier is concerned with context, with emotional recognition, not with specific historical incident. Any manner of debate over whether this is an inferior method of recalling the past compare to didactic historical investigation is actually irrelevant. Essentially, in the author's vision, all manner of perceptual engagement operates on these same principles. As Linda Hutcheon states: "there is nothing natural about the 'real' and there never was" (31). In other words, the 'real', the more thoroughly researched and laboriously extrapolated representation of history, has still been refined and prepared by the historian. The end product may be a

narrative rather than a symbol, but the ordering and sequencing of chaos has still occurred which means that the result is no less a manufactured truth. Postmodernism simply extrapolates this process of restructuring, and illustrates how the conscious mind utilises it to retain a formalised and useable blueprint of its environment. Through it, the reader "become[s] aware of the means by which we *make* sense of and *construct* order out of experience in our particular culture" (Hutcheon 51). By loading the postmodern metaphor with disjunctive images, the author is able also to signify how these constructs draw upon a wealth of presupposition. He can successfully illustrate that signification evolves incrementally by the combination of diverse elements, and he can use this conclusion to push awareness to its limits and beyond.

Evolution, both biological and social, is intrinsically tied to the concept of sequential time and it is only in a system of chronology that moves in a forward motion that consciousness can exist. A systemisation of incremental knowledge requires a repository to add new data to, a repository that has already developed with each acquired impression and corresponding emotional response. Yet to categorise the engagement of consciousness with time as a purely sequential arrangement would be a fundamental misrepresentation. In the world of Brautigan's narrators, events from their childhood often seem steeped in greater relevance than those from subsequent years. In *So the Wind Won't Blow it all Away*, for instance, the narrative voice switches between two distinct time zones – the adult present and a past located specifically in childhood. The phobias of the narrator's mother, and the effect they had on him, are recalled with precision: "I was so exhausted [...] from the fear of dying by gas" (51). This recollection is evidently more important than events of the last hour, day, or month, any of which the narrator could similarly express. The reality is, Brautigan seems to suggest, that whilst perceptions are acquired sequentially, they are not collated in the conscious and the unconscious in this manner. There is a much more complex pattern of codification taking place, one that is entirely in keeping with the postmodern microcosm of physical reality. Some instances are being assigned greater significance than others, are being ordered and categorised in a discerning manner that creates from chaos a structured notion of personal history.

As has been established in this thesis, time only really exists for Brautigan in the immediate moment. Future is a notional concept and past is really nothing more than a by-product of human memory. In this sense, it is not a linear phenomenon. Its physiology is precisely that of the pattern the mind chooses to allocate to it. So time is in fact dimensional, a complicated web of associated perceptions and signifiers that interrelate in a multitude of oblique ways. Brautigan identifies this structure in *An Unfortunate Woman* as the "calendar map" (2), a geography of past impressions that can be navigated across. It is a closed system in the sense that any reference to it within the concurrent moment is a reference to a static repository, one which will only be updated with the perceptual outcome about to be realised. So it is one in which all elements are known (in so far as the consciousness has designated them meaning) and therefore can be analysed with some leisure in order to extrapolate portents and consequences. In other words, fate becomes a more likely concept in a system of hindsight. The only logical conclusion to situation A and situation B, it can be concluded, was consequence C. Thus Brautigan draws fate into his wider argument about the role the consciousness has in defining its world. It is another manifestation of the mind's drive towards order and yet another conceit that can be deconstructed and attributed to this overriding truth.

The problem with Brautigan's intellectual thesis is twofold. Primarily, it is a complex one and difficult to transmit satisfactorily to a reader. Secondly, it is one which seeks to debunk the notional restrictions that society imposes upon an individual's ability to contextualise his environment, and yet seeks to do so in the medium of one of those restrictive methods: language. One of the prominent techniques Brautigan draws upon to tackle the first of these issues, and to some extent the second, is that of genre. By its very nature, genre is a system of signs and symbols that have been codified in a specific manner to elicit immediate identifications from its audience. As Northrop Frye articulates: "the symbol [...] is the communicable unit" (99) in literature and art generally. The significance of the symbol is in no greater evidence than in genre fiction, indeed genre seems the ultimate cultural demonstration of postmodernism's reductive signification. Film noir, for instance, can be satisfactorily summarised as a collection of archetypal components that include

gangsters, private detectives, wealthy women, luxury cars and some mysterious intersection between high class living and a seedy underworld. The form has become crystallized by a significant number of characteristics that conform to the common type. As soon as these components are revealed on screen, viewers will recognise the pattern and set their perceptual expectations accordingly. It is by undermining these expectations that Brautigan is able to make this same audience aware of the system of interpretation they have effortlessly assumed. His inept private detective in *Dreaming of Babylon* is not only a discordant example of his genre symbol, but one who actually becomes aware of his deficiency. Within a genre structure he articulates those traits and characteristics that he knows he should possess and yet is all too painfully aware he does not. He has no bullets for his gun, he has to take the bus because he cannot afford a car, but most significantly he identifies a shoulder holster as "an authentic touch" (9) for his own, self-aware characterisation. The aesthetic intent here is to derail the reader's genre habits and make them take a step back from their engagement with the rules of codification. They are prompted to consider these rules in a more objective manner, realise that they *are* rules, understand what they signify, and hopefully apply these same conclusions to the systems and schemas that exist elsewhere in their lives. Mixing genre achieves the same effect as deconstructing genre signifiers. Brautigan uses this device to great effect in several of his novels also. The often contradictory rules of any two genre systems serve to juxtapose each other, sometimes confirming and sometimes undermining the conventions of their counterpart, but always highlighting the different codifications at work.

Furthermore, Brautigan imbues at least one of his genre novels, *The Hawkline Monster*, with readily identifiable Jungian symbols. The eponymous monster is endowed with a shadow, a contradictory portion of its consciousness which compels actions at odds with the majority of its psychological being. The introduction of such a key facet of the psychiatrist's philosophy works to extend the notion of genre by association with other hypotheses from the same source. For instance, Jung's theory of archetypes is brought into play, its supposition that all human consciousness stems from a common understanding of basic symbols perfectly complementing the foundations that genre is built upon. It is precisely because an audience is perceptually

preconditioned in this manner that the codifications of a closed system are so rapidly acquired and so effortlessly assumed. Genres often contain, for instance, the figure of the hero, an archetype that every reader is familiar with. There is, in effect, a framework already in place for these cultural models to be mapped upon. In short, genre and archetypal awareness complement each other; each gives form and narrative to the inherent suppositions of the psyche. It therefore follows that genre is, at least for Brautigan, a material representation of consciousness. It is a logical extension of postmodernism and another unifying factor in the search for a description of awareness, bridging as it does the more detailed theoretical work of Jung and the deducible activity of perception as it processes sensory data from external sources.

Genre, however, only really answers the first part of Brautigan's aesthetic conundrum. It serves to illustrate his conclusions on the nature of the psyche in an accessible manner, and to some extent manages via juxtaposition to undermine the credibility of language constructs. But it does little beyond this to address the fundamental limitation on consciousness that language imparts. For this problem, the author is forced to turn to another critical technique: Surrealism. The work of formative artists in this field – individuals such as Breton, Dali and Magritte – focuses very much on the notional manner in which words have come to signify the phenomena they describe. Because language operates in logically constructed terms, it infers an apparent consent that logic is the only true method of understanding. In fact, for authors such as Pirsig and Brautigan, logic is really only the intellectual property of logisticians and a technique they have chosen to illustrate their own perspectives with. It demands that the recipient in any communicative process acknowledges the notional truths within the proposition and assume them without question. But that requirement puts the reader, the audience, the recipient, at the whim of the originator. Magritte illustrates this unwarranted bias towards logic by producing paintings of instantly recognisable objects incorrectly labelled, whereas Brautigan does so by establishing premises in his work that he immediately undermines and reveals to be purely conjectural or impossible: "there is always the chance that [this] is not true [...] and if that's the case, I am sorry that I have wasted your time" (86). In this example from *The Tokyo-Montana Express*, there is an unreliable narrator on display,

producing an unreliable narrative. Of course Brautigan's words are not strictly true – he is writing fiction after all – but by drawing attention to this fact he is effectively opening up a subtextual debate on the nature of fiction itself, its purpose and its relevance to our cognitive processes. We are each unique, distinctly individual entities with a common grounding that enables us to cohabit and coexist. Language, the author claims, is the key to this delicate link, the codification of language and the unwritten rules of interpretation the framework that binds us communally.

But what is real for one individual – real in the sense of derived meaning and emotional response – does not necessarily apply to somebody else. Therefore, the narrative form cannot sustain the singular purpose of transmitting received wisdom. Its aim must be instead to offer up to the reader sufficient material for him to construct a meaning and significance for himself in the same way that he builds from more immediate physical stimuli. As Mead asserts, "the gesture which the first individual makes use of must in some sense be reproduced in the experience of the [other] individual in order that it may arouse the same idea in his mind" (48). Critically, it must be reproduced, not simply received and immediately understood. There is, then, a fine line to discursive technique. The recipient must be prompted rather than informed, and it is an issue Brautigan appears incessantly aware of. As discussed in the thesis, he utilises a method of venturing a perception and then immediately conceding that it is fundamentally flawed and in need of reconsideration in light of a whole host of secondary issues. They are merely his perceptions, he does not necessarily believe in their validity himself, and they are coloured and shaped by his specific personal experiences. In some instances he even concedes that he may be lying in an attempt to highlight the absurdity of author/reader dichotomy. The texts are essentially a tangible extension of his consciousness, intended to lay out the manner in which this consciousness operates. In so doing they force the reader to assume the task of reconstructing elements of this original conscious state. The intent is to make the reader consequently aware that he himself is engaging with the notion of perceptual process, and to ultimately realise the parallel between this exercise and his own intricate daily enterprise of translating the world into ideas and concepts.

To these ends, Surrealism is the author's ideal vehicle, seeking as it does "to express, either verbally or in writing, the true functioning of thought" (Breton 49). Thought is nothing if not superficially random in nature – tenuous in its method of association and ultimately unpredictable. "When people are talking to me about very important things like President Carter", claims the narrator of *The Tokyo-Montana Express*, "I'm really thinking about the light on at the Tastee-Freez" (131). For some reason certain images sometimes assume a greater significance than those at hand; some unarticulated resonance is triggered and there is no expunging it. Elsewhere in the same text, the narrative voice proclaims that he has "smelled a peach and [that] it smelled just like [his] childhood" (135). These are precise illustrations of how awareness works, instances of the human condition laid bare. The associations defy logic and there is no way to reconcile them to an easily identifiable agenda, a sequence or a method of correlation. Thoughts simply are as they are, they belie sequence and narrative and parable, which is why Brautigan is more concerned with expressing methods of signification rather than artificial constructs of meaning.

There is, therefore, a close alignment to the underlying form of Brautigan's texts and the inherent configurations of consciousness. In this he is aligned with other artistic approaches such as that of haiku, for instance, which employs precisely the same symbiosis of form and content to deliver its message to the reader:

> Bird of time –
> in Kyoto, pining
> for Kyoto (Basho 43).

To be in one location, one point of time and place and yet pine for that which you are already a part of illustrates these same conceits of consciousness and conceptualisation. The physical reality of Kyoto here is somehow disjunctive with the idea of Kyoto, the conjured reality of signs and tokens that the subjective mind has assembled to represent this place. There is a juxtaposition of perception and stimuli in Basho's poem which is at odds with the usually complementary Zen nature of Haiku. But it reflects back Brautigan's focus on the perceiving psyche: "the Japanese squid fisherman are asleep and I am thinking about them being asleep" (Brautigan, *Tokyo*

11). The narrative conscious consumes the squid fishermen, uses them to ponder all that their sleep entails, and what it signifies about their world and his. Brautigan is thinking, Basho is pining: both foreground the act of engagement above any of the stimuli upon that engagement. Brautigan's work, however, shares more in its technique with Haiku and Zen than this parallel alone. Both are concerned, for instance, with the transitory nature of experience. "Be mindful of the present moment" urges Wong Kiew Kit (289), and mindful Brautigan most certainly is, his narrator acknowledging in *The Abortion* that he is in for a long day but cherishing the fact that he can "get there only moment by moment" (109). Both affirm the indistinguishable nature of sensory input into concurrent modes of awareness:

> Darkening waves –
> cry of wild ducks,
> faintly white (Basho 38).

If a sound is reminiscent of a colour in the perception of the individual, then the sound becomes that colour. The aural and visual senses combine to create an impression, the constituent parts of which are no longer discernable. Similarly, Benjamin Franklin dominates the cover of *Trout Fishing in America*, and his "statue speaks [...] in marble" (1). These examples are again primarily concerned with perception. The waves and the ducks, the statue in Washington Square: none of these have any special significance or meaning as and of themselves. What lends them pertinence is the processing of their sensory signification against a repository of experience that occurs in the consciousness of the observer. The ducks sound white, the statue has a tactile voice. Their essence, their reality is bestowed upon them when the gears of awareness engage and an emotional momentum is triggered. Reality is shown in both instances to be the coalescence of stimuli and discernment, the end product of a process that occurs organically in the psyche of the sentient being.

It follows, then, that nothing is real except that which is interpreted and imagined. The physical world is not 'real' in Brautigan's work, it is but a catalyst to a perceptual reaction that creates as byproduct that which we term tangible. His intellectual agenda seems to be the promotion in his readers of what Alan Watts

describes as the "sensation that what is going on outside of you is all one process with what is going on inside you and that you are all there is" (42). Watt's expresses the concept in decidedly Zen Buddhist terms, but then there is a decidedly Zen-like thread running through Brautigan's catalogue. The theology seems another of his appropriations, not fully realised in spiritual terms but certainly utilised as another vehicle for his message. In Zen Buddhism there is no distinction between the seer and the seen. They are both parts of an indivisible equation. Everything exists in a simple symbiosis of being: "there are no flowers where there are no bees. There are no bees where there are no flowers" (Watts 40). Or to put it in more human terms, "we do not get an intelligent organism in an unintelligent environment" (Watts 42). In other words, we are capable of consciousness precisely because the world we exist in enables it. We are a part of that wider reality and it is a part of us; there are no divisions of any real note. The same principle appears in Brautigan's work over and over, as evidenced by this passage from *An Unfortunate Woman*:

> 'This is why I am in Alaska', I said to myself. 'To watch a crow with a hot dog bun sticking out of its mouth' (49).

This section is not really about the destiny of the narrator, at least not destiny in the conventional sense of the term's usage – it is more about the purpose of the narrator, his reason for being. The text illustrates his role in the order of the universe which is to observe this situation, to experience it, to make of it what he will. Thus the incident reveals an alternative meaning to the concept of destiny, indicating that the role we are intended to play in the imagining of reality is our fate rather than the projection of some apparent consequentialism onto circumstances we have experienced.

Where Brautigan perhaps falls short of the Zen ideal, however, is in his insistence upon the individual psyche. His characters are indeed stitched into a vast cultural tapestry from which their personalities are barely discernable from their cultural motifs, their "World War II and the Andrews Sisters" (Brautigan, *Trout* 106). In this manner they are made less unique, entwined in the great mesh of similar influences. On occasion their psyches overlap – "we were talking at the same time, saying exactly the same things like a chorus of coal" (Brautigan, *Unfortunate* 88). In

the end, however, they are always idiosyncratic psychic entities immersed in a world of their own devising and related only by the common practice of their perceptual abilities. At best they can be engaged in the process of forging sympathetic realities, like Jesse and Lee Mellon from *A Confederate General from Big Sur* with names "made for [them] in another century" (65). At worst, they can be terminally divided, like Bob and Constance from *Willard and his Bowling Trophies*, "two haunted houses staring across a weedy vacant lot at each other" (55). In either case, the individuals on display fail to homogenise in the true Zen manner: "we [...] come and go like leaves on a tree, but the tree remains: and we are the tree" (Watts 43). There is no self in Zen, there is no I. The individual soul contains the whole world, *is* the whole world: every tree and animal, every circumstance, and every other soul intertwined throughout eternity. Brautigan never quite attains Satori or a true rationalisation of the self and the world in precisely these terms, but then he never professes to be a true student of Zen. He evidently finds resonance in the spiritual posits of the movement, but for him they are an obvious extension of this thesis on the nature of perception rather than triggers of a religious zeal.

In any case, Brautigan's appropriation of Zen remains essentially incomplete and his inquest into the state of being turns ultimately to a more overt expression of the individual self. The author's work as a whole is, in a very real sense, extremely autobiographical. Care has to be taken, however, in how this term is applied to him as the material is structured so as to defy the conventional definition of this form. Brautigan's autobiography is not about the recounting of incidents particular to the sequential experience of the author. It is instead concerned with the mechanisms of his consciousness, the cogs and pistons laid bare in order for the reader to observe awareness in the process of forming and being. "I was about seventeen", claims the narrator of '1/3, 1/3, 1/3', "and made lonely and strange by that Pacific Northwest of so many years ago, that dark, rainy land of 1952" (10). Nowhere else in his body of work is Brautigan as coherent with regards to his own childhood, and yet upon examination the statement is much more about the narrative present than the factual or fictional past which has informed it. The Pacific Northwest may well have had a profound effect but the focus is set firmly on the sadness and despair of the present

tense. The narrator *is* lonely and strange, his condition an end product of various factors that are not articulated. Many of the author's suppositions are framed in this manner: the past a referent for the present. The sound of pigs being slaughtered, for instance, is presented to the reader as 'A Complete History of Germany and Japan'.[19] The present draws upon the past and puts it to work for its own benefit and this is why the body of work is so strikingly autobiographical, not because it imparts much in the way of personal history, but because it imparts *so* much in the way of concurrent consciousness – the *result* of this personal history.

The manner in which Brautigan utilises the notion of moment has been extensively examined in this thesis: his conviction that the immediate instance of time is all that we have as a basis for reality. Each second is "like a pinch of spice in a very complicated recipe that takes days to cook, sometimes even longer" he asserts in *The Tokyo-Montana Express* (188). There is something temporal in such examples, something that exists beyond the boundaries of the moment, but it is only in the moment that we experience it and have knowledge of it. For Brautigan, moment is the zenith at which the entire spectrum of experience and memory and sensory predisposition intersect. It is the prism which refracts all these divergent strands of self into one bright pinnacle, a single point which represents the very essence of who we are:

> It was snowing hard when we drove
> into Los Alamos. There was a clinical feeling
> to the town, as if every man, woman and child
> were a doctor. We shopped at the Safeway
> and got a bag of groceries. A toddler
> looked like a brain surgeon (Brautigan, *Rommel* 19).

Very often the articulation of a single instance in time such as this is devoid of any logic or sense. The reader is not privy to why the town seems clinical; very likely the poet is not privy to why it seems so either. As a metropolitan centre it simply has

[19] Brautigan's story "A Complete History of Germany and Japan" in *Revenge of the Lawn* establishes the premise that slaughtering pigs has "something to do with winning the war" (102) because at the time everything was framed via propaganda and in the public consciousness as part of the war effort.

indeterminate qualities that trigger some manner of recognition in the unconscious of the observer. It hardly matters why: this simply is the way it seems, and therefore is the way it is. There is no controlling the impulses that forge reality for the observer, and it therefore follows that the observer is powerless to exert any influence on his environment, has no real dominance over his own existence. There is not even any consistency to one's own awareness: as soon as an impression forms the stimuli shift and the perception collapses under its own weight and has to be rebuilt. "The afternoon sun kept changing everything as it moved across the sky" the narrator of Trout Fishing in America concedes at one point (55). "The FBI agents kept changing with the sun" (*Trout* 55), he asserts, demonstrating that, for him, reality is precarious, founded on presupposition and shaped from all sides by contradictory psychological forces. Everything is in transit, constantly shifting like the product of a formula with ever new variables entered into it. It is impossible to arrive at a definitive truth because truth is subjective and hence conceptually redundant, at least in the language of absolutes. Brautigan asserts that what is true in one instant of awareness is meaningless in the next. All that is left, therefore, is the concurrent moment, the one pure instance of perception that ignites and is gone forever. This is the function and the essence of the historical present and of Brautigan's autobiography: the whole of one's being expressed in a single incident or observation, a finite number of words that crystallise the soul.

From Brautigan's limitations with Zen Buddhist doctrine, however, stems a much larger issue that he fails to rationalise into his otherwise all-encompassing theory of perception. Because his reality remains doggedly homo-centric in nature, it lacks the capacity or empathy required for the topic of gender to be truly appropriated into his fractured manifesto. For the male author and the male narrator, the female remains persistently 'other' throughout the texts, something alien and external to the male psyche. Brautigan's women are never really much more than a part of the cultural landscape, a stimulus to perception, a muse:

> Signalling, we touch,
> lying beside each other
> like waves.

I roll over into her
and look down through
candlelight to say,
"Hey, I'm balling you" (Brautigan, *Mercury* 50).

As with Magic Child in *The Hawkline Monster* who seals a deal with sex, the woman in this poem signifies little more than an expression of male sexuality, of supposed sexual liberation and the great casualness that characterised the counterculture. The two partners are depicted as equals for most of the stanza, but the old male dominance reasserts itself at the conclusion as the male subject looks down and expresses his satisfaction in the act he is committing upon the female. The language of participation, the two waves signalling to each other, switches to the language of penetration, the final verb associated quite distinctly to the masculine half of the couple. The sex on display here is not like the perceptual engagement with reality illustrated elsewhere. There is no blurring of the elements that constitute awareness, no interplay of memory and sensation and external stimuli. The protagonist is very clearly asserting his own agenda upon the world around him and subjugating it to his will. Even women who instigate the circumstances the poet finds himself in are rapidly manoeuvred into a more submissive role:

The telephone rings in San Francisco,
"This is Ultra Violet".
I don't know her except that she
is a movie actress.
She wants to talk to me.
She has a nice voice.
We talk for a while (Brautigan, *Mercury* 26).

The female fan obviously seeks to engage the poet in conversation, but her confident assertion of will is immediately undercut with an instance of objectification. She has a nice voice, that is all that is worthy of mention – not the subject of their conversation, not the wit or intelligence or lack of either that she exhibits. With only the voice available to the male consciousness, this characteristic alone is seized upon. There is also a sense that if she had been present for the conversation the line may well have read "she has nice breasts". If this seems unfairly critical it should be noted that the

woman's name is Ultra Violet and despite the wordplay and metaphorical leaps the author is renowned for, this provocative name is felt unworthy of note, certainly less worthy than the tone and timbre of a disembodied voice.

This analysis is not to imply, of course, that Brautigan was simply chauvinistic in his attitude towards women. In the middle and later period of his career he concentrates rather explicitly on the topic of gender politics. His female characters move from purely objective entities such as Vida from *The Abortion*, "developed to the most extreme of Western man's desire in this century for women to look" (43), to more substantial and self-empowered individuals. In *Sombrero Fallout* the male narrator is even subjugated to the Japanese girlfriend, Yukiko, who has rejected him. But even in this recognition of female identity Brautigan fails to bridge the divide between the genders. By acknowledging the independence and self-sufficiency of women he simply establishes a more equal, and more fraught, dichotomy. There is still no real discernment of how the female consciousness operates and no attempt to reconcile the masculine and feminine in the wholeness of being that typifies the rest of his work. In this he is no different from any of his peers. The sexual revolution of the counterculture floundered because insufficient effort was poured into redefining traditional gender roles. The terms of engagement may have changed but the expectations, the share of the input and the rewards remained the same. "The counterculture", claims Umansky, "failed especially to tackle the meaning of sexual liberation for women" (26). It can even be argued that this failure in Brautigan's work occurs precisely because of the author's gender limitations. He is biologically predisposed to apportion certain meanings and purposes to women, drawing upon his biological impulses as well as the patterned social templates of femininity in his engagement with the female in the concurrent moment. In this sense his theory of momentary perception remains sound for it is simply finite and bound closely to the notion of individual consciousness. Because the individual consciousness on display in each of these works is a male one, it therefore follows that the perceptions used as examples are specifically male. However distasteful it may seem, the female consciousness seems to have been identified by the author as significantly different from the male and therefore doomed to exist as an external influence on concurrent

awareness just as all the other tokens of the wider environment that his narrators move among.

As well as his inability to successfully rationalise gender differences, the fanciful streak in Brautigan's work has often invited criticism and has lead to its dismissal as insubstantial and unworthy of note. In fact his humour and whimsical imagery belie and underlie a significant theoretical project that spans no less than the totality of human history, three of the most refined intellectual theories of the twentieth century (postmodernism, Surrealism and Jungian analysis), a religion, the physical principle of time and the most fundamental enquiry imaginable into the very nature of being itself. The scope of the author's thesis, as developed over the course of eleven novels and a multitude of poems and short stories, is astounding because all of these influences, this vast wealth of cultural material, is brought to focus in one single point: the essence, scope and function of our human perception. In Brautigan's work we do indeed seem to be, as Marc Chénetier asserts, "in the presence of a narrative that is always being made" (70). The reason why it seems this way for Chénetier is that the narrative lies not in the texts, but in the interaction between the author's prompts and the reader's responses: the work is an entity embedded within our cognitive capabilities, and not a two dimensional string of printed words. Its engagement with its audience parallels the engagement of The Diggers via their street theatre and the sheer scope of its challenge matches the challenge undertaken by the broader counterculture on the restrictions of their existing social reality. Brautigan's work is the very articulation of the will to liberty of his surrounding culture, and he should, therefore, no longer be marked out as a minor Beat writer or an unliterary, whimsical hippy.

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Appendix:

Interviews with Brautigan's Acquaintances

Keith Abbott, email, July 2005

Greg Keeler, email, August 2005

John Barber, email, July 2005

Question:

There is some documentary evidence suggesting that Brautigan's relationship with the Beats was rather fraught. Ferlinghetti is attributed with several disparaging remarks about his writing style and its apparent naiveté and inconsequential nature. I'm interested in whether he was particularly dismissive in turn or whether he ever acknowledged the debt his work owes to this movement? In some instances he seems to be grouped loosely with the Beats, almost as a footnote to the movement, a latecomer who espoused some of the same values.

Keith Abbott:

There was no percentage to be affiliated with Beats by 1964. In my opinion, as a young writer who arrived in 1965, it was the Dixieland of American poetry by 1967. Brautigan was annoyed to have his *A Confederate General From Big Sur* promoted under that banner. He acknowledged the Beat North Beach writers' importance for him, especially as a community, when he arrived from out of state. He was not exactly dismissive of Beat poetry, but he was critical about how easy it was to write, especially the surrealist tropes by someone like City Lights author Pete Wilson. There were a lot of Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Creeley imitators around then, and you don't hear of them now. But they were boring.

By 1963 the Beat poets were almost entirely a good old boys club: but no money or grants or critics' attentions to fight over. Ferlinghetti is unreliable on this point about

Brautigan. He was the gatekeeper and a bestseller, and took his role seriously, so he resented Brautigan's popularity and sales.

I think it's more fruitful to connect Brautigan to the San Francisco Renaissance. He did study at or at least go to Spicer's soirees. Spicer promoted *Trout Fishing in America* for sure and perhaps edited it in some way. But this is not yet proved by an examination of drafts of the original manuscripts, if those manuscripts still exist.

Question:
The relationship between Brautigan and the Beats seems much more complex than is often portrayed and certainly his work evolved beyond this very quickly, becoming throughout the sixties more and more representative of the counterculture as it too evolved out of the Beat influence.

Keith Abbott:
I agree. In my opinion Brautigan got techniques for self-promotion from the Beats, mostly. Celebrity status gets you off the book review page. Put your picture on the front of your books, too.

Surrealist and/or European structures did not belong only to the Beats, but to Mark Twain, Stephan and Hart Crane, Rexroth, Duncan, Kenneth Fearing and K. Patchen, etc. All of whom Brautigan read or heard read. I never saw a French surrealist book at Brautigan's house, or heard him talk about them. He had Bruce Conner as a close friend & I think his art and film works (especially) and life (lives) was an inspiration to him. He regarded Conner as a genius. Conner's gothic, surrealist, horror/newsreel movies, cinematic collages and art were familiar to RB.

Greg Keeler:
Richard hardly ever mentioned the other Beats - except for Snyder, who was a mutual friend. I think he respected Gary but was jealous of him - not because of his prominence as a Beat but because of his fluency in Japanese - which put him a step

ahead with Japanese women, including Aki, his wife. Gary told me that when he was young, Richard hung out at North Beach, San Francisco - wanting to be a part of that scene. If Richard had a mentor or guru during that time, it was Jack Spicer. He talked about him a lot - about how Spicer would hold court and Richard would hang on every word. Spicer was very important to Richard's writing and his attitude toward literature in general.

It was Ginsberg who called Richard Bunthorne and trivialized his work.

Question:
A lot of critics have talked about Brautigan in explicitly postmodernist terms. However, there is no evidence that he considered his work in this light himself.

Keith Abbott:
He did not; you are correct.

Question:
I have explained this by claiming the sixties as a period of cultural explosion with a lot of conflicting influences bearing down on artists at precisely the same time. In effect, intellectual thought became decidedly postmodernist in nature, especially amongst the counterculture, and so it is no surprise that this becomes imbued into his writing rather unconsciously. He probably wouldn't have thought of himself necessarily as a postmodernist because the tendency of opening up one's awareness to a whole multitude of artistic and sociological and pop-cultural stimuli was more of a fundamental approach than something consciously pursued.

Keith Abbott:
The popular culture, too, was postmodernist in certain arts: newsreels, comics and cartoons for example, and Brautigan in my opinion was reacting to those influences, which were much more visceral and available and constant in his life than reading Michel Butor on novels. How unconscious this was is debatable.

I could be wrong and often am, but that concept 'unconscious' can be, in my opinion, a form of class warfare in the literary arts. If some writer or artist gets something before it is named by an approved critic with all the spanking marks of higher education on his critical derriere, then it is often termed 'unconscious, especially if the writer has no college pedigree and is an idiot-savant.

Common truth often is that some people educate themselves and friends together and vice-versa. Again, it seems to me that Bruce Conner's works display both an attitude and various techniques that Brautigan admired and probably used in some creative way.

After all, Brautigan put the many images and visual logic of those popular culture genres and the genres themselves in his writing. His "Trout Fishing In America Shorty" was more a cartoon version (a crippled demented alky Yosemite Sam) than a literary version. Bruce Conner created creepy deranged characters, too. I don't think you have to be tenuous about this.

So I think your next point is correct: he probably wouldn't have thought of himself necessarily as a postmodernist. Richard's habit was to open up one's awareness to a whole multitude of artistic and sociological and pop-cultural stimuli and that 'Osmotic Principle' was more of a fundamental approach than something consciously pursued. But he did take up enthusiasms of others. For example, one of his bright girlfriends, Siew Hwa Beh, was a grad student studying Noir film at UCLA. He went to films with her and he learned from her considerable intellect & study.

Greg Keeler:
I once read Richard an abstruse passage from Marc Chènetier's book on his work to see how he'd respond. He was very happy with the book. He felt that it gave his work the serious consideration it deserves. After I read the passage, Richard said "The Frog's got it right".

On the other hand, Richard didn't like to write or talk in the terminology of literary discourse, though I'm convinced he understood how it works. If someone used it around him, in my experience, he would usually turn away. He loathed what he considered to be intellectual pretension perhaps because he thought that kind of language lacks precision. He liked precise, direct, new, even simple action and language in the same way he liked to shoot cans with his well-oiled .22 rifle or cast flies with a delicate rod. It truly irked him when people confused this attitude with the simplicity of ignorance or shallowness. Richard was inventive in his writing and conversation. He was a minimalist before minimalism, he was reflexive before post-structuralism. His work creates the eternal return of difference but it never talks about it. He lived the same way, but I don't think he *tried* to do these things. I think they were just a part of him.

Question:

I was wondering if critical approaches was a topic that ever came up in your conversations with Brautigan and whether he ever professed an opinion on their value or lack of value? Either way, would you agree that these elements appear to be transfused into the writing?

Keith Abbott:

The book Intellectual Skywriting about the *New York Times Book Review* (I think) comes to mind, and I put an anecdote in *Downstream from Trout Fishing in America*, I believe. But that incident was about how critical approaches were hijacked for cultural agendas: *New York Times* had a hatchet man for Vonnegut's and Brautigan's books on call.

Book reviews was the outer limit of his self-interest; they sold his books sometimes. He did not read criticism at all, besides his book reviews.

As I remember any other writers' book reviews didn't count for much, and critical collections of essays were not around his library. He simply had no use for them, given his way of life and writing. He wasn't interested in their value.

He did study novel writing when he first tried to write novels. He was guided by what was then used in colleges, I believe, Brooks and Warren et al, and he didn't dismiss them. He read them to see what he could use. His serious attempts to write his first novel is the only time I know of when he said that he consulted literary criticism.

Intellectuals got his scorn occasionally, and he said once such matters bored him. But this attitude was no hobby horse. He had other things to do.

John Barber:
Brautigan never talked with me about his writing in relation to any critical theory, especially post-modernism. I know he knew quite a lot about various critical approaches, but I think he also had little use for them. He thought writing was hard work, and often said he worked very hard to make his writing seem (and read) simple.

He also never talked about his writing technique. He only said that he often wrote throughout the day, sometimes for days at a time. After several days of not hearing from him he would call to say he had been writing and had accomplished some things. He never talked about what those things were or how he accomplished them.

In an interview he once said that rather than getting high on dope and writing, he thought about things for years before attaching them to paper. I think he was also inspired by the moment. I saw him once write a poem in response to something I said. I think his mind was always working, always thinking about how to put into writing what he was seeing and experiencing, how to boil it down to some essential ingredient. But then just before the end of the telling about that ingredient, I think he was also looking for some way to take the telling off on an unexpected narrative detour that ended up being as or more interesting than the original story.

He was hurt by the negative responses his later books drew from critics, and by the fact that seemingly his fans had abandoned him as well. But there are no records of him ever writing anything, a letter, an essay, anything, in defense or explanation of his writing.

Question:
I've dedicated an entire chapter of my thesis to representations of time in Brautigan's writing because it appears a very big topic for him. It seems to me that it's a concept he meets head on as part of his agenda of redefinition – questioning the ways in which we understand because these are nothing more than inherited forms that we accept unquestioningly when really we should be struggling to define ourselves and our world constructively. So he breaks down notions of linear time, making it elastic and cyclical and dimensional. He coins this notion of the "calendar map", a geography of time where events and moments are laid out like co-ordinates across a grid of existence. Did time as a concept ever came up in discussion, in any context? Did he appear concerned by it as something indicative of his other philosophies on life?

Greg Keeler:
I mentioned in the "Me and Captain Death" chapter [of the book *Waltzing with the Captain*] that Richard and a friend shot his kitchen clock full of bullet holes (destroying appliances in the room behind it). At one point he pointed to that clock and said he and his friend shot it because "Time isn't funny". But I'm pretty sure a lot of his little jokes were about time. I recall a conversation something like this.

Greg: What time is it?
Richard: Why?
Greg: I don't know.
Richard: Just as I thought.

When he had a good day trout fishing, he'd sometimes say, "I cleaned their clock".

I always got the impression that he thought clocks were his personal enemies. Toward the end, maybe it's because they put a gauge on his chronic nsomnia.

Keith Abbott:
Yes, he was very interested in three and four dimensional notions of time. Usually on a personal level: I was there, she wasn't, she came in later, and I missed her.

So that interest fits the calendar map idea. I don't know where he might have come across that notion. Perhaps from a visual source, like the grids on which games of Go were played on in the city parks.

He talked about such things especially when he got into writing genre twins: novels serving two genre conventions. He spoke of submitting such hybrids to a diminishing time scheme. Hence *Willard and his Bowling Trophies*, *Sombrero Fallout*, etc.

As you suggested this was one way of breaking open time & space for experimental plotting. It also was a habit of his mind; to dismantle events into simple theoretical constructs, usually serving a fate or will, and hatching emotional situations in them.

Richard was very wilful and control oriented at times. He said he believed that no one could change their life, they played the cards they were given. Fatalistic, maybe.

Time was the big variable for him. He often remarked about himself or someone being a little too early, a little too late. In Confederate General he spoke of his characters being born in the wrong time.

Question:
His interest in Japan and Japanese culture is pretty well documented, but I have been more interested in my research in looking into Brautigan's appropriation of Zen values in his writing. In the introduction to June 30th, June 30th he mentions that he

picked up Zen via a kind of osmosis from his friends and acquaintances. (Incidentally, do you know who these may have been?)

Keith Abbott:
Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Joanne Kyger are his friends and writers who practiced Zen. The others especially from the Zen Center with Suzuki were around the Haight and poetry venues. Gary Snyder was a Rinzai lay monk, strict training, ten years study in a Japanese monastery; and his early work, which Brautigan knew and read, uses concepts from Zen as structure, texture and anecdote.

Philip Whalen eventually was a Soto Priest but he knew a great, great deal about Buddhism and could produce that knowledge quite succinctly and accurately in conversation. He was around Brautigan more than Snyder and that alone would have given Richard an education in many things. I think they might have shared the Beaver Street house where Brautigan wrote *In Watermelon Sugar*. I know both were there.

Brautigan's lawyer Richard Hodge had a house down the block from the Zen Center where Philip Whalen was in residence from 1972. From Brautigan's remarks I believe he dropped in on Whalen while in the neighborhood. In the 1970s I went to a dinner there once, where Whalen was present. Philip did a spot on imitation of his Florida drill sergeant that entranced the guests. Later Hodge donated the building to the Zen Center. It was used as a hospice and when Whalen was dying he stayed there for awhile and I visited him.

I have only info in RB's writing on what his stays in Japan provided for him.

Question:
I've been able to draw some interesting parallels between his narratives and his poetry to the structure of Zen Koans and Haiku by writers such as Basho and Issa. In that chapter I have mentioned that the Zen he seems to utilise is best characterised as 'Bompu' Zen, or ordinary Zen. In line with the claim that he gathered Zen knowledge

and influence by osmosis it seems to me that he appropriated a lot of the fundamental ideals of Zen without pursuing the spiritual teachings or practices to any significant degree. Was Zen Buddhism something that he ever discussed or visibly practiced? I've not come across any evidence of him meditating in a conventional Buddhist manner, but perhaps he did?

Keith Abbott:
No meditation, however he used some concepts from its popular images. He never sat with or spent much time around the Zennies. He did visit the Zen Center when Whalen moved there in 1972 and beyond. He did go south to Tassajara Zen Center in the Santa Cruz mountains at least once, but that was a lark, to hear him tell of it.

He never meditated that I know of. He did not read Zen texts that I know. It was in the air of the times. He took what he understood from Zen art, haiku or poetry mostly, if anything, I would guess.

Greg Keeler:
No, I don't think Richard meditated in a traditional way. I think he equated Zen with paying attention - and he could be naturally diligent at that. Richard's attention could be like a magnifying glass focusing the sun till an object seemed to smoke - but when he was drunk, it could turn into boring repetition. In his life and writing, he didn't practice Zen, but sometimes he *was* zen.

Richard in the lotus position would be like a stork with its legs tied in a knot. He liked the idea of Zen ritual. When he married Akiko, his neighbors the Hjortsbergs said they saw him in his yard in traditional Japanese garb, walking in tiny steps and bowing. I think his attraction to traditional Zen was similar to his attraction to Japanese women. Both were so "other" to him that he wanted to insinuate himself because he knew it was impossible. In doing so, he could appear foolish, but he was willing to take that risk - even though the negative outcomes devastated him. I guess that's the essence of desire - and the antithesis of Zen.

Question:

There is a lot of debate over the literary references Brautigan uses in his work, cross-referencing it seems a lot of his own reading and influences. I was just wondering if you would be able to mention any names of authors that he was particularly interested in and which he himself felt were an inspiration?

Keith Abbott:

Kenneth Fearing's poetry was an influence. I helped moved his household several times. I've worked in rare book trade so I tend to remember books. His library was largely works by friends, books from Don Allen's Four Seasons and Grey Fox presses, review copies later in his life and gifts from fans. He used the San Francisco Library in his early days. There were no books on the Civil War, for instance, and his early friends said he was well-read on parts of that history.

Bob Kaufman was a friend and acknowledged early influence to his poetry. Creeley's poetry. Nelson Algren (who was in or around San Francisco in Brautigan's early days). Patchen (I still think his obscure novel *See You In The Morning* was an inspiration for *In Watermelon Sugar*). Don Carpenter's two Hollywood novels, *Turn Around* and *The True Life Story of Jody Mckeegan*, he praised. He owned Carlos Baker's biography of Hemingway. I don't remember any other literary biography. Or for that matter any Hemingway books.

From internal evidence of his early imitative works: William Saroyan, Emily Dickinson, Stephen Crane's poetry. The Greek Anthology in the Loeb Edition he owned. Sappho.

Greg Keeler:

As I mentioned earlier, Jack Spicer was his main influence and inspiration. He admired the work of Hemingway and Gogol and once told one of my classes that they were major influences. He DIDN'T like Flaubert, but he never told me why. One

night, to my surprise, he read Eliot's "Prufrock" to me, a girlfriend and Ianthe, his daughter and said it was one of the greatest poems ever written. I think he liked the simile of the evening and patient on a table, maybe because his own similes were such a stretch that they were more like magical confusions - i.e., confusing the white stairs for a trout stream in Trout Fishing in America - then at the end, actually buying segments of trout stream at the Cleveland Wrecking Yard.