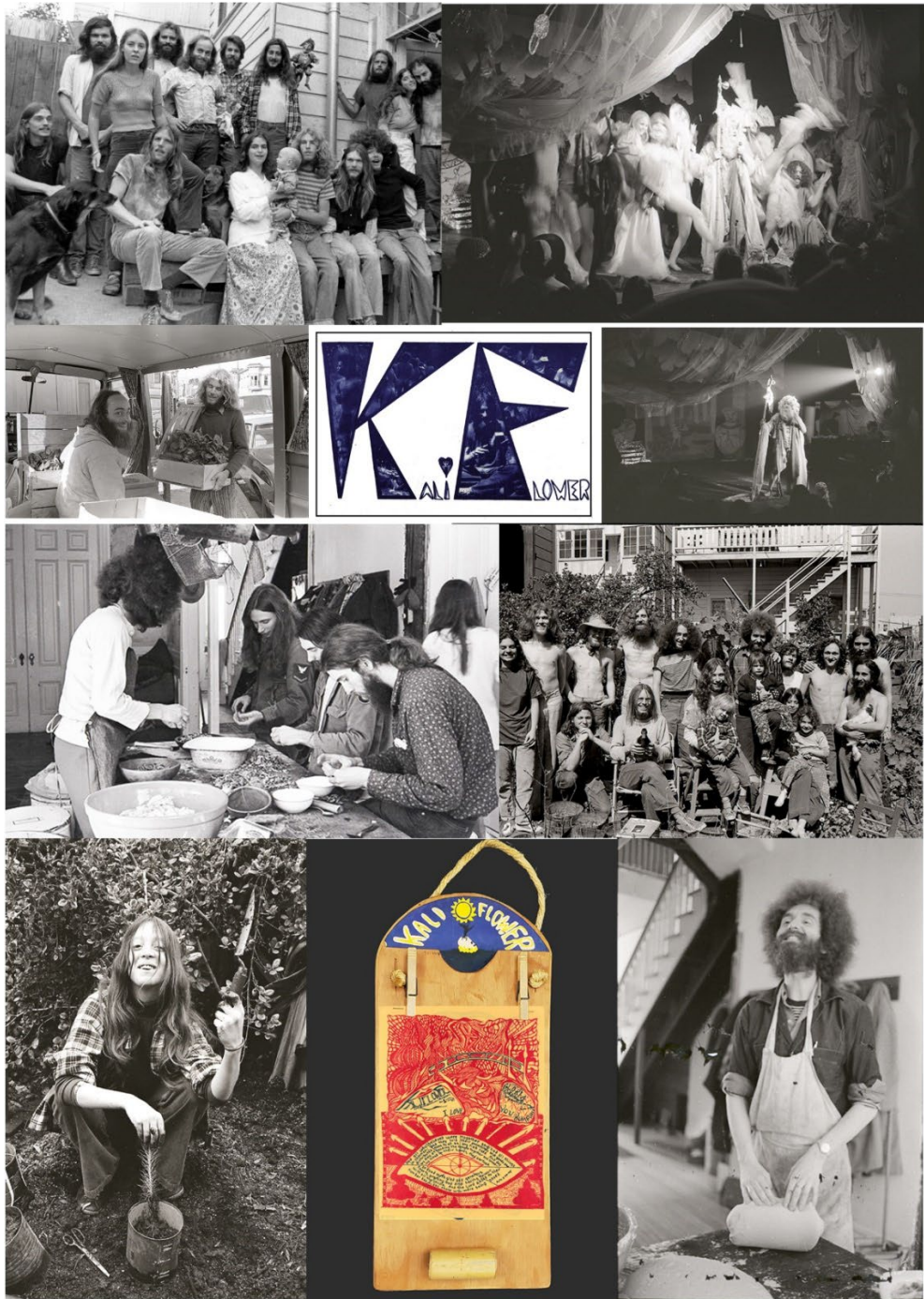


Apostles of Free: A History of the Kaliflower Experiment



Apostles of Free: A History of the Kaliflower Experiment

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of
San Francisco State University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree

Master of Arts

In

History

by

Eric Paul Noble

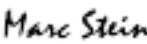
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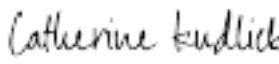
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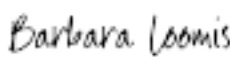
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Abstract

This thesis, *Apostles of Free: A History of Kaliflower*, investigates the origins, evolution, and enduring legacy of the Kaliflower Intercommunal Network, a radical 1960s-1970s movement rooted in San Francisco. Emerging from countercultural and Digger philosophies of communal living, free services, and anti-capitalism, Kaliflower sought to construct a self-sustaining, cooperative society operating beyond conventional economic structures. Central to the network's cohesion was the *Kaliflower* newspaper, which served as a vital medium for communication and cross-pollination between communes, embodying principles of the gift economy, communalism, and ecological consciousness.

The thesis delves into pivotal themes, such as the Free Food Conspiracy, a groundbreaking system of communal food distribution, and the influence of queer aesthetics, especially through the Angels of Light Free Theatre. It also addresses the internal tensions and ideological conflicts that arose within the network, as well as external pressures that contributed to its dissolution. By situating Kaliflower within the broader tapestry of 1960s countercultural movements, this study highlights its intersections with gay liberation, environmentalism, and the search for alternative ways of living.

Ultimately, *Apostles of Free* reflects on the transformative aspirations of Kaliflower and similar radical experiments in communal living. It acknowledges both the movement's visionary potential and the profound challenges it faced in striving to realize its utopian ideals.

Acknowledgements

As the Grateful Dead sang, “Lately it occurs to me / What a long, strange trip it’s been.” Indeed, taking the long view, this has been a 50-year journey, from the moment I started collecting Digger broadsides to the final touches of this history of one of the offshoots of the Digger movement — the Kaliflower Intercommunal Network. Along the way, countless individuals have helped push the project along. First and foremost, my husband Joseph whom I followed out of the Kaliflower Commune when he left in 1976. Joseph has been my partner in so many undertakings since we first met one Thursday, Kaliflower Day, in 1971, collating and stringing that week’s issue of *Kaliflower*. His recollections have been an impeccable encyclopedic resource where my feebleness of memory has been lacking. His judgments have been an infallible sounding board for me.

I suppose that I also owe thanks to COVID-19. At the outset of the pandemic in 2020, I had just gotten approval for my master’s thesis which was intended as an oral history of the Kaliflower Commune. Then COVID hit. All travel was out of the question. Fortunately, Zoom came to the rescue. A bunch of us started meeting weekly, including many who had lived in the Kaliflower network of communes in the late 1960s and 1970s. We called ourselves the Burrow’s Bees Pandemic Zoom group (or Beez for short) and eventually there were forty members in the group. Many of us had not seen each other in forty years or more. Consequently, one of the recurring themes in our weekly zooms was “What have you been doing all this time?” and that led to questions about our experiences living in communes. A standard set of questions developed: “What enticed you about communal living?” “What brought you to the commune where you ended up?” “Why did you stay?” and finally, “Why did you leave?” Over the course of four years, every one of the Beez who answered these questions has done so in the form of a 20-minute presentation to the group. One of the most interesting insights about our Zoom project has been that group oral history can uncover and resolve discrepancies that would not be obvious with one-on-one interviews.

Here are the individuals in Burrow’s Beez who helped stitch together the story of Kaliflower: Alex Gilmore, Anna Isakson, Art Downing, Ben Kinmont, Bobby Burnside, Burl Willes, Carl Linkhart, Clane Hayward, Claude Hayward, Daniel Nicoletta, David Parkhurst, David Weissman, Debra Beaver Bauer, Dolores De Luce, Eric Noble, Fayette Hauser, Gary Faigin, Gary Leung, James Bartlett (a.k.a. Rumi), James Tressler (a.k.a. Jilala, J.E.T. or JET), James Windsor (a.k.a. Tahara), Jesse Cox, Joseph Johnston, Kathy Nolan, Lila Travis, Lily Marnell, Lora Arbrador, Lynn Brown, Matthew Horrigan, Mike

Marnell, Pam Tent, Paula Downing, Psylvia Gurk, Rachel Robbins, Robert Croonquist, Russell Blackwood, Steven Dworkin, Susan Robbins, Sybil Ajay Sanford, Tree, Tulsi Ram, Victoria Woods, Vince Costa, and Walter Fitzwater. Over the course of four-plus years, JET, Lynn, Paula, Rumi, Vince, and Walter have passed on. Their memories endure, and their contributions remain invaluable.

Much of the primary source material for this study comes from the personal collection that I have put together over the past half century. In 1982, Peter Berg referred to me as “the folk archivist of the Digger movement.”¹ This was after fifteen years that I had spent collecting Digger and related printed material (including broadsides, pamphlets, posters, interviews, and references for Diggers, Communication Company, Free City, *Kaliflower*, Angels of Light). Along the way, and since then, numerous individuals have donated their personal files to this collection. It would almost take a separate dissertation to take account of this journey, but some of the people to whom I most indebted are the following: Allen Cohen, Angela Lucas, Barbara LaMorticella, Billy Murcott, Chester Anderson, Chuck Gould, Cindy Read, Claude Hayward, Fred Moore, Freeman (Linn) House, Judy (Berg) Goldhaft, Helene Hayward, Kathy Nolan, Kelly Hart, Kirby Doyle, Lily Marnell, Margot Patterson Doss, Matthew Horrigan, Michael Horowitz, Mike Marnell, Paula Downing, Peter Berg, Peter Coyote, Phyllis Wilner, Ron Thelin, Siena Riffia, Vicki Pollack, and Walt Reynolds.

I should also mention my gratitude to the University of California, Hastings College of the Law (now UC Law San Francisco) from which I retired as Director of Information Technology after a twenty-five-year career during which I developed the skills to make the Digger Archives accessible online.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisors, Professors Marc Stein, Barbara Loomis, and Catherine Kudlick, whose unwavering encouragement was instrumental in the completion of this project. Without their steadfast support, I might have abandoned it long ago. Their critical insights and thoughtful feedback helped me refine this history and greatly improved the quality of my writing. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Marc, whose meticulous attention to detail and tireless dedication have been a source of constant inspiration and marvel.

¹ John Curl, (ed.), *History of Collectivity in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Berkeley, CA: Homeward Press, 1982), 35.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my fellow community (or folk) archivists and people's historians — whether they pursue an academic career or follow an amateur passion for this vital work. These dedicated stewards of memory preserve the overlooked and ephemeral artifacts of our collective past, ensuring that stories from the margins are not lost to time. A special tip of the hat goes to Ken Wachsberger, founder of the massive collection project "Voices from the Underground" (now titled "Independent Voices" and hosted by JSTOR). Through Ken's efforts, researchers of the Sixties have access to an OCR-scanned database of more than 800 underground publications, representing the broad range of social movements that emerged in the 1960s. This monumental work is emblematic of the ethos shared by all who take on the challenge of preserving and amplifying these voices: a belief in the transformative power of history and a commitment to ensuring that future generations can learn from the struggles, creativity, and resilience of those who came before us.²

² Reveal Digital. *Independent Voices: An Open Access Collection of Alternative Press*. JSTOR. Accessed December 7, 2024. <https://www.jstor.org/site/reveal-digital/independent-voices/>.

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Introduction

“The way that Time and Newsweek magazine talked about hippies, they had no clue what we were doing. I don't think anybody knew anything about what we were doing except for us, do you? The mass media had no clue whatsoever. The things they portrayed, it was a sixteenth of a sixteenth of an inch of what was really going on from my perspective. And even stuff I read today. I mean, I've read a lot. People try to talk about what was going on in the Haight-Ashbury, they don't really tell the whole story.”

—Paula Downing³

In the decade following San Francisco's iconic 1967 Summer of Love, hundreds of communes took root in the San Francisco Bay Area. Commune members included both younger and older women, men, and children from a wide socio-economic spectrum and varied ethnic backgrounds who lived together and shared their lives amidst the societal upheaval taking place in America and the world. Communal cohesiveness ranged from households that shared meals or other daily activities but otherwise led individual lives to groups that shared overarching purpose or ideology and common work projects.

Starting in 1969 with the publication of *Kaliflower*, a weekly underground newspaper that was published and hand-delivered by and only for communes, a dynamic network developed that entailed mutual support and free services. This intercommunal network lasted well into the 1970s before its eventual dissipation. This study covers *Kaliflower*, both the publication and the intercommunal network during these years — the philosophies, outlooks, practices, successes and challenges of the

³ Paula Downing, "Kaliflower: Oral History," interview by Eric Noble, February 2, 2020.

movement.

At the center of this history is the commune that published *Kaliflower* and envisioned the intercommunal network that sprung up in its wake. The Sutter Street Commune, as they were initially known, formed in the late fall of 1967. The following year, at the behest of members of the San Francisco Diggers, the commune set up the Free Print Shop, which, in true Digger style, printed everything for free (although there were restrictions on content, e.g., a prohibition on anything that involved charging money). The year after the Free Print Shop opened its doors to the vibrant counterculture of the Bay Area, the Sutter Street Commune (at the time numbering fifteen permanent members) began publishing *Kaliflower*. Once a week, they printed the colorful newspaper (each issue individually designed) and delivered it to the dozens and eventually hundreds of communes on the routing list.⁴

Over the coming months and years, a lively exchange developed among the communes that received *Kaliflower*, with an emphasis on the sharing of free goods and services. One commune collected and gave away books (including searching for special requests); another offered free auto repair; another coordinated the Food Conspiracy; another opened a Free Store in the tradition that the Diggers had begun in 1966. Several communes took on long-term projects that would define their mission of free service to the community — the Angels of Light offered Acid-Drag free theatre that created communal spaces celebrating a transgressive (“genderfuck”) aesthetic out of the glare of mass media; Hunga Dunga took on the coordination of the Free Food Family wherein

⁴ The convention to be used is to italicize *Kaliflower* when referring to the newspaper, and not when referring to the Kaliflower Commune that published it nor the Kaliflower intercommunal network that it engendered.

several dozen communes pooled all their food money and purchased in bulk direct from farmer's and produce markets, then distributed the food on the basis of the communist principle "from each according to ability; to each according to need." The Free Medical Opera operated a clinic for communes — treating all manner of diseases, performing home births, and offering practical medical advice pertinent to the bohemian lifestyle. Konnyaku Commune offered a refuge for Japanese expatriate artists and provided an art gallery in their home along with Zen meditation services. Kailas Shugendo offered lessons in Tantra and, as the Mantric Sun Band, showed up at intercommunal picnics and carnivals dressed in Buddhist robes and playing a cross between bluegrass and Tibetan chant music. The Oakland Free Bakery had inherited the large industrial oven the Diggers liberated in 1968 and weekly produced thousands of loaves of whole wheat bread from their storefront on Grove Street. This oven then passed into the hands of Scott Street who ultimately gave it to the One Mind Temple of John Coltrane. Other communes — usually only known by their street address rather than an official name — participated in this alternative society through the pages of *Kaliflower*.

The history of the Kaliflower communal network is but a small segment of the larger Sixties counterculture, but it provides an important glimpse into the rise of a wide swath of the trends, ideas, lifestyles, and practices which both diffused into the wider mainstream society and innovated forms for future radical social movements. The communes of the Sixties acted as incubators for these cultural innovations. By studying Kaliflower, we can track their early appearance and subsequent evolution.

Essence of the Argument

The Kaliflower intercommunal network was an example of an alternative social

and cultural landscape in which lifestyle was a form of political and social activism. These strategies were effective in creating microcosmic societies that reflected the Digger ideal of a money-free, anti-authoritarian, and creatively liberated society. Following a committed ideal, these communal groups managed to engage communities and promote change at a local level, demonstrating the potential of alternative social economics and communal support systems. This also implicates the influence that the Sixties counterculture had on broader social movements such as feminism and gay liberation. The counterculture's emphasis on personal liberation and social equality provided a philosophical foundation that encouraged the questioning of traditional gender roles and sexual norms. The counterculture's challenge to mainstream societal norms was a fundamental aspect of its identity. By creating alternatives to the mainstream economic and social structures, the counterculture posed a substantive challenge to the status quo, advocating for a society that values human needs over technological and bureaucratic efficiency. However, as will be seen in the final dissolution of the Food Conspiracy, while the counterculture was initially positioned in radical opposition to mainstream society, many of its ideas and practices have since been absorbed into the mainstream. This transformation can be seen both positively and negatively; positively in the sense that countercultural ideas have gained broader acceptance, and negatively in that some of the radical impetus has been diluted. The legacy of the Sixties counterculture is complex and multifaceted. While it succeeded in changing societal conversations around personal freedom, artistic expression, and communal living, its broader goals of societal and global transformation were less realized. The enduring impact of the counterculture can be seen in ongoing social and cultural movements that continue to draw on its ideals and tactics.

Sources/Materials

Kaliflower: the Intercommunal Newspaper existed continuously from April 1969 to June 1972. The Free Print Shop, publishers of *Kaliflower*, produced a total of 165 issues over 167 weeks, skipping one week at the end of the year twice. Each issue was diligently numbered with volume and issue number and the date of issue. Aside from maintaining an archive of four complete sets, the Kaliflower Commune donated one complete set to the California Historical Society in 1973, with restrictions that have kept it largely inaccessible to scholars. The research for this study is based on a complete set in the Digger Archives, a project that the author initiated after leaving the Kaliflower Commune in 1976. Over the years, auction sites occasionally have highlighted partial sets, but there are no other known complete sets. At the conclusion of volume 4, number 7, the commune embarked on a decade-long project that produced an anthology of *Kaliflower*. During this time, the commune published at least two additional issues — one on the tenth anniversary of the Sutter Street Commune's founding and another on the occasion of Emmett Grogan's memorial at the first Haight Street Fair.⁵ These issues form the bulk of the primary source material for this study.

My original plan for this study was to conduct a series of oral histories focusing on the Kaliflower Commune. Then Covid happened. With pandemic restrictions it became impossible to travel. However, fortuitously, a group that included many

⁵ Dates of *Kaliflower* as follows. Volume 1, no. 1 (April 24, 1969) to volume 1, no. 52-1/2 (April 16, 1970) with an odd issue no. 15-1/2 (August 5, 1969). Volume 2, no. 1 (April 30, 1970) to volume 2, no. 52 (April 22, 1971). Volume 3, no. 1 (May 6, 1971) to volume 3, no. 52 (April 27, 1972). Volume 4, no. 1 (May 11, 1972) to volume 4, no. 7 (June 22, 1972). The two subsequent issues in the following decade were: *Kaliflower*, new series 2, November 30, 1977, and *Kaliflower*, n.s. 3, April 30, 1978.

longtime friends who had lived in communes together started meeting weekly via Zoom. The group named itself the Burrow's Bees Pandemic Zoom group to denote both the sense of a safe space and of a hive that kept humming while the outside world raged. We told each other stories each week, presenting talks on history, art, theater, nature — an endless series of interests we shared. Over the three-plus years that we met (and are still meeting as of this writing), the focus of this study shifted from one commune to all the communes that were part of the Kaliflower network. And what was originally planned as one-on-one oral histories became group oral histories. We video recorded and typed up notes (memcons we called them) of each weekly session.⁶ After four-and-a-half years, we have accumulated 2,500+ pages. We also discovered that group oral history offers distinct advantages for fact-checking individual memory.

The underground press is another major source for this study, if for no other reason than to compare the developments we see in the pages of *Kaliflower* to the wider counterculture. One of the main tenets of *Kaliflower* was “staying out of print” — meaning, no sharing of information with reporters or academics. Periodically, a special handout with the weekly issue of *Kaliflower* would be an article in the *New York Times* or other ‘aboveground’ publication with an exposé of communes. This breaking of the code of silence would be held up as a severe taboo. Consequently, the three-year run of *Kaliflower* can be seen as an undiluted record of a clandestine experiment in communal

⁶ The story of the adoption of the term “memcon” has a communal origin. During the Watergate Senate hearings in 1973, John Dean used the term for his typed memoranda of conversations he had with Richard Nixon in the Oval Office. Some members of the Scott Street Commune paid avid attention to the disempowering of a detestable president on a second-hand black and white television set obtained for that specific purpose. The idea of recording conversations, especially as part of historical research, was immediately adopted along with the term that John Dean had introduced. This history makes liberal use of the resulting memcons.

living. There is another sense in which *Kaliflower* was a refined source opposed to the underground press. There were no paid ads — in fact, all commercial activity was strongly discouraged and eventually banned. Underground papers existed on their advertising revenue. Advertising both reflected and directed the culture. The latest rock album became an icon, creating a feedback loop in the star system that fed ad revenue. *Kaliflower's* determination to exist outside this commercial realm and to create an alternative social economy set it apart, allowing it to focus on communal values and artistic expression. This approach fostered an environment free from the influence of commercial interests to prioritize authentic cultural development. By rejecting the conventional means of monetization, *Kaliflower* was working on creating an insular landscape for alternative voices and experimental ideas, standing as a testament to the power of non-commercial creativity in the counterculture.

One source is currently unavailable for this or other studies of *Kaliflower*. That is the communal archive of the remnant of the Sutter Street Commune. With the death of Irving Rosenthal in 2022, much speculation has developed regarding the “vault” that contained meeting notes, correspondence, diaries, artwork, Free Print Shop operating files, etc. — dating from 1967. In 2005 and 2006, Rosenthal completed a sale to Stanford University of his papers (primarily correspondence with Beat writers, poets, and artists) that comprised 23 linear feet. Very little of this overlapped with the commune period. Much of the data in the first chapter of this study comes from the Rosenthal Papers at Stanford. It is hoped that the stewards of the Sutter Street Commune’s archive will see fit to find a similarly appropriate home for that collection.⁷

⁷ Irving Rosenthal papers, M1550, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.

Methods/Approach

David Farber, one of the most prolific of Sixties academics, described the ideal approach for writing counterculture history:

The authors of the good books ... examine how and why people challenged the institutions, cultural practices, and disciplinary regimes, of what their protagonists perceived to be conventional society. To tell these stories of cultural rebellion they focus less on hair and dress style, paisley ghettos, and music festivals. Instead, they examine countercultural scientists and technologists, architects and designers, homebuilders and mechanics, community and institution builders, journalists and writers, health, well-being and spiritual practitioners, food and plant growers and distributors, artisans, artists, promoters, alternative educators, and "hip" entrepreneurs. These authors find archival sources ... and they email and interview hordes of people who did amazing and not-so-amazing countercultural deeds. Chronologically, their histories tend to run from the early 1960s through the 1970s.⁸

Bill Murcott, the co-founder of the San Francisco Diggers in 1966, provided suggestions for writing history of the Sixties:

'History and Theory' is the background forest and as for the trees—what questions you ask. Structurally, what, when, where, who, why, how, cause and effect, change from a to b. Structurally the growth curve — origin (genesis, the big bang), beginning, growth, maturity, ending. Structurally, ending—The Last Judgement. Structurally, compare and contrast to other scenes.

Ask about personal life. Daily routine. Love/hate, Truth/deception, Beauty/repulsive. Who was favorite artists—music, poster, paper, book, etc. and events. Work??? and paying rent. Love, sex and partying. Sex,

⁸ David Farber, "Acid matters: LSD and the counterculture," Article, *Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics & Culture* 10, no. 2 (2017): 247.

drugs and R&R. Parent conflict. Sad events. Heroic and cowardly events. Favorite clothes—presentation of self-identity. Attitude changes. The military.

As for myself I often think back to that time and wonder about this or that thing, place, idea, person or event with both hurt and joy. That's for another time.⁹

My approach will attempt a synthesis of these two ideals — dropping the reader into the narrative — to taste, smell, and feel the action — to hear the sounds — to watch the comings and goings — to understand the motivations, the driving ideas behind these events.

Sixties Historiography

Part of a historian's task is to situate their narrative within a broader conversation with other historians who have explored the same circumstances. Historians have been examining, explaining, extolling, and excoriating the Sixties and its social movements for decades. This history of Kaliflower is but one part of that larger landscape.

Interpretations have evolved over the past half century. The meaning of the term "Sixties" itself has evolved. The first mention by historians of the "sixties" (in lowercase) appeared in 1968 with a journal article that highlighted the emergence of the New Left school of American historians.¹⁰ Prior to this, the term "the Sixties" had been the designation that historians used for the 1860s and the period of the American Civil War. By 1968, the decade of the 1960s had supplanted its historic predecessor. Arthur

⁹ Bill Murcott, email message to author, January 7, 2019.

¹⁰ Willard L. Hogeboom, "The New Left and the Revision of American History," *The History Teacher* 2, no. 1 (November 1968).

Marwick (1998) first used the term “long sixties” to encompass the years from 1958 to 1974, which he explained marked the beginning of this transformative period extending to the culmination of many of the changes that had been initiated.¹¹ David Farber (2011) went further, declaring that, “A ‘long’ Sixties, then, extending from World War II through the 1970s, makes a certain amount of sense — although why the ‘Sixties’ label should be retained, in that case is hard to defend.”¹² More recently, the term has morphed into the “Global Sixties” to denote the broadening of scope to include transnational interconnections. “The ‘Long Sixties’ has now become the ‘Global Sixties,’” as Salar Mohandesi declared in 2022.¹³

To compare and contrast the history of Kaliflower with historical scholarship on the Sixties, I will examine works by a dozen historians.¹⁴ Scholarly interpretations

¹¹ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974* (New York: Oxford University Press; Bloomsbury Reader, 1998, 2012), 6. The quote is: “I am postulating a ‘long sixties’, beginning in 1958 and ending, broadly speaking—many of the new trends of the sixties continued throughout the seventies, and right on to today—in 1973-4.”

¹² David Farber, “The Radical Sixties,” *Reviews in American History* 39 (2011).

¹³ Salar Mohandesi, “Thinking the Global Sixties,” *The Global Sixties* 15, no. 1-2 (December 2022).

¹⁴ Mark Abraham, “‘Sometimes Grotesque, Often Beautiful’: Pleasure, Performance, and Protest in the Radical Counterculture, 1965–69,” *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 4, no. 2 (2018); Damon R. Bach, *The American Counterculture: a History of Hippies and Cultural Dissidents* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2020); Farber, “The Radical Sixties.”; David Farber, “Building the Counterculture, Creating Right Livelihoods: The Counterculture at Work,” *Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics & Culture* 6, no. 1 (2013); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987, 1993); Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretative History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Hogeboom, “The New Left and the Revision of American History.”; Marwick, *The Sixties*; Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1984, 2009); John McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes:*

exhibit wide diversity, mirroring the multifaceted perspectives of those who experienced the era firsthand. Marwick describes the divergent points of view about the Sixties. He lists the aspects of the period that a radical would have enumerated:

black civil rights; youth culture and trend-setting by young people; idealism, protest, and rebellion; the triumph of popular music based on Afro-American models and the emergence of this music as a universal language, with the Beatles as the heroes of the age; the search for inspiration in the religions of the Orient; massive changes in personal relationships and sexual behaviour; a general audacity and frankness in books and in the media, and in ordinary behaviour; relaxation in censorship; the new feminism; gay liberation; the emergence of 'the underground' and 'the counterculture'; optimism and genuine faith in the dawning of a better world.¹⁵

Marwick also includes those attributes of the 1950s that Sixties radicals found intolerable:

rigid social hierarchy; subordination of women to men and children to parents; repressed attitudes to sex; racism; unquestioning respect for authority in the family, education, government, the law, and religion, and for the nation-state, the national flag, the national anthem; Cold War hysteria; a strict formalism in language, etiquette, and dress codes; a dull and cliché-ridden popular culture, most obviously in popular music, with its boring big bands and banal ballads.¹⁶

Conversely, Marwick noted that conservative critics of the Sixties "take up very

Hippies and Beyond (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999); Doug Rossinow, "'The Revolution Is About Our Lives': The New Left's Counterculture," in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002); Stephen Vider, *The Queerness of Home: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Domesticity After World War II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021).

¹⁵ Marwick, *The Sixties*, 3.

¹⁶ Marwick, *The Sixties*, 3.

hostile views of radicalism, feminism, and black liberation.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, Marwick believes that the Sixties was a period “of outstanding historical significance in that what happened during this period transformed social and cultural developments for the rest of the century” — a cultural revolution.¹⁸ Marwick viewed the counterculture as significant, but not central to the broader social transformations that he termed the “cultural revolution.” In contrast to Marwick's perspective, my history of Kaliflower places the counterculture at the center of the narrative, highlighting the lived reality of these countercultural ideals and emphasizing communal living, radical social experimentation, and mutual aid as transformative experiences. Where Marwick suggests that broader material and lifestyle changes were more significant than the actions of minority groups (including the counterculture), this history of Kaliflower offers a microcosmic view of how countercultural principles like anti-capitalism, ecological awareness, and gay liberation were fully embodied within the intercommunal network. In this context, the counterculture is not a peripheral influence but the driving force behind a radical alternative society.

One of the recurring themes in historical interpretations of the Sixties is the relationship between the New Left and the counterculture. One of the first academic accounts for which this was a key aspect of the analysis was Todd Gitlin's *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. Gitlin himself was a leader of the New Left's SDS (Students for a Democratic Society). *The Sixties* draws on his personal experiences, interviews with other key participants, and primary sources, much like this history of Kaliflower does. Gitlin's framing of the Sixties counterculture and the New Left has been one that

¹⁷ Marwick, *The Sixties*, 4.

¹⁸ Marwick, *The Sixties*, 5.

subsequent historians have referenced ever since. Gitlin argued that the counterculture was more focused on personal liberation, lifestyle choices, and the rejection of mainstream societal norms. It was about exploring new ways of living, whether through communal living, drug experimentation, or alternative expressions of spirituality and sexuality. The counterculture saw personal freedom and cultural revolution as paths to societal change, emphasizing individual expression and a rejection of authority. The New Left, in contrast, was more explicitly political, focusing on structural changes and direct action. The New Left aimed at addressing issues like civil rights, the Vietnam War, and economic inequality through political activism, protests, and organizing. Gitlin pointed out that while the New Left and the counterculture often overlapped in terms of participants and shared a general opposition to the establishment, the New Left was often critical of the counterculture's focus on personal transformation at the expense of broader political goals:

Nourished on cultural opposition, the New Left had to confront a counterculture that was in many ways more attractive than radical politics. Should it outflank? Accommodate? Especially in California, the hip-political synthesis—along with violence—was the siren song of the late Sixties.¹⁹

My history of Kaliflower calls into question Gitlin's claim that the counterculture posed a challenge to the New Left as if they were at odds, requiring the New Left to either "outflank" or "accommodate" the counterculture. The Kaliflower network managed to integrate countercultural values with radical political ideals, creating a practical model where personal liberation was intertwined with a program of political

¹⁹ Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 6.

and social activism. The Free Print Shop, Free Food Conspiracy and other intercommunal projects operated on the principles of mutual aid, anti-capitalism, and ecological awareness — directly addressing systemic issues while embodying the counterculture's vision of alternative lifestyles. Rather than diverting energy away from political activism, Kaliflower's communal practices supported collective action and radical social change. This history shows that, in some contexts, the counterculture did not weaken political movements but enhanced them by fostering a deep sense of solidarity and cooperation, offering an alternative perspective to Gitlin's view of an antagonistic relationship between the counterculture and the New Left and suggesting that there was a more nuanced interaction between the two.²⁰

Doug Rossinow (2002) addressed the "complex stance" that the New Left developed toward the counterculture, "one marked by ambivalence and confusion, but also by self-consciousness and strategic thought." He concluded, "The New Left's attempt to synthesize cultural and political aspirations in a search for hegemony has strongly influenced American dissenters since the 1960s, and the fate of this attempt goes far toward explaining the state of American political radicalism in the post-New Left era."²¹ Kaliflower is an example of Rossinow's synthesis of "cultural and political

²⁰ Gitlin's antagonism toward the counterculture was in part a result of an encounter with the San Francisco Diggers, who coincidentally play an important role in the history of *Kaliflower*. In 1967 at an SDS workshop which Gitlin attended, the Diggers showed up and disrupted the proceedings. According to Judy Goldhaft (personal interview, 21 Sept 2024), Peter Berg was fond of recounting a statement that he attributed to Gitlin, referencing the 1967 encounter, "Peter Berg single-handedly destroyed SDS." Gitlin's account of the encounter is in Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 225. Emmett Grogan's account of the clash with SDS is in Emmett Grogan, *Ringolevio: A Life Played for Keeps* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), 393.

²¹ Rossinow, "'The Revolution Is About Our Lives': The New Left's Counterculture," 100.

aspirations”; this thesis locates this process in the communal movement of the counterculture, not the New Left.

Damon Bach (2020) discussed the tensions and differences between the two movements. He used the example of Bob Dylan’s evolution from acoustic to electric music, which corresponded to the shift from folk lyrics to “surrealistic lyrics,” as emblematic of the growing rift between the New Left, with its focus on political activism, and the counterculture, which shifted toward personal freedom and authenticity.²² As a marker of the cultural divide, Bach noted that Gitlin “doubted whether a single member of the old guard in 1967 had taken LSD and ‘most were leery even of marijuana.’”²³ *Kaliflower* is an example of what Bach saw as the radical counterculture, which “advocated cultural revolution — not political protest — as a better means of changing society.”²⁴ While Bach acknowledges the counterculture’s eventual decline, attributing it to factors like internal divisions and changing societal attitudes, my history of *Kaliflower* provides a microcosmic view of these challenges, specifically highlighting the conflicts within the Free Food Family and within the *Kaliflower* Commune itself as contributing to their dissolution. It also is important to note that Bach’s analysis does not specifically address the role of queer identity and expression within the counterculture, a central theme in this thesis. This difference in focus potentially highlights a limitation in Bach’s broader historical perspective, similar to the limitations he himself identifies in traditional interpretations that often overlook marginalized voices and experiences.

²² Bach, *The American Counterculture*, 61.

²³ Bach, *The American Counterculture*, 137.

²⁴ Bach, *The American Counterculture*, 79.

Mark Abraham (2018) discusses three Sixties groups that embodied Bach's radical countercultural agenda — the West Hollywood Freaks, the San Francisco Diggers, and the Yippies. Abraham noted that historians of the New Left had overlooked ("unfairly obscured") the contributions of the cultural radicals.²⁵ Abraham portrays the counterculture as a movement that went beyond mere rebellion, influencing a broad range of social issues and challenging the norms of society. His focus on the Diggers as one of the groups that embodied a fusion of "pleasure, performance, and protest"²⁶ intersects with the history of Kaliflower, which was a direct heir of the Digger ideology. In this regard, Kaliflower extends Abraham's thesis about a countercultural fusion. However, Kaliflower also challenges Abraham's contention that the counterculture "privileged middle-class white nondisabled cisgender nonintersex heterosexual activists."²⁷ Participants in the Kaliflower intercommunal network included people with differing ethnic and economic backgrounds and diverse sexual and gender orientations. Abraham overlooks that the Diggers were never a single entity and that the Digger movement encompassed groups that included the Black People's Free Store, the Berkeley Provos, the L.A. Diggers, as well as the dozens of communes that emerged, including the Kaliflower Commune and the Angels of Light Free Theatre.

David Farber (2011) provides a valuable lens through which to view the Kaliflower experiment. Farber argues that the "radical Sixties" were defined by a youth-driven challenge to established authority, with movements like the Free Speech Movement (FSM) embodying a push for grassroots democracy that rejected "the

²⁵ Abraham, "Grotesque," 11.

²⁶ Abraham, "Grotesque," 10.

²⁷ Abraham, "Grotesque," 11.

'rationality' of the Establishment stewards who ran the institutions that largely ruled life in the United States in the mid-1960s" in favor of "collective struggle for social justice."²⁸ This resonates with Kaliflower's communal ethos, where the rejection of capitalist structures and the embrace of a gift economy were central. Kaliflower's intercommunal network sought to create a self-sustaining society outside traditional economic systems, one where free services like the Free Food Conspiracy exemplified the anti-capitalist ideals of the network. Farber's description of 1960s radicals as engaged in "a form of politics that championed grass-roots democracy" applies to Kaliflower, where communes collectively organized around principles of mutual aid.²⁹ Just as Farber notes that activists like the FSM's Mario Savio believed in the transformative power of "participatory democracy," participants in the Kaliflower experiment believed that their alternative social structures would challenge societal norms by creating egalitarian spaces and fostering communal engagement, reflecting a broader countercultural rejection of individualism in favor of collective liberation.

Farber's most recent research essay on the counterculture (2013) explores the role of work and the search for "right livelihoods," which Farber suggests led to the creation of enduring "institutions, vocations, enterprises, and opportunities built not on stoned indifference but on active social engagement and community-oriented hard work." The "values and practices they embraced ... fundamentally changed both individual lives and social formation in the United States."³⁰ Farber places the Diggers at a central location in the history of the counterculture — calling them the "ur-agents of the

²⁸ Farber, "The Radical Sixties," 714.

²⁹ Farber, "The Radical Sixties," 716.

³⁰ Farber, "Building the Counterculture," 3.

Haight-Ashbury and the rural communes that followed the 'death of hippie.'"³¹

However, he misconstrues the Digger philosophy when he declaims their anti-capitalist economy as the "exact opposite premise" of the search for right livelihood. Farber argues that the Diggers, with their emphasis on "free" living and rejection of traditional work, were not concerned with finding sustainable livelihoods. However, the history of Kaliflower, as an extension of the Digger experiment, suggests otherwise. The Kaliflower network demonstrates that the Digger philosophy, when put into practice, actually facilitated the creation of alternative economic systems and "right livelihoods" that supported communal living and fostered sustainable lifestyles while rejecting the business models that Farber considers imperative for lasting effect.

John McMillian (2011) examined the role of the Sixties underground press, focusing on themes of community building, political activism, and the rise of alternative media. While the story of *Kaliflower*, the intercommunal newspaper, reinforces many of McMillian's arguments, it also challenges certain aspects of his account. McMillian emphasizes that the "underground papers could impart to their readers a sense of connection and belonging to the New Left."³² The history of *Kaliflower* strongly

³¹ Farber, "Building the Counterculture," 4. Farber's argument is as follows: "The group Sixties historians often use to stand in for the entire counterculture, the Diggers, began with the exact opposite premise. The San Francisco Diggers, in their outré countercultural manifesto "Trip without a Ticket," enjoined people to be "free" and offered a simple benediction: "Give up jobs. Be with people. Defend against property." The Diggers, thanks in part to the eloquence of Peter Coyote and Emmett Grogan, as well as to the excellence of the Diggers website, have come to seem (at least for those in the know about these things) the ur-agents of the Haight-Ashbury and the rural communes that followed "the death of hippie." And for their creativity, brilliance, and charismatic presence in the Haight as edge-walkers, they deserve such a starring role. But the Diggers' focus on post-scarcity economics and the absolute centrality of "Free" to a new way of life in America masks the temporal specificity of that claim."

³² McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 7.

supports this argument but within a highly defined community of 300 communes that involved face-to-face distribution. *Kaliflower* facilitated the exchange of ideas, resources, and promotion of social gatherings within the intimate boundaries of the intercommunal network. McMillian also highlights the connection between the underground press and the broader New Left. *Kaliflower*, with its roots in the Digger movement and the commitment to anti-capitalism, exemplifies this connection. McMillian describes the complex and contradictory economic situations of underground newspapers that often rejected traditional advertising but struggled to achieve financial stability.³³ *Kaliflower* demonstrates an economic alternative to the “alternative media” model with its rejection of all commercial advertising — even to the extent of rejecting any ads selling merchandise — and reliance on the gift economy that developed among the intercommunal network. While many underground papers featured confrontational articles that aimed to provoke and challenge authority, *Kaliflower* operated in a more insular manner, fostering a “bubble” that shielded the communal network from external scrutiny.

Timothy Miller is one of the leading scholars in the study of intentional communities in the United States. His work is extensive and influential in this field, especially through his research on communal societies, alternative religions, and intentional living communities. The second of Miller’s trilogy on communes in America (1999) covers the period during which the *Kaliflower* intercommunal network thrived. Miller argued that, while the phenomenon of communes was not unique in American

³³ McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 45. Art Kunkin, publisher of the *Los Angeles Free Press*, provided a poignant example of the constant threat of financial disaster.

history, the “communal explosion” of the Sixties was unprecedented.³⁴ Miller estimated the number of Sixties communes in the thousands, “probably tens of thousands” and the number of participants in the “hundreds of thousands, conceivably a million.”³⁵ Given the evidence in this history of the Kaliflower intercommunal network of more than 300 communes that were receiving the weekly hand-delivered issues of the newspaper in the San Francisco Bay Area, Miller’s estimates on the high end are probably more accurate.

One of the unique aspects of *Kaliflower* was the network of hundreds of communes that were interconnected through the newspaper’s weekly face-to-face distribution. Miller briefly mentions several “federations of communities” that involved groups on a wider geographical scale than *Kaliflower*.³⁶ In contrast, this history of *Kaliflower* offers a compelling case study of a localized, grassroots intercommunal network. Unlike the geographically dispersed federations mentioned by Miller, *Kaliflower* operated within a defined urban area, likely fostering closer relationships and more frequent interactions among its member communes. The face-to-face distribution of *Kaliflower* underscores the importance of direct personal connections in sustaining the network.

Miller identified several key factors as contributing to the eventual decline of the communal movement, including external pressures, internal conflict, and shifting cultural attitudes. In the case of *Kaliflower*, external pressures such as media attention played little role in the dissolution of the intercommunal network. *Kaliflower* had from

³⁴ Miller, *The 60s Communes*, xiii.

³⁵ Miller, *The 60s Communes*, xvii.

³⁶ Miller, *The 60s Communes*, 90.

the outset shunned reporters and researchers and continually preached vigilance and media avoidance in its pages. Instead, it was internal dynamics—specifically, unresolved conflicts within the Free Food Conspiracy and the abrupt decision by the Scott Street Commune to end publication — that were instrumental in the network’s dissolution. The Free Food Conspiracy, initially a cooperative effort to create a common food treasury, became a source of contention as differences in vision and decision-making arose, creating rifts among participating communes. The Scott Street Commune’s unilateral decision to end the publication of *Kaliflower* further destabilized the network, severing a crucial communication link and sense of unity. This history of *Kaliflower* emphasizes the primacy of internal cohesion and adaptability in sustaining communal experiments even in the absence of external pressures.

Allen Matusow (1984, 2009) hangs his analysis of the counterculture on one of the intellectual forebears of the movement, Norman O. Brown. Matusow takes Brown’s Neo-Freudian embrace of Eros as his framework for explaining the counterculture and ultimately its failures.³⁷ By the end of the decade [meaning 1970], “Thanatos [Death], not Eros, prevailed in the counterculture. ... It became clear that drugs, sex, and rock and roll lacked moral content.”³⁸ The history of *Kaliflower* provides a counterpoint that contrasts with Matusow’s argument that the counterculture succumbed to a death impulse. Rather than devolving into a self-destructive phase such as the Altamont “calamity” or the Manson murders, as Matusow heartily uses as examples, *Kaliflower* exemplified a sustained commitment to communal values, mutual support, and selfless service. The *Kaliflower* network, well after 1970, fostered sustainable alternatives such

³⁷ Matusow, *The Unraveling of America*, 280.

³⁸ Matusow, *The Unraveling of America*, 303.

as the Free Print Shop, Free Food Conspiracy, the Angels of Light Free Theatre, the Free Bakery, the Free Medical Opera, and innumerable communal services throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. These efforts reveal a counterculture that actively cultivated a sense of moral purpose and social engagement, thus challenging Matusow's reduction of the movement to an escapist impulse that "lacked moral content."

Van Gosse (2005) offers a reconsideration of the fate of the New Left, arguing that, in opposition to some scholars who have argued "that the New Left simply died," the movement (or more correctly movements) diffused "into the mainstream of civil society." Gosse argues that it is "essential not to mistake" diffusion with "the death of radicalism."³⁹ He gives four broad examples of how this diffusion of the New Left into the broader society took place. On the whole, he dismisses the "counterculture" (which he consistently put into quotation marks), decrying a "politics based on 'sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll' and 'fucking in the streets'" (echoing Matusow except for correcting Matusow's spelling of "rock and roll" to the commonly accepted form). However, unlike Matusow, Gosse sees some long-lasting value to the counterculture, especially in the extent to which it frightened Richard Nixon and J. Edgar Hoover.⁴⁰ It is hard to fathom how Gosse's judgment about the New Left — that it "never ended" but instead "became part of everyday political life" — could not be applied to the counterculture as well.⁴¹

Interestingly, Gosse argues that two segments of the counterculture offered visions of a radical political component to the "sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll" ideology.

³⁹ Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left*, 189.

⁴⁰ Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left*, 207.

⁴¹ Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left*, 208.

The first segment included the San Francisco Diggers as its foremost representative; the second was represented by the Whole Earth Catalog, with its approach to appropriate technology. Gosse concludes that the Diggers failed whereas he credits the Whole Earth Catalog with putting down “deep roots in later decades, moving into the mainstream via organized environmentalism and a wide range of new cultural practices, from organic food production to recycling to, eventually, the epochal changes in social organization and economic life that we associate with the Internet.”⁴² The history of Kaliflower demonstrates how the Digger movement evolved and continued to influence subsequent communal experiments, showing its lasting impact within the counterculture. The history of food conspiracies, as told in this history, is an example of the “diffusion” that Gosse attributes to the New Left but overlooks within the counterculture.

As for the intersection of the history of Kaliflower and the gay liberation movement, Steven Vider’s discussion of gay communes (2021) overlaps with this thesis in several respects. Although the Kaliflower Commune was seen as gay, Vider limits his survey to gay and lesbian separatist communes. Nevertheless, there are numerous similarities. The attraction of communal living as a shared space in which to create alternative social and cultural forms was a common thread not only for gays and lesbians but for thousands of others, no matter their sexual orientation. The term that Vider uses is “prefigurative politics.”⁴³ As will be seen in subsequent chapters, prefigurative politics (a term anarchist theory supplied) was an essential part of the Digger movement philosophy — to “create the condition you describe” — and one that

⁴² Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left*, 206.

⁴³ Vider, *The Queerness of Home*, 88.

the Kaliflower network embodied.⁴⁴ What was unique perhaps in gay and lesbian communes was the extent to which debate and discussion took place over sex and gender roles, including criticisms based on Marxist theoretics, feminist critical thought, and consciousness-raising discourse.⁴⁵ However, in the pages of *Kaliflower* can be found extensive discussion of oppressive behaviors that have been learned and the antidotes within a community of people looking to find recipes for change.⁴⁶ There are numerous similarities between the Kaliflower communes and Vider's gay and lesbian communes, even to the extent that at one gay commune, there was discussion of removing the bathroom door, something that the Scott Street Commune eventually did, but the Angels of Light decided not to (Vider's gay commune also did not). Vider prominently mentions Carl Wittman and his groundbreaking essay on gay liberation, as do many other historians of gay liberation. Wittman is discussed here in chapter four. Vider quotes Wittman's suggestion that "the creation of gay liberation communes was an important step toward creating what he called a gay 'free territory.'"⁴⁷ The connection

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the derivation and meaning of "prefigurative politics," see "Prefigurative Politics," Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology, 2022, accessed November 9, 2024, <https://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/prefigurative-politics>. For the Digger meaning of "create the condition" see Chapter 2.

⁴⁵ Vider, *The Queerness of Home*, 86. Vider suggests that theoretical discussion of feminism originated in lesbian communes and was adopted by gay men into their intra-group discourse.

⁴⁶ See, for example, "Silver Wigs," *Kaliflower* 1, no. 9 (June 19, 1969); "Lousy Dreams," *Kaliflower* 1, no. 4 (May 15, 1969); "Smoking Gurus," *Kaliflower* 1, no. 13 (July 17, 1969); "Sutter Street Commune Is Run With Government by Criticism, ...," *Kaliflower* 1, no. 43 (February 12, 1970); "Against the Stars," *Kaliflower* 3, no. 9 (July 1, 1971); "Interrogation of a Businessman by the Interior Police," *Kaliflower* 3, no. 17 (Aug 26, 1971); "Sexcesspool Snorkling," *Kaliflower* 3, no. 26 (October 28, 1971).

⁴⁷ Vider, *The Queerness of Home*, 83.

of Wittman to the Kaliflower network of communes poses a historical question of influence that has not been answered to this point but is intriguing given their close proximity in time and place.

Vider discusses conflicts that took place in gay and lesbian communes in the 1970s and the eventual dissolution of most within a few years. Many of these issues were common to all communal living situations — delegation of tasks, leadership roles, individual responsibilities, interpersonal conflicts, sexual relationships, finances and decision-making. Vider concludes that these types of internal conflicts as well as political differences were one of the sources of internal conflict that brought an end to the communal movement by the early 1980s.⁴⁸ Vider also includes external pressures (in one case, outright firebombing at the Wolf Creek Commune) as reasons for the end of the communal dream. As noted in chapters five and six, internal conflict was the primary cause of the breakup of the Kaliflower Commune as well as the intercommunal network. There was also external pressure, but it was much less crucial.

Vider's conclusion about the eventual legacy of the gay and lesbian communes is a keen observation that is likely applicable to that of Kaliflower. Even though many communes struggled to align their idealism with the complexities of interpersonal dynamics and societal pressures, they left a lasting mark on queer identity. Vider suggests that their legacy is most powerfully felt in the ongoing pursuit of queer belonging and the recognition that intentional families can offer profound forms of love, support, and resistance:

The gay commune, as experience and representation, partook of a similar hopefulness. It became an emblem of the social utopia many

⁴⁸ Vider, *The Queerness of Home*, 103.

gay men desired, a space for experimentation—new forms of self-awareness and self-expression, new forms of sexual and social connection—even when reality failed to match. For many gay men, both those who joined communes and those who read about them, the commune remained a utopian ideal—of what gay community and gay lives could look like—precisely because it could never be completed.⁴⁹

The Kaliflower experiment, itself an inheritor of the Digger legacy, provides an example that would have recurring reverberations in the coming decades.

Three Overlooked Sources

Radical history should reclaim the roots of an idea or a theory. At the outset of the phenomenon that was called the Sixties Counterculture, three observers, two of whom were academic historians, offered their comments on the significance of the events they were witnessing.⁵⁰ Theodore Roszak was a San Francisco Bay Area historian who had taught at San Francisco State College and finished his academic career at the East Bay campus of the California State University. Roszak wrote the book that popularized the term ‘counterculture’ in 1968. The second of our three historians, Arnold Toynbee, the preeminent historian of civilization, offered his commentary at the end of his long career in a series of newspaper articles over a period of a few days in the spring of 1967 during his semester appointment at Stanford University. Third, Kenneth Rexroth was practically a local Bay Area institution by the mid-1960s and his comments on the emerging counterculture appeared regularly in his weekly newspaper columns. All three of these historians shared similar views on the significance of the

⁴⁹ Vider, *The Queerness of Home*, 105.

⁵⁰ Hereafter, the term will be ‘Sixties counterculture’ or simply ‘counterculture’ as the convention unless quoting directly from Roszak.

counterculture to American society and to world history. All three have seemingly been lost to subsequent historical interpretation. We will review their analyses of the Sixties counterculture in an attempt to resurrect interpretations that need to be incorporated into the history of that period.

Roszak's work is better known among historians of the Sixties than the other two. In 1969, he published *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society*.⁵¹ He was ebullient on the prospects of the younger generation in the midst of the Sixties crises that were confronting America and the West generally. He believed "that the alienated young are giving shape to something that looks like the saving vision our endangered civilization requires."⁵² Twenty-five years after the initial publication of *Counter Culture*, Roszak wrote a "New Introduction" to accompany its 1995 reprinting. That span of twenty-five years was a crucial moment in American and world history and Roszak (the only one of our three historians still alive in 1995) offered his view of the changes that had taken place in American society. His sentiments were downright melancholic on the prospects of American (if not Western) society, and he suggested that reaction to the counterculture was at the root of this situation. Toynbee (who died in 1975) and Rexroth (d. 1982) didn't have the advantage of hindsight that Roszak (d. 2011) did. Yet the comments of all three will serve to help understand the meaning of the counterculture to American and world society.

Theodore Roszak

Theodore Roszak wrote *The Making of a Counter Culture* during the period of the

⁵¹ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1969).

⁵² Roszak, *Counter Culture*, 1.

1960s when American society fractured along ideological fault lines. Commentators were eager to explain the abrupt end of the social consensus of white middle-class America that had dominated the post-World War II landscape. Roszak, writing as a professional historian but also as someone sympathetic to the Sixties social movements, offered his analysis of the historical roots of the youth movement he called a 'counter culture.' Roszak himself was a decade older than most of the participants in the counterculture, and at one point turns aside from his narrative to question the role of an "elder" committed to "radical social change" in approaching the youthful foibles that he describes in minute detail as part of the adolescent trends of the day.⁵³ His answer is to lay aside the utter cynicism of his generation and to see in "beat-hip bohemianism" nothing less than the salvation of Western Civilization from an "anti-utopian" future of "dismal despotisms" in which all "Reason, Reality, Progress, and Knowledge" will be appropriated by the technocratic apparatus of modern society.⁵⁴ Indeed, Roszak sees his role as teacher of the "alienated young ... to educate them in what they are about."⁵⁵

Roszak's *Counter Culture* was published in 1969 and then reissued with a new introduction in 1995. In the 1970s, the book was standard reading fare for college courses in the humanities. After he died in 2011, Roszak was credited in standard obituaries with inventing the term "counterculture."⁵⁶ Although that honor should go to Kenneth Rexroth as we will see, Roszak certainly popularized the term that many

⁵³ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, 41.

⁵⁴ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, Second ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 16.

⁵⁵ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, 17.

⁵⁶ Elaine Woo, "Obituaries; Theodore Roszak, 1933 - 2011; He coined term 'counterculture'; Scholar examined the intellectual basis of the 1960s youth social uprising," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, Calif.), July 14 2011.

associated with him. Even today, the term counterculture is not simply used in relation to the numerous social movements that emerged in the Sixties but continues to be applied to social movements in the twenty-first century that stand in opposition to the larger society, including Occupy Wall Street and even conservative social movements such as the 2008 Tea Party.⁵⁷

Roszak saw the counterculture of the Sixties as part of a revolutionary tradition—rebellion against the social order, including the military-industrial complex and all the attendant amenities of bourgeois life. One of the important economic factors in the emergence of the counterculture was what Roszak deemed the “Age of Affluence” that began in 1942 with U.S. entry into World War Two and which ended around 1972 with the first worldwide oil shortages. Roszak saw this Age of Affluence as a “daring experiment on the part of the ruling elites” to engineer a postwar consensus through economic abundance and conformity to the military-industrial complex.⁵⁸ What they got instead was a broad swath of the youth of the 1950s and 1960s who rejected the underlying assumptions of this ruling ideology.

The counterculture had a rich history as a recipient of decades-long genealogies of social, cultural, and political protest. It had far-reaching effects in American and Western society and left its traces in numerous social movements—primarily the environmental, women’s, gay liberation, and other lifestyle movements. Where the counterculture failed—and that is a question of some debate—was on the rock of

⁵⁷ CT Staff, “Tea Party movement: a new counter-culture,” *Campus Times* (Rochester, New York <http://www.campustimes.org/2010/04/01/tea-party-movement-a-new-counter-culture/>), Apr 1 2010.

⁵⁸ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, xxiii.

political change in the wake of the anti-Vietnam War movement and the collapse of the liberal consensus. (Roszak puts it slightly differently.)

Roszak saw the counterculture as a reaction by the youth of middle-class America against “the technocracy” — a term he uses to designate “that social form in which an industrial society reaches the peak of its organizational integration.”⁵⁹ It is a society that is run by experts, and which demands deference to expert authority in exchange for all the material comforts that a modern industrial society can provide. Ultimately this technocratic worldview was borne out of the “scientific world-view of the Western tradition.”⁶⁰

Each of Roszak’s chapters delves into a different aspect of the ideological foundations of the counterculture in the guise of “a few of the more important figures” whom he argues are the “mature minds” necessary for providing insights to guide adolescent rebellion.⁶¹ These include Herbert Marcuse and Norman Brown, who emphasized “the primacy of consciousness in social change”; Allen Ginsberg and Alan Watts, who represented the introduction of Zen and Eastern philosophy into the counterculture; Timothy Leary, whom Roszak worries is the harbinger of a psychedelic consciousness that emphasizes the personal “over the public task of changing institutions or policies”; C. Wright Mills, who provided the sociological underpinnings of the New Left; and Paul Goodman, who contributed a “Gestalt-therapy” vision of anarchism.⁶² Even though Roszak has distinct reservations about the excesses of the

⁵⁹ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, 5.

⁶⁰ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, 7.

⁶¹ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, 46.

⁶² Roszak, *Counter Culture*, 97, 63-64.

counterculture, his overarching belief is that it represents a genuine “quest for some new foundation that can support a program of radical social change.”⁶³

In the final two chapters of *Counter Culture*, Roszak critiques the technocratic worldview and proposes a radical approach to de-programming its overarching mindset. He contends that the Enlightenment created the “myth of objective consciousness,” which divides reality into inner and outer realms and leads to the objectification of “the other” and alienation of the self.⁶⁴ The counterculture offers a solution to this dilemma in its cultivation of the “visionary imagination.”⁶⁵ Indeed, the solution involves the “mystery and magical ritual” that traditional shamans have contributed “to human culture” as a “form of experience, a way of addressing the world.”⁶⁶ It is the “beatniks and hippies” and their “instinctive fascination with magic and ritual, tribal love, and psychedelic experience” who hold the promise of breaking that “spell of the objective consciousness” that is overseen by the “regime of experts” and to “ground democracy safely beyond the culture of expertise.”⁶⁷

Arnold Toynbee

Roszak wasn’t the only observer of the scene in the mid-1960s to comment on the ideological implications of the youth rebellion. British world historian Arnold Toynbee undertook a visiting professorship at Stanford University in the spring of 1967. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported on his activities, including lectures to large audiences at Stanford and at the University of California, Berkeley. In addition, Toynbee wrote a

⁶³ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, 186.

⁶⁴ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, 208, 23.

⁶⁵ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, 240.

⁶⁶ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, 148, 243, 44.

⁶⁷ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, 265.

series of three articles that were published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *London Observer*. All three were singular reports of his comments on the youth movement, which he had personally observed while visiting the Haight-Ashbury on at least one occasion during his California sojourn.⁶⁸ Toynbee's three articles appeared in May 1967, one month before the informal start of the "Summer of Love" that attracted thousands of young people to San Francisco.

Toynbee presented his analysis of the "hippie movement" (his words) within the context of world history. Throughout the series of articles Toynbee laid out his criticisms of mainstream American politics and culture in very clear and stark terms. He saw the world situation as dire. The conflict between Soviet and Chinese and American interests with the looming prospect of nuclear disaster was the largest threat, in his opinion. On the cultural level, Toynbee saw much of the American way of life that repulsed him; as a historian, he attempted to explain the historical roots of these cultural traits, which he saw as detrimental. For example, he traced the cultural tradition of conformity to the Puritans and argued that this tradition is responsible for the rabid "my country, right or wrong" brand of patriotism, not to mention everyday submission to authority (he cites driving regulations as the most pernicious of the

⁶⁸ Arnold Toynbee, "Toynbee Tours Hippieland," *San Francisco Chronicle (London Observer)* (San Francisco), May 17 1967. This was the first of the three articles. The other two are: Arnold Toynbee, "A New Challenge to Conformity: Toynbee on Hippies," *San Francisco Chronicle (London Observer)* (San Francisco), May 16 1967; Arnold Toynbee, "Hippie Revolt on War," *San Francisco Chronicle (London Observer)* (San Francisco), May 18 1967. In addition to Toynbee describing his visit to the Haight-Ashbury, Herb Caen mentioned in one of his columns that Toynbee celebrated his 78th birthday at a private party where the local Bay Area rock band Quicksilver Messenger Service performed.

latter).⁶⁹ Toynbee also thinks that the desire for money has led to increasing alienation of work from the sustaining nature of meaningful jobs. Instead, we have meaningless occupations that only lead to “purposeless, meaningless, vacuous, boring” lives.⁷⁰

As the cure for these ills, Toynbee believes that the “Hippie Movement” holds much promise. Of course, it must be acknowledged that he was only drawing conclusions and making analyses based on the first bloom of the Sixties Counterculture. Toynbee himself acknowledges as much. In comparing some of the hippie beliefs and practices to the previous spiritual movements led by St. Francis and the Buddha, Toynbee recalls that “the verdict of posterity is that no two human beings have done so much for mankind for so minimal a material return.” Toynbee then suggests that history’s verdict on whether the hippies would provide a similar return for the rest of humankind is an open question: “We cannot tell till the hippies have been given time to show us what return to mankind they are going, or are not going, to make.”⁷¹

If the verdict on the ultimate effect of the Hippie Movement was unknown in 1967, at least Toynbee saw very clearly the aspects of the developing counterculture that made him hopeful. He describes the individuals and groups that he encountered on his first-hand visit to the Haight-Ashbury. But first, he lays down a cautious remonstrance. He holds out promise that the hippies will overcome the susceptible weaknesses that he thinks the Beatniks and the British Mods succumbed to — “sexual promiscuity, drug-taking, and robbery with violence.”⁷²

⁶⁹ Toynbee, “New Challenge,” 14.

⁷⁰ Toynbee, “Hippieland,” 13.

⁷¹ Toynbee, “Hippieland,” 13.

⁷² Toynbee, “Hippieland,” 13. One problem with this Pollyanna view is that the issue of sexual promiscuity was the third rail in ideological conflicts. During Toynbee’s visit to Stanford

Aside from his qualms about aspects that repulse him, Toynbee is enthusiastic about those aspects of hippie culture which resonate with his prescriptions for the modern world. First and foremost were the Diggers, a group who carried out numerous actions and activities starting with daily free meals in the park, the invention of free stores that blossomed throughout the Sixties Counterculture, and a cycle of public events that defined what came to be called the utopian vision of Digger Free City. Toynbee was only witness to the daily free food, so he wasn't able to study the eventual panoply of social practices such as the emphasis on communal sharing and alternative institutions and lifestyles to those of the dominant society. Nevertheless, Toynbee was attracted to the Digger vision, which he described as "the expression of love between human beings as the ultimate manifestation of spiritual reality."⁷³

For Toynbee, the hippies were seeking "new expressions of man's relation to the ultimate spiritual reality behind the universe, in order to find new ways of living and acting in harmony with it."⁷⁴ He declares that the "hippie emphasis on love is genuine" and suggests that this is one of the aspects that can transform the American way of life. "Hippies are in revolt, not just against the war in Vietnam, but against the whole of the prevalent American way of life and ideology."⁷⁵ Toynbee predicts that it is a revolt that

in the spring of 1967, the local news was filled with the infamous five-week-long criminal trial against Lenore Kandel's *Love Book*. The arrests of three book dealers on the charge of selling obscene material, i.e. copies of Kandel's latest poetry book, had divided local attitudes. Pitted against the socially prominent and conservative Catholic hierarchy was the liberal academic community in the San Francisco Bay Area. The *Love Book* trial represented the last gasp of the conservative social establishment at banning such expression.

⁷³ Toynbee, "Hippieland," 13.

⁷⁴ Toynbee, "Hippieland," 13.

⁷⁵ Toynbee, "Revolt," 1.

won't be easily bought off with offers from corporate America of monetary reward.

Toynbee declares that the hippie revolt "is not so easily conquerable as that. Its roots are both older and deeper."⁷⁶

For the rest of his visit to California in the spring of 1967, Toynbee peppered his lectures with the insights he had gained in his visit to the Haight-Ashbury. At a lecture to 1,500 students on the Berkeley campus of the University of California, Toynbee warned in dire terms that a "radical change in the ethical, moral and social habits of the world" was needed for any hope for survival of the human race.⁷⁷ Toynbee declared that ethical standards that developed five thousand years ago needed to be updated to fit the reality of a technological "world of mass transportation and communication and atomic weapons."⁷⁸ He called for a "switch in emphasis from a focus on nationalism to a focus on the entire human race" and declared, "We've got to stop this habit of treating many of our fellow human beings as strangers and enemies."⁷⁹

Toynbee's newspaper articles in 1967 were the last occasion for him to comment on the "hippie movement" before his death in 1975. Perhaps the reality of subsequent events such as the Manson Murders in 1969 was more than his initial sense of hope could accommodate. Perhaps he was quiet because he had said everything that needed to be said. Toynbee's vision of the "Hippie Movement" contained within its core the germ of an idea for a way of life that contradicted the materiality and meaninglessness of modern American mass culture. The fact that there were failures should not

⁷⁶ Toynbee, "Revolt," 18.

⁷⁷ Arnold Toynbee, "Toynbee on Survival of Human Race," *San Francisco Chronicle* (San Francisco), May 20 1967, 11.

⁷⁸ Toynbee, "Survival," 11.

⁷⁹ Toynbee, "Survival," 11.

overshadow the ideas. Toynbee would possibly say — 'ideas can exist outside history.'

Kenneth Rexroth

In addition to Roszak and Toynbee, there was another historical observer and commentator on the new youth scene that was emerging in San Francisco in the 1960s. This was Kenneth Rexroth, the doyen of the Beat literature movement that had coalesced around the coffee houses and poetry readings in the North Beach neighborhood in the mid- to late-1950s. But unlike Toynbee (and to a lesser extent, Roszak), Rexroth was first and foremost an active participant in the avant-garde scene — as well as a perceptive observer and critic.

Rexroth was of an earlier generation, having grown up in the 1920s, when he pioneered the far-ranging and rambling lifestyles that would later be memorialized by Jack Kerouac and the Beats. After three decades of writing and publishing his poetry and critical essays, Rexroth was recognized in the local literary scene as something of a curmudgeonly avuncular presence, someone who had been instrumental in bringing together the luminaries of the Beat Generation. It was Rexroth who had suggested and then emceed the watershed event that defined the Beats — the Six Gallery poetry reading in October 1955. This was where Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Michael McClure and Allen Ginsberg first collaborated in creating an aural tremor in the ears of the avant-garde poetry scene. Ginsberg read "Howl," his dystopian paean to the dropped-out fringes of American civilization which became one of the troika in the Beat pantheon.⁸⁰

In 1957, Rexroth wrote an essay for *New World Writing* in which he put together

⁸⁰ Allen Ginsberg and Barry Miles, *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile, Transcript & Variant Versions, Fully Annotated by Author* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986). Besides Howl, the other two members of the Beat Troika are William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* and Kerouac's *On the Road*.

the disparate influences that he saw formulating a vision of cultural ruin. Writing a decade before Roszak and Toynbee did, Rexroth even more than those two trained historians hit the nail on the head. He was describing the youth of the late 1950s, but these were the progenitors of the movement that would fully blossom in the Haight-Ashburys and East Villages of the mid-1960s: "All of this youngest group have a good deal in common. They are more or less influenced by French poetry, and by Céline, Beckett, Artaud, Genêt, D. H. Lawrence, Whitman, Pound. They are all interested in Far Eastern art and religion; some even call themselves Buddhists. Politically they are all strong disbelievers in the State, war, and the values of commercial civilization."⁸¹ In looking forward, Rexroth ventured a prophetic pronouncement: "What will happen afterwards I don't know, but for the next couple of decades we are going to have to cope with the youth that we, my generation, put through the atom smasher. Social disengagement, artistic integrity, voluntary poverty—these are powerful virtues and may pull them through, but they are not the virtues we tried to inculcate—rather they are the exact opposite."⁸² Rexroth referred to his 1957 essay as "the launching gun, the finger removed from the dike."⁸³

That was 1957. In 1965, eight years later, Rexroth announced that his prognostication of a cultural revolution was complete. In the *New York Times Book Review* he looked back at the "effective social force" that the "oral presentation of

⁸¹ Kenneth Rexroth, "Disengagement: The Art of the Beat Generation " in *New world writing : 11*, ed. W. D. Snodgrass and Donald Justice (New York: N.Y. New American Library, 1957). Reprinted in *Alternative Society*, 1972.

⁸² Rexroth, "Disengagement."

⁸³ Kenneth Rexroth, *The alternative society : essays from the other world* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 16.

poetry” had become—in San Francisco where it had first emerged, but now worldwide including in the Soviet sphere.⁸⁴ Coffee shops are the venues where this movement is spreading, even to college towns in the “remotest hinterland” and “accompanying this is the most extraordinary proliferation of little magazines, most of them produced by some cheap offset process.”⁸⁵ In the first use of the new compound term that Rexroth innovated, he suggested, “Maybe this is not a youth subculture at all, but a counter-culture which has been developed mostly by youth simply because they were not already involved too deeply in the prevalent one. Suppose they don't outgrow it—what then? It's already spread throughout the world. It already provides a pretty complete system of life satisfactions. Its values contradict those of a predatory, materialistic, nationalistic, war-making civilization point for point.”⁸⁶

The following year, Rexroth stepped out of the role of critic and assumed the mantle of instigator (as was his wont throughout his career). At the Campus and Community Day symposium on May 3, 1966, at San Francisco State College, Rexroth delivered a speech that would inspire a social movement of radical arts and artists that laid the foundation for a public sphere in the emerging counterculture of the Bay Area.⁸⁷

Lost in Time?

⁸⁴ Kenneth Rexroth, "Speaking of Books: Poetry Aloud," *New York Times Book Review*, Apr 1 1965, BR2.

⁸⁵ Rexroth, "Speaking of Books: Poetry Aloud." Rexroth's comment about the proliferation of small presses suggests that a study of the relationship between the little magazine and the later underground newspaper phenomena might yield some interesting correlations.

⁸⁶ Rexroth, "Speaking of Books: Poetry Aloud."

⁸⁷ Eric Noble, "The Artists Liberation Front and the Formation of the Sixties Counterculture," (The Digger Archives, 1996). <http://diggers.org/alf.htm>.

If we take all three of our early observers at face value, the Sixties Counterculture was a significant development in Western society that portended a radical shift in consciousness. And yet, in the current historiography, two of the three voices have seemingly been lost in time. In the academic journal *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture*, there are no references to Toynbee nor Rexroth (out of 146 articles, reviews, and essays in eleven volumes to date).⁸⁸

Roszak has fared better. *Counter Culture* is referenced in several of the works that I included in the discussion on historiography.⁸⁹ What has not been referenced is Roszak's introduction to the 1995 revised edition of *Counter Culture*. Looking back after a quarter century, Roszak discussed the conservative backlash to the challenge that the counterculture had posed to industrial society and offered several warnings about future outcomes. Roszak's reassessment will be discussed in detail in the final chapter.

⁸⁸ Farber, "Building the Counterculture."; Simon Rycroft, "Lightshows and the cultural politics of light: mid-century cosmologies," Article, *Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics & Culture* 6, no. 1 (2013); Blake Slonecker, "Portland in the 1960s: stories from the counterculture (Book Review)," Article, *Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics & Culture* 6, no. 1 (2013); Holly Scott, "Youth will make the revolution: creating and contesting the youth frame in the New Left," Article, *Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics & Culture* 7, no. 1 (2014); Seth E. Blumenthal, "Nixon's marijuana problem: youth politics and 'law and order,' 1968–72," Article, *Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics & Culture* 9, no. 1 (2016); John P. Murphy, "Feed your head," Article, *Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics & Culture* 10, no. 2 (2017); Adrian Chapman, "The British anti-psychiatrists: from institutional psychiatry to the counter-culture, 1960-1971 (Book Review)," Article, *Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics & Culture* 11, no. 2 (2018). Of these, Slonecker poses the most interesting question—about technology in the counterculture.

⁸⁹ Abraham, "Grotesque."; Bach, *The American Counterculture*; Farber, "Building the Counterculture."; Michael J. Kramer, "Counterculture," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History*, ed. Joan Shelley Rubin and Scott E. Casper (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Marwick, *The Sixties*; Miller, *The 60s Communes*; Doug Rossinow, "The New Left in the Counterculture: Hypotheses and Evidence," *Radical History Review* 67 (1997).

Even though Roszak's 1995 dire reassessment has been overlooked, there are hints of the outcomes that he predicted. In their 2000 neo-Marxist critique of *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that globalized capitalism evolved in response to the countercultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s. They explain, "'Dropping out' was really a poor conception of what was going on in Haight-Ashbury and across the United States in the 1960s. The two essential operations were the refusal of the disciplinary regime and the experimentation with new forms of productivity."⁹⁰ This challenge to capitalist modes of production resulted in the globalization response:

A paradigm shift was needed to design the restructuring process along the lines of the political and technological shift. In other words, capital had to confront and respond to the new production of subjectivity of the proletariat. This new production of subjectivity reached (beyond the struggle over welfare, which we have already mentioned) what might be called an ecological struggle, a struggle over the mode of life, that was eventually expressed in the developments of immaterial labor.⁹¹

Where Roszak had discussed "ruling elites," Hardt and Negri substitute the less personified "global capital." The cause is the same; the only difference in the outcome is its formulation from a neo-Marxist perspective.

If Hardt and Negri's global capital forces lacked the specificity of personal agency, Nancy MacLean's *Democracy in Chains* corrects that oversight in spades. MacLean takes the career of James McGill Buchanan as the central pole of her narrative of the far-right social movements led by the Koch brothers to bring about radical limits to popular democracy. Buchanan was the ideologue who developed the conservative

⁹⁰ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 274.

⁹¹ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 269.

economic philosophy known as public choice theory. MacLean argues that Buchanan's theories were the skeleton of the program that became the "single most powerful and least understood threat to democracy today: the attempt by the billionaire-backed radical right to undo democratic governance."⁹² In this half-clandestine far-right movement, opposition to social changes in America starting with the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision in 1954 was the engine that gave it momentum. For Buchanan, the Supreme Court decision represented the outcome of "legally sanctioned gangsterism" that placed individual rights over the rights of the wealthy elite enforced by the Federal government.⁹³ The ultimate source of this movement were the various post-World War social movements of the 1950s onward. MacLean documents in exquisite detail the machinations and successes (with few if any setbacks) of the Buchanan-inspired, Koch-backed conservative right in the final and first decades of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Historical Approach

While earlier historical accounts often viewed the Sixties counterculture as secondary to or even dismissive of the New Left's political activism, more recent scholarship has highlighted the counterculture's unique contributions, particularly its focus on communal living and artistic expression as vital components of its challenge to dominant societal norms. My history of *Kaliflower* and the Kaliflower network builds on that newer scholarship by examining the lived experiences of a community that sought to put countercultural ideals into practice. This focus highlights how daily life and

⁹² Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2018), xvii.

⁹³ MacLean, *Democracy in Chains*, xxiv.

creative projects were vital arenas for expressing and enacting countercultural ideals. This perspective adds depth to an understanding of the counterculture, showing it as a multifaceted movement with various dimensions of resistance and social change. This history also offers an analysis of how the counterculture intersected with and influenced other social movements, such as feminism and gay liberation. This enriches the narrative of the Sixties Counterculture as a catalyst for broader societal changes, beyond its immediate cultural and political contexts. This history also extends the work of Roszak, who critiqued the technocratic society's impact on human values and community. The history of the Digger movement, including the Kaliflower network of communes, connects the philosophical and practical oppositions of the counterculture to technocracy with its long-term influence on contemporary critiques of technology and capitalism. Much of the existing historiography discusses how countercultural values were co-opted or absorbed into mainstream society. This history contributes to this discussion by offering detailed examples of how specific countercultural practices and ideas transitioned into broader social acceptance. This helps to nuance the often-simplified narrative of 'sell-out' or 'failure' by showing how the transformation of countercultural values into mainstream society was complex and multifaceted. By examining the lasting impacts on contemporary movements and societal shifts, this history suggests that the counterculture's influence is both significant and nuanced, not an insignificant and passing phenomenon. The history of Kaliflower highlights intimate aspects of the counterculture and its evolution during a critical moment. Traces of this lineage can be found in subsequent decades up to the present.

Plan of Chapters

The cover of the first issue of *Kaliflower* set the stage for the three-year project that

would eventually involve more than 300 communes in the San Francisco Bay Area. The artwork for that cover had phallic images superimposed on a psychedelic design with what could be an oyster shell containing a pearl of wisdom, within which there was an embedded quotation from the New Testament Book of Acts. The quotation described the early Christian communities sharing “all things in common.” Future issues of *Kaliflower* would contain articles and excerpts from the Oneida Community’s vast literature on Bible Communism, a term they used to emulate the acts of the apostles.

In a similar vein, the naming of the chapters here will employ Biblical metaphor to describe the evolution of the Kaliflower project.

Chapter One, “Genesis to a Queer Beat,” tells the story of Irving Rosenthal, the queer Beat writer who founded the commune that came to be known as Kaliflower.

Chapter Two, “Revelation of Digger Do,” is a condensed history of the Digger movement in San Francisco from 1966 to 1968 and its prophetic effect on the Sixties counterculture and specifically the Kaliflower Commune.

Chapter Three, “Psalms of the Angels,” tells the early history of the Angels of Light Free Theatre, a communal group that was one of many that emerged out of the intercommunal nexus that formed around the *Kaliflower* newspaper.

Chapter Four, “Acts in a Rainbow Revolution,” uncovers connections between Kaliflower and the homosexual revolution in 1969.

Chapter Five, “Exodus: Rise & Fall of Free ... Food ... Conspiracy,” is the story of the Free Food Family, the apotheosis of the Kaliflower intercommunal experiment.

Chapter Six, “Judges in Black Masks & Robes,” considers the causes and subsequent reverberations of the inter- and intra-communal schism that took place in the Kaliflower communal network.

A Note on Quotations and the Typography of *Kaliflower*

The custom I have tried to follow for excerpts of quotations is to denote my deletions as thus: “. . . ” (a full ellipsis within a sentence) and “. . . . ” (a period followed by an ellipsis for material deleted after a period). When an ellipsis is surrounded by brackets, that indicates that the ellipsis appeared in the original source. Thus:

“. . .” (material omitted by the author);

“[. . .]” (the ellipsis appeared as thus in the original text).

As previously mentioned, *Kaliflower* is italicized when referring to the newspaper, and not when referring to the Kaliflower Commune that published it nor the Kaliflower intercommunal network that it engendered.

Chapter One. Genesis to a Queer Beat

A beginning is the time for taking the most delicate care that
the balances are correct. This every sister of the Bene
Gesserit knows. To begin your study of the life of
Muad'Dib, then, take care that you place him in his time . . .
— from *Manual of Muad'Dib* by the Princess Irulan⁹⁴

The Founding of a Commune

In January 1968, Beat writer and editor Irving Rosenthal, recently arrived in San Francisco, wrote to his friend Daniel Haber back in New York City:

I have begun a commune, about which I don't want to go into great detail... . We have an eight-room flat, and it's full, but George is willing to share his room with you.⁹⁵ Someday we hope to be self-supporting, but for now every member brings in \$45 outside a month, which covers all expenses. The cuisine is completely vegetarian (though so far we have had fish about once a month), and we make our own bread and yogurt. You can earn \$45 a month easily by selling the Berkeley Barb one day a week. The flat is large & has two huge common rooms. There are flashes of temper sometimes and flurries but never serious arguments, and everything runs pretty much like a clock. It is a work commune, and every member is expected to put in several hours a day cooking, painting or repairing the flat (until our more esthetic projects get under way). So much like a clock that we have decided all to get up at 6 every morning for breakfast.⁹⁶

Rosenthal wrote this letter three months after his move to San Francisco from New York City. In other correspondence he had made it clear that starting a commune was one of

⁹⁴ Frank Herbert, *Dune* (New York: Ace Books, 1965), 17.

⁹⁵ George Edgerly Harris III would later adopt the nom de théâtre of Hibiscus.

⁹⁶ Irving Rosenthal to Daniel Haber, 28 January 1968, Box 10, Folder 7, Irving Rosenthal Papers.

his goals in making the move. Rosenthal's letter notifying Haber of establishing a beachhead in this cultural quest was but a foreshadow of the network of communes that would arise and become interdependent in the next decade.

Literary Beginnings

Prior to his move to San Francisco in 1967, Rosenthal had enjoyed a ten-year stretch exploring the social frontiers of an avant-garde literary and arts scene in New York and elsewhere before picking up and moving back to the city where he had been born thirty-seven years earlier. He had first made his entrée into the Beat literary universe a decade earlier while editing the *Chicago Review*, a student-run literary quarterly with a national reputation. Rosenthal found his calling as a literary editor by accident when a narcissistic solipsist story he wrote and submitted was accepted and published in the Spring 1957 issue of the *Review*.⁹⁷ Rosenthal's literary success must have seemed a fluke. As a graduate student pursuing a Ph.D. in human development psychology, his background was heavily science oriented; he earned an undergraduate degree at Pomona College with a dual major in Zoology and Chemistry. However, he had also taken college courses in the Greek and Roman classics and his education as a child included Jewish elementary school, where he had studied Hebrew and the Torah, with his best grades in History and his worst in Deportment.⁹⁸

More of a surprise than having one of his stories accepted for publication was the unexpected offer by the editor-in-chief to take over his position as the head of the nationally recognized *Chicago Review*. The masthead for the next issue (Summer 1957)

⁹⁷ Irving Rosenthal, "An Invitation to Sleep," *Chicago Review* 11, no. 1 (1957).

⁹⁸ "Childhood, 1930-1948," Box 1, Folder 7, Irving Rosenthal Papers.

listed Rosenthal as one of two Associate Editors, and for the Winter 1958 issue, he was sole editor-in-chief with a large editorial staff. Rosenthal's first issue of the *Review* under his control was made up of material that had been accepted under the previous editor. His second issue (Spring 1958), however, was entirely of his choosing. The cover announced the theme of the issue — "Ten San Francisco Poets" — and listed the names of a set of relatively-unknown writers, including Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Michael McClure, Philip Whalen, Philip Lamantia, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti.⁹⁹

The Birth of Beat

This first issue of the *Chicago Review* under Rosenthal's full editorial control highlighted a literary movement that had only been recognized and named the

⁹⁹ In discussion with the author, Rosenthal recalled these events two decades later. He gave credit to two of the assistant editors for introducing him to the work of the San Francisco poets. He also revealed that David Ray, the *Review* editor who offered him the position, rescinded the offer after a disagreement between the two. The editorial staff, however, took Rosenthal's side and voted to keep him as editor-in-chief. Rosenthal also remembered that it was his decision to take full artistic control of the content of the *Review* "mainly because he thought the others were dumb." Previously, the custom was for the staff to vote on the pieces to be published. Rosenthal fired one of the assistant editors to assert his control. He wasn't sure he could do that, but "the guy stayed fired." [Quotations are from Eric Noble, *Memcon with Irving Rosenthal*, December 16 1974.] Both incidents — the attempt to rescind the offer of the editorship after a falling-out, and Rosenthal's assertion of full artistic control — foreshadowed consistent themes in his life. In fact, Rosenthal's predilection as a "control freak" was soon obvious to some of the same staff that had supported his takeover. Eila Kokkinen, the *Review's* art editor, recalled, "When we joined, Irving Rosenthal was very quiet, a meek little soul. Absolutely. But in a matter of months he had taken over, like a dictator." [Gerald Brennan, "Naked Censorship, Part I: The University Goes Ballistic (the true story of the University of Chicago and William S. Burroughs's Naked Lunch)," *Chicago Reader* (29 September 1995).] This is evidence perhaps of how a little power can transform even a "meek little soul" into a "dictator." Rosenthal was not only studying but also an example of human development psychology!

previous year. *Evergreen Review* No. 2 had appeared on the newsstands in July 1957. Its cover read "San Francisco Scene," and the list of contributors overlapped neatly with the *Chicago Review*'s Spring 1958 table of contents months later. That Rosenthal essentially used the same "palette" that Barney Rosset and Donald Allen of Grove Press had used the previous year is perhaps not so surprising. Paul Carroll, the poetry editor of the *Chicago Review*, had brought the San Francisco poets to Rosenthal's attention, and it was an instantaneous aesthetic marriage. Rosenthal's editorship of the *Review* was his entrée onto the national literary stage and, whether his birthplace played any part in his decision to focus on San Francisco's new literary scene, future developments showed the extent to which this was Rosenthal's Damascene moment.¹⁰⁰

From Six Gallery to San Francisco Renaissance

The next three issues of the *Chicago Review* carried forward Rosenthal's discovery of the San Francisco Renaissance, so named by Kenneth Rexroth in his introduction to *Evergreen Review* #2. Rexroth himself had been instrumental in the movement's emergence in 1955 when he played matchmaker for a poetry reading that marked a

¹⁰⁰ In discussion with the author, Rosenthal talked about the lengthy period it took for him to understand poetry. It was with the help of friends, especially Allen Ginsberg "showing him how to appreciate Wieners, Corso, and Lamantia." The magazines that Rosenthal thought "crystallized the Beat Poetry Revolution" were *Black Mountain* 7; *Evergreen* 2; the issues of *Chicago Review* he edited (volume 12, issues 2, 3, 4); and *Big Table* 1. It is interesting that he lists *Evergreen* 2 second on the list. It preceded all the rest by at least several months. Nevertheless, Rosenthal mentioned that it was the art editor on the *Chicago Review* staff who first introduced him to the San Francisco poets via *Black Mountain* 7. That issue had a cover date of Fall 1957, but from many accounts it was not on the newsstands until the spring of 1958. (Noble, Memcon with Irving Rosenthal.). In later discussions, Rosenthal named what he considered the pantheon of Beat Poetry publications: the complete Auerhahn Press collection; *Beatitude* magazine; LeRoi Jones' *YUGEN*; *Black Mountain Review*; *Evergreen Review* #2 and #11; and *Origin* magazine.

watershed moment in this history. The Six Gallery Poetry Reading transfused an audience with an aural experience of the written word. The reading took place Friday evening, October 7, 1955, on Fillmore Street in San Francisco's Cow Hollow neighborhood. Rexroth was the M.C., having put together the lineup of poets: Allen Ginsberg, Phil Whalen, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, and Philip Lamantia. Ginsberg recited (more properly, performed, along with audience participation) the first public reading of "Howl," which Lawrence Ferlinghetti quickly requisitioned for his newly minted City Lights Books poetry series. All the poets were unknown at the time but soon became synonymous with the "Beat Generation," a term first proposed by Jack Kerouac and popularized by John Clellon Holmes. Kerouac himself attended the Six Gallery Reading and acted as nightlong drunken cheerleader for the festivities.¹⁰¹ Ginsberg's description of homosexual affection would have been an epiphany for Rosenthal, who in 1958 was a 27-year-old gay man.¹⁰²

Eighteen months after emceeing the Six Gallery poetry reading, Rexroth gave a more formal name than "Beat" to this movement in his introductory essay for *Evergreen Review* No. 2:

There has been so much publicity recently about the San Francisco Renaissance and the New Generation of Revolt and Our Underground Literature and Cultural Disaffiliation . . . For ten years or more, seen

¹⁰¹ The story of the Six Gallery poetry reading is told in Ginsberg and Miles, *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile, Transcript & Variant Versions, Fully Annotated by Author*, 165-68. See p. 167 for Rexroth's role as catalyst for the event ("since he had linked us up"), as described by Ginsberg in an excerpt from *Jack's Book* [Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee, *Jack's book : an oral biography of Jack Kerouac / by Barry Gifford & Lawrence Lee* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978).]

¹⁰² Rosenthal used the term "homosexual" as late as 1960 and was criticized for it by John Wieners, who became an icon within queer literary circles. Rosenthal to Dave Hazelwood, August 25, 1960, Box 10, Folder 14, Irving Rosenthal Papers.

from above, all that could be discerned was a kind of scum. By very definition, scum, ice packs, crusts, are surface phenomena. It is what is underneath that counts. The living substance has always been there—it has just been hard to see—from above. It is easy to understand why all this has centered in San Francisco. . . . It is one of the easiest cities in the world to live in. It is the easiest in America. Its culture is genuinely . . . Mediterranean — *laissez faire* and *dolce far niente*.¹⁰³

Rexroth's pronouncement to the literary world was mere months before Rosenthal and his editorial staff hobbled together the Spring 1958 "San Francisco Issue" of the *Chicago Review*. Jack Kerouac's one-page preface, like Rexroth's introduction the previous year, announced the new poetry movement in San Francisco to the world (or at least to anyone who had not yet heard of the Beats). Kerouac wrote:

The new American poetry as typified by the SF Renaissance (which means Ginsberg, me, Rexroth, Ferlinghetti, McClure, Corso, Gary Snyder, Phil Lamantia, Philip Whalen, I guess) is a kind of new-old Zen Lunacy poetry, writing whatever comes into your head as it comes, poetry returned to its origin, in the bardic child, truly ORAL as Ferling said, instead of gray faced Academic quibbling.¹⁰⁴

A second prefatory remark by "Ferling" (Lawrence Ferlinghetti) laid down the gauntlet to poets everywhere and announced:

The poetry which has been making itself heard here of late is what should be called street poetry. . . . The printed word has made poetry so silent. But the poetry I am talking about here is spoken poetry, poetry conceived as oral messages. It "makes it" aloud. Some of it has been read with jazz, much of it has not. A new "ashcan" school? Rock and roll? Who cares what names it's called. . . . And finally, in some larger

¹⁰³ Kenneth Rexroth, "San Francisco Letter," *Evergreen Review* 1, no. 2 (1957).

¹⁰⁴ Jack Kerouac, "The Origins of Joy in Poetry," *Chicago Review* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1958).

sense, it all adds up to the beginnings of a very inevitable thing—the *resocialization* of poetry.¹⁰⁵

With the Spring 1958 “San Francisco Issue” of the *Review*, Rosenthal ensconced his place in the Beat pantheon, perhaps not as one of the leading lights but rather as a stagehand who set out the props for the main action. Rosenthal, however, had one skill that shone above his uncanny statistics and botany science background — editorship. Rosenthal, it turned out, was a consummate editor.

Visionary Editor

Rosenthal’s newly found editorial skill was supremely evident in that first issue of the *Review* under his full control. For besides the panoply of Beat poets from San Francisco, Rosenthal plucked another contribution seemingly from thin air — the first chapter of what became one of the Beat classics, *Naked Lunch* by William Burroughs. Paul Carroll, the poetry editor at the time, told the story of how the *Chicago Review* became the first publishers of *Naked Lunch*. As the poetry editor of the *Review*, Carroll had heard “rumors” of the literary variety about happenings in San Francisco. After reaching out to Ferlinghetti as the most recognizably available through the auspices of his North Beach enclave, City Lights Bookstore, Carroll received a listing of poets to contact for their contributions. One of Ferlinghetti’s suggestions was to contact Ginsberg. Carroll wrote to Ginsberg, who replied by suggesting that the *Review* should contact William Burroughs, which they did. By return post they received the unpublished manuscript for *Naked Lunch*. Both Rosenthal and his poetry editor immediately were smitten and determined to include an excerpt in the San Francisco

¹⁰⁵ Lawrence Ferlinghetti, “Note on Poetry in San Francisco,” *Chicago Review* 12, no. 1 (1958): 4.

Poets issue (even though Burroughs was neither). According to Carroll:

At that time the manuscript was not in any chapter or sequential order. It was just, incoherent [...] not incoherent but it was a strong manuscript and Irving did a brilliant job of editing it, in the sense of putting it into what we consider sequential order, with Burroughs okay. And the final edition of *NAKED LUNCH*, the published edition, was Irving's work, as far as the chapter order.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Paul Carroll, "Interview with Paul Carroll by Peter Kostakis and Art Lange," *Brilliant Corners*, no. 6 (Summer 1970). The full quotation is:

I was the poetry editor on the review, and in '57 I mentioned to the editor, Irving Rosenthal, that I'd heard rumors along the poet's grapevine that there was some good writing being done out in San Francisco. The only name I knew at that time was Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Now Ginsberg's name was known but I didn't know where he was. Because one had heard of *HOWL*, I actually hadn't read it at that point but one'd heard of the censorship of this poem *HOWL*. But I knew Ferlinghetti had a bookstore out there so I wrote a letter saying we'd like to have a San Francisco issue of the review if we were able to get enough good writing, enough writing that we thought was worth publishing. And so Lawrence was very co-operative and he sent back a letter with a lot of names and addresses of the writers including Ginsberg. And so all of them were contacted, Phil Whalen, McClure, Kerouac, and all of them. ... And one of the writers we published as a result of Ginsberg's leads ... and among those writers there was a very short note saying "Write to Burroughs." He didn't even give his first name, and an address in Tangiers. Which we did, and into the office of the Chicago Review came *NAKED LUNCH*. The whole manuscript. Irving read it [...] no, I was the first to read some of it, I remember that, and it really knocked me off my chair and I called Irving on the phone and I said "Come on down here, this is [...] there's this prose, but it's terrific." And Irving read it and he added a similar reaction. At that time the manuscript was not in any chapter or sequential order. It was just, incoherent [...] not incoherent but it was a strong manuscript and Irving did a brilliant job of editing it, in the sense of putting it into what we consider sequential order, with Burroughs okay. And the final edition of *NAKED LUNCH*, the published edition, was Irving's work, as far as the chapter order.

Rosenthal had plucked *Naked Lunch* out of thin air and was the first to put it to print, even after it had been rejected by several publishers already.¹⁰⁷ *Naked Lunch* became Rosenthal's ticket into the Beat Universe, first upon his ejection from the academy and second by his welcome into a circle of companions who nourished, challenged, supported, and antagonized Rosenthal's growing aesthetic sense. As Carroll noted, Rosenthal's editorial skill made *Naked Lunch* coherent. The first excerpt he chose to publish in the Spring 1958 issue of *Chicago Review* later became the first chapter in the Olympia Press (1959) and Grove Press (1962) editions.¹⁰⁸

The second, "true" Rosenthal issue of the *Review* was the Summer 1958 "Zen" issue, with articles on Zen Buddhism by D. T. Suzuki, Alan Watts, Jack Kerouac, Philip Whalen, and Gary Snyder, among others. This was the first appearance of Watts's "Beat Zen, Square Zen, Zen," which had profound and lasting influence among the new generation of Zen enthusiasts in the West.¹⁰⁹ The article also was mentioned favorably in the *New York Times Book Review* section, one of four instances that the *Chicago Review* was cited by the *Times* in the 1950s (Rosenthal's issues were three of the four; the previous editor, David Ray, accounted for one.)¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ It is interesting to try and follow the twists and turns in *Naked Lunch*'s publishing career. Miles and Grauerholz attempt to unravel this history but leave the impression that Robert Creeley was first to the starting line with the publication of *Black Mountain Review* #7 (Fall 1957, but not released until Spring 1958). The piece that Creeley published, however, was one of Burroughs's Yage letters under the title "From Naked Lunch, Book III: In Search of Yage" by "William Lee." This was not an excerpt from *Naked Lunch* that was subsequently published by Olympia or Grove Press. Rosenthal deserves that credit. See William Seward Burroughs, James Grauerholz (ed.), and Barry Miles (ed.), *Naked Lunch: the Restored Text* (New York: Grove Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁸ Burroughs, Grauerholz (ed.), and Miles (ed.), *Naked Lunch: the Restored Text*.

¹⁰⁹ Alan Watts, "Beat Zen, Square Zen," *Chicago Review* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1958).

¹¹⁰ J. Donald Adams, "Speaking of Books [Lolita and Dharma Bums followup]," *The New*

Banned and Reborn

The final issue of the *Chicago Review* under Rosenthal's editorship would become the cause célèbre that propelled him into a new orbit of the avant-garde arts universe that was churning under America's cultural surface, as Rexroth had so aptly put it.¹¹¹ The Autumn 1958 issue dropped back to traditional academic fare except for three pieces. Two were by members of the previously highlighted San Francisco Renaissance (a poem by William Everson and a "prose take" by Philip Whalen). However, the third nonacademic piece of the issue was Chapter 2 of *Naked Lunch*. It was the latter that would detonate a delayed explosion in public outrage.¹¹²

The Autumn 1958 edition with the second Burroughs excerpt hit the local bookstores on September 22.¹¹³ A month passed before Jack Mabley, a columnist for the *Chicago Daily News*, wrote a front-page column titled "Filthy Writing On the Midway," which lambasted the not-to-be-named University of Chicago publication. (Not named because he didn't "want to be responsible for its selling out.") Nevertheless, he ended his diatribe by lambasting the school's administrators: "The trustees should take a long

York Times Book Review, Nov. 16, 1958. Adams confesses that Watts helped him reconcile his doubts about the "Western conscience" and Eastern belief systems. The other two *Book Review* articles that mentioned Rosenthal's Spring and Summer issues of the *Chicago Review* are Lewis Nichols, "In and Out of Books," *The New York Times Book Review*, Apr. 6, 1958; J. Donald Adams, "Speaking of Books [Beat Generation]," *The New York Times Book Review*, May 18, 1958; Adams, "Speaking of Books [Beat Generation]."

¹¹¹ Rexroth, "San Francisco Letter."

¹¹² In his correspondence with Burroughs preceding the publication of this second excerpt from *Naked Lunch*, Rosenthal made clear that the designation of "Chapter 2" was his own and he offered Burroughs the opportunity to change it. See Rosenthal to William Burroughs, 22 August 1958, Box 6, Folder 1, Irving Rosenthal Papers.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

hard look at what is being circulated under this sponsorship.”¹¹⁴ And take a long hard look they did. The upshot of the ensuing controversy was that the university administration decided in no uncertain terms that the content Rosenthal had planned for the Winter 1958/59 issue would not be permitted. This included an even longer passage from *Naked Lunch*, a piece by Kerouac, and another by Edward Dahlberg.¹¹⁵

Rosenthal and Carroll were not fazed by the administration’s blatant censorship. They, along with all the *Review*’s editorial staff save one, resigned. There was an outcry, not just locally in Chicago, but nationwide. John Ciardi, poetry editor for the *Saturday Review*, declared the suppression of the winter issue “a memorable blow for academic freedom.” Ciardi’s judgment was almost biblical in its sternness: “There can be no compromise with the book burners. There is only the duty to hold them in disgust, and the hope that they can be made to understand the scorn of freer and better men.”¹¹⁶

Rosenthal absconded with the manuscripts that had comprised the “complete contents of the suppressed” issue and planned, along with Carroll, to publish them in the inaugural issue of a new independent literary review that they named *Big Table* (after a suggestion by Kerouac).¹¹⁷ Subsequently, the first shipment of *Big Table* 1 was seized by the U.S. Postal Service and an obscenity trial took place in U.S. District Court in Chicago. The outcome was a decision in 1960 by Judge Julius Hoffman (of later fame in the Chicago Seven trial) that *Big Table* 1 was not obscene.¹¹⁸ Rosenthal handed over

¹¹⁴ Jack Mabley, “Filthy Writing On the Midway,” *Chicago Daily News*, October 25 1958.

¹¹⁵ Rosenthal told the story of the back-and-forth discussions between himself and the university administration in his editorial for *Big Table* #1. (Irving Rosenthal, “Editorial,” *Big Table* 1, Spring, 1959.)

¹¹⁶ John Ciardi, “The Book Burners and Sweet Sixteen,” *Saturday Review*, June 27, 1959.

¹¹⁷ Rosenthal, “Editorial.”

¹¹⁸ Gerald Brennan, “Naked Censorship, Part II: The Beats Strike Back (the true story of

control of *Big Table* to Carroll after the first issue was published. By then, Rosenthal had moved to New York, where he began writing his own novel. He was hired by Barney Rossett (on Ginsberg's recommendation) to edit the Grove Press edition of *Naked Lunch*, which was eventually published in 1963.¹¹⁹

New York Avant-Garde

After moving to New York in 1959, Rosenthal enjoyed a peripatetic life until 1967. He made his more-or-less permanent home in Manhattan's Lower East Side, with jaunts and longer stays in Cuba, Tangier, and Greece while working on his first novel *Sheeper* which Grove Press eventually published in 1967. After his foray into the literary world had resulted in a 180-degree shift in his life trajectory, Rosenthal began keeping carbon copies and originals of all his correspondence. This archive now resides at Stanford University's Special Collections library. A 'word cloud' that was constructed from the inventory listing of his correspondents depicts Rosenthal's place in the Beat literary universe.¹²⁰

During this eight-year stretch, Rosenthal enjoyed the company of all the minor

the University of Chicago and William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*)," *Chicago Reader* (6 October 1995).

¹¹⁹ Rosenthal's involvement with *Naked Lunch* is recounted in the 2001 "restored" text version of Burroughs' magnum opus: Burroughs, Grauerholz (ed.), and Miles (ed.), *Naked Lunch: the Restored Text*. The "Editor's Note" narrates the convoluted history of the numerous versions of the novel's text, including Rosenthal's first publication of excerpts in the *Chicago Review* in 1958 as the graduate student managing editor, and his later employment by Grove Press as the book's editor. "The Grove contract with Olympia Press for *Naked Lunch* was made in November 1959. Irving Rosenthal, with Allen Ginsberg's assistance, would be Rosset's editor for the American edition." (253)

¹²⁰ See Figure 3 for the depiction of the word cloud based on the correspondence headings in the Irving Rosenthal Papers at Stanford University.

and major lights of the Beat Renaissance for whom New York City was one of the centripetal poles. Chief among this coterie was Ginsberg who developed an ongoing relationship with Rosenthal that began with their early correspondence concerning the first publication of portions of *Naked Lunch*.¹²¹ Rosenthal shared with Ginsberg the secretive lifestyle of many gay men in 1950s America. Ginsberg's poetry, however, became the beacon for a gay revolution a decade later, and Rosenthal's novel *Sheeper* was a revelation for many young gay men in the pre-Stonewall era.

Rosenthal also came under the spell of Jack Smith, the experimental filmmaker whose transgressive, infamous avant-garde classic *Flaming Creatures* became another censorship cause célèbre. Rosenthal appeared in both *Flaming Creatures* and its 1967 follow-up, *No President (or The Kidnapping of Wendell Wilkie by the Love Bandit)*. In the subsequent history of San Francisco's acid-drag queer aesthetic, there has been much speculation on the relationship between Rosenthal and Smith, himself another gay artist whose creations opened the door to gender-bending queer cinema and art. It is likely more fruitful to think of the relationship between Rosenthal and Smith as a reciprocal one. As early as 1960, Rosenthal was critiquing French Cinema. In one letter, he discussed the aesthetic intricacies of Jean Epstein's 1928 production of *The Fall of the*

¹²¹ Curiously, Rosenthal's relationship with Ginsberg took on a reverse mentor aspect. Rosenthal adopted what can only be termed a scolding, almost hectoring, tone with the older (by four years) Ginsberg. In one letter, Rosenthal accuses Ginsberg of wreaking havoc in his wake as he fled the internecine drama of the New York Beats. Rosenthal declares, "I have questions to ask you. ... Maybe accusations to make. I had a long talk with Huncke last night, who cannot make judgements, likewise Ray Bremser, but I can and always have. I think it was given to me to do so. I AM THE SCALES. For nigh onto 32 years a Libra and proud of it." See, Rosenthal to Allen Ginsberg, 11 August 1962, Box 9, Folder 8, Irving Rosenthal Papers. Ginsberg would inevitably answer these recriminations with a tone of self-deprecation. Not all of Rosenthal's targets of his judgment would react so kindly in the coming story.

House of Usher. Rosenthal described it as “one of the truly GREAT films, the source of hundreds of Cocteau effects but in the splendor of origination.”¹²² Rosenthal’s judgment demonstrates a mature visual aesthetic at least a year before he met Smith.

In 1965, Rosenthal set up a small print shop (Carp & Whitefish Press) on Suffolk Street, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, to publish works of poetry that captured his fancy. He ended up printing two volumes before the winds of destiny blew him onto the next tack of his life journey. In the fall of 1967, Rosenthal moved to San Francisco, in part on the advice of Ginsberg.¹²³ He left the print shop in the hands of Barry Bassin, a young anarchist anti-Vietnam War protester who had recently been released from Federal prison after serving a sentence for refusing induction into the military.¹²⁴ Bassin will play an important intermediary role a bit later in this history.

Return to San Francisco

It was almost inevitable that Rosenthal ended up moving back to San Francisco

¹²² Rosenthal to Dave Hazelwood, August 25, 1960, Box 10, Folder 14, Irving Rosenthal Papers.

¹²³ The date of Rosenthal’s move is in question based on evidence in his papers at Stanford. Rosenthal himself fixed the date of his move as “early October” in his tenth anniversary reminiscence. [Irving Rosenthal, “Back in 1966 I was living on the Lower East Side,” in *Kaliflower (New Series 2): The Intracommunal Infusion* 67-77 ([Free Print Shop], 1977).] However, his last savings account bank book shows a withdrawal date of November 9 1967. This discrepancy is not settled currently.

¹²⁴ Bassin appeared in the official publication of conscientious objectors starting first in 1965 with his arrest for noncooperation with the Selective Service system and continuing through the spring of 1967 with reports of his incarceration in various Federal prisons. There were also two reports of his activities in the *New York Times*, one of which described him as an “unemployed printer” who was arrested for distributing flyers protesting voting and urging “direct action” instead “to achieve results.” See “Poll Picket Arrested,” *New York Times*, Nov 3 1965; “The Court Reporter,” *News Notes of the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors*, Jan-Feb, 1966; “Draft Dodger Met By F.B.I. On Request,” *New York Times*, Aug 21 1965.

after a decade or more hiatus since he had left for graduate school in Chicago. There were several important influences that were pulling him back. Dave Hazelwood, the publisher of the Auerhahn Press in San Francisco, was one. Rosenthal considered Hazelwood to be the "publisher of the most beautiful books then being printed in America" and chose him to design the covers and inside drawings for *Sheeper*.¹²⁵ Their long series of correspondence included plans for starting a commune. The interest in communes in 1967 was at a fever pitch with the news reports about the hippies in San Francisco. Rosenthal recalled seeing the June 1967 issue of *Time* magazine which spotlighted the Haight-Ashbury scene.¹²⁶ Prominently mentioned was Morningstar Ranch, an intentional living community north of San Francisco which opened its doors to all comers and received the reputation as the Digger Farm.¹²⁷ Rosenthal was intrigued and was pulled toward this new center of bohemian culture.

One of the students whom Irving had taught in an upper-level English course at City College of New York in 1967 was the son of a Jewish rabbi. Mel Fisher (known as Mutty by his friends) had been introduced to marijuana and sex and had dropped out to head to San Francisco shortly after the Human Be-In in January 1967. At one point, Fisher returned to New York and visited Rosenthal's class to give an account of his life among the hippies. Afterwards, Rosenthal asked his students to write a piece about the class visit. He kept one of his student's papers which reads in part, "Mr. Rosenthal introduced the class to Mr. Monte . . . a 'hippy' from the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco." The essay then summarized Mutty's comments, and concludes, "The full

¹²⁵ Rosenthal, "Back in 1966..."

¹²⁶ Rosenthal, "Back in 1966..."

¹²⁷ "The Hippies," *Time Magazine*, July 1, 1967.

freedom that evolves around the life of the 'hippy,' the free meals and the rooms provided by a group called 'The Diggers' interested me."¹²⁸ It also interested Rosenthal, who would seek out the Diggers after his move to San Francisco.

Irving travelled cross-country in early November 1967 with Peter Orlovsky, Allen Ginsberg's younger life-partner, artist and poet in his own right. Orlovsky offered to drive Rosenthal in his VW camper to San Francisco. Joining them in the car was George Harris, the oldest son of a family of actors who had given their offspring a childhood ensconced in the world of avant-garde theater. Harris would later become Hibiscus and a crucial personality in this history.¹²⁹

When he arrived in San Francisco, Rosenthal was hoping to live with Dave Haselwood and undertake their plans to publish a literary magazine called *Glamorous Novelties* (Jack Smith's suggestion for the title). By the time Rosenthal finally got to California, however, Haselwood had gotten involved in a Gurdjieff study group and was no longer interested in their previous schemes. Undeterred, Rosenthal set out to locate a suitable apartment which became the nucleus of the communal experiment that he had set out to accomplish.¹³⁰

Within a few weeks, Rosenthal found a Victorian flat for rent and a landlord with whom he had an intuitive understanding despite the man's distinct prejudice against

¹²⁸ Michael J. Teatum, ca. 18 April 1967, Box 8, Folder 14, Irving Rosenthal Papers.

¹²⁹ Rosenthal, "Back in 1966...".

¹³⁰ Rosenthal had avidly communicated his and Hazelwood's shared vision of communal living. See, for example, Rosenthal to Ginsberg, 24 November, 1967, Box 9, Folder 9, Irving Rosenthal Papers. "Dave & I will set up a publishing commune bit by bit, from my part now more of a desire to give the children something better to do than shoot A, and we are going about it more secretly than Maltese Knights, and the first thing we need is hdqs., like a Victorian house."

hippies (a group of whom had trashed one of his properties).¹³¹ Over the coming months, the Sutter Street Commune, as they eventually would call themselves, took shape with the slow accretion of individuals attracted by a vision of communal living and the sense of family and shared mission that would develop. This communal bonding would eventually come to fruition in the pages of *Kaliflower*, a project the group undertook in April 1969.¹³²

¹³¹ Rosenthal, "Back in 1966...".

¹³² There is some dispute around the timing of Rosenthal's cross-country trip with Orlovsky and Harris. In the Rosenthal Papers at Stanford is a collection of postcards from Hibiscus to various people. One postcard is to Mel Fisher from Harris and the postmark is Oct. 19, 1967. Harris is telling Fisher (who is staying with Dave Hazelwood in SF) that he (Harris) will be in SF "in a few days." The dating of the postcard is crucial. The massive protest in Washington, D.C., at the Pentagon, where the young protester (whom many are convinced was Harris) was photographed placing flowers in the rifle barrel of an Army soldier, happened on Oct. 21, 1967. Another item in the same folder is a note from Bob LaVigne to "Ann" (whom I think was Ann Charters) introducing "George Harris" to her. The date of the note is Oct. 28, 1967. [See "Harris, George, ca. 1967-1979," Box 10, Folder 11, Irving Rosenthal Papers. Finally, in Rosenthal's memoir, he states that "We reached San Francisco early in October of 1967 . . . [with Peter Orlovsky driving his] brand new VW camper. ..." [Rosenthal, "Back in 1966...".]

What do I make of these disparate pieces of evidence? The date of Harris' postcard and Bob LaVigne's introductory note would indicate that the ride to SF did not happen until (at the earliest) late October. This would mean Rosenthal got the arrival date wrong. The earliest arrival would have been early November NOT October. The date of Harris' postcard and Bob LaVigne's note would also mean that Harris' appearance at the Pentagon would be entirely possible. He sent the postcard to Fisher from New York on October 19, went to Washington for the protest two days later, went back to New York and picked up the note from Bob LaVigne a week before heading to San Francisco with Rosenthal et al. However, there is another possibility. It's possible that Irving et al. did arrive in early October, and that Harris turned around and went back to New York only to return a few weeks later. There is one piece of evidence that I think is dispositive in this matter. Rosenthal kept all his New York bank books and they are in his Papers at Stanford. They show a final withdrawal in early November of \$1,490. I believe that this is strong evidence that Rosenthal was still in New York at that late date and that their arrival in San Francisco was early November, not October 1967. ["Bank Books, 1948-1967," Irving Rosenthal Papers.]

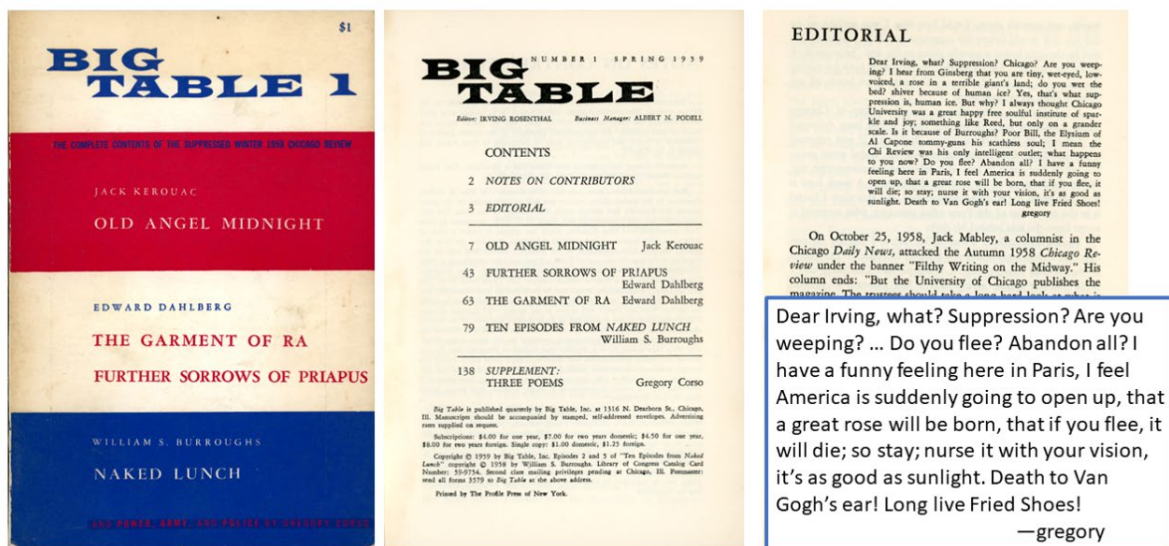
Chicago Review with Irving Rosenthal as editor



Dates: *Ten San Francisco Poets* (Spring 1958); *Zen Issue* (Summer 1958); *Naked Lunch* by William S. Burroughs (Autumn 1958)

Figure 1. *Chicago Review* with Irving Rosenthal as editor

Big Table Number 1, Spring 1959



Dates: *Big Table* (named by Kerouac) #1 the suppressed CR Winter issue, pub. Mar 1959; seized by USPS; trial results in acquittal—not obscene (J Hoffman) (Sep 1960)

Figure 2. *Big Table* Number 1, Spring 1959

Chapter Two. Revelation of Digger Do

Radical social movements can have their roots decades, and even centuries, in the past; likewise, they can leave their traces deep into the future. This is the story of the roots and traces of one such radical movement.¹³³

By the time Irving Rosenthal arrived in San Francisco in November 1967, the Diggers had been active for one full year on the streets and in the parks of the Haight-Ashbury.¹³⁴ Irving had heard first-hand stories about the Diggers from Mel (“Mutt”) Fisher, and he had read in the “hippie” issue of *Time* magazine (July 1967) about the communes that were springing up everywhere the counterculture was taking hold.¹³⁵ Having experienced communist society firsthand while visiting Cuba weeks after the Bay of Pigs invasion as a correspondent for the *Evergreen Review*, and as a staunch but disillusioned supporter of the Castro revolution, Irving now saw communes as the answer to the paradox of revolutionary impotence.¹³⁶ As soon as he got to San

¹³³ This was my epigraph for the second edition of *A Short History of the San Francisco Diggers*, FREE SERIES, (Livorno, Italy: Antinomian Press, 2022).

¹³⁴ See previous discussion on the dating of Rosenthal’s arrival in San Francisco [fn. 39 in Chapter One].

¹³⁵ From here on, first names will be used after introducing the individuals who were part of the intimate communal and inter-communal history. All others will be denoted by their surnames.

¹³⁶ In a memoir for a tenth anniversary edition of *Kaliflower*, Rosenthal wrote, “In January of 1967 I received a long, electrifying, first-hand account of the Human Be-in just a few days after it happened, and until I left New York I was kept au courant on developments in San Francisco through correspondence, long-distance telephone calls, and reports by returned visitors. I had been given copies of *The Oracle* and *Free City* gestetnered publications, and even read about the Diggers and the new hippy communes in *Time* magazine. Communes! How obvious! Why sit around waiting for the Bolshevik revolution?” (Rosenthal, “Back in 1966...”) For Irving’s accounts of his Cuban visit in 1961, see “Cuba, 1960-1962,” Box 2, Folder 4, Irving Rosenthal Papers.

Francisco, he set out to “make contact with the Diggers.”¹³⁷ Rosenthal’s pilgrimage will be taken up at the end of this chapter. But first, we need to make a detour to tell the story of the San Francisco Diggers — their rise, their influence (and influences), and their legacy. Ultimately the Diggers became a movement in the counterculture of which the Kaliflower network was one manifestation.

SF Mime Troupe: Praxis of Change

One of the critical influences in the formation of the San Francisco Digger praxis was R.G. Davis, the founder and consummate theoretician of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, founded in 1959.¹³⁸ The experiences that many of the original Diggers took from their involvement with the Mime Troupe were the foundation for the idea of “life acting” in the service of social change. In his 1966 essay “Guerilla Theatre,” Davis called for theater collectives to:

- teach
- direct toward change
- be an example of change

In a nutshell, this is the definition of “lifestyle as change agent” — the contribution of the Sixties counterculture to social protest history. Later feminist theory would propose that “the personal is the political” — in some ways a reformulation of Davis’s concept of

¹³⁷ Rosenthal, “Back in 1966....”

¹³⁸ I am using the term “praxis,” as defined by Nonini, to mean “theoretically informed action.” Donald Nonini, “Praxis,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 40, no. 3 (2016). This encompasses actions aimed at achieving a range of liberatory ends, from the traditional Marxist goal of working-class liberation to the Digger/Bioregionalist aim of fostering sustainable ecological relationships within the boundaries of a local biome. Thus, praxis merges theory with practice, serving as a vital bridge between ideological commitment and tangible outcomes.

guerrilla theatre.¹³⁹

Artists Liberation Front: Celebration as Community

Mime Troupe members were arrested at a publicly staged event in August 1965 after their permit to perform in the parks was revoked by the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Commission for alleged obscenity. The resulting events to support the troupe galvanized the new hip community of artists and social outcasts. At a symposium where Ronnie Davis lambasted the arts establishment, longtime radical poet and gadfly Kenneth Rexroth gave a speech that would inspire the formation of the Artists Liberation Front, a group of working artists who planned a series of Free Fairs in the fall of 1966. The ideas behind the Free Fairs and the Artists Liberation Front (ALF) are significant. They represented the first stirrings of the neighborhood arts movement. Their influence on the San Francisco counterculture then emerging was profound. The Free Fairs became the first joyous outdoor communal celebrations, one of the most important symbols of the counterculture. The Free Fairs inspired the Love Pageant Rally in October 1966, which itself was the inspiration for the Human Be-In in January 1967. The Be-In became the model for similar gatherings worldwide, the most famous of which occurred two years later in New York at a farm in upstate New York near Woodstock.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ R. G. Davis, "Guerrilla Theatre," *Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 4 (Summer 1966), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1125214>. See also Davis's retrospective memoir: R. G. Davis and with an introduction by Robert Scheer, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe: the first ten years* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Ramparts Press, 1975). A film about the San Francisco Mime Troupe can be found here: https://diggers.org/sf_mime_troupe.htm.

¹⁴⁰ For the story of the Artists Liberation Front and most importantly the role of Kenneth Rexroth in its formation, see Noble, "The Artists Liberation Front."

Barbara Wohl, one of three people responsible for organizing the Free Fairs, described the Artists Liberation Front:

It was an extension, for the most part, of the very kind of loving tender attitude that people had toward each other then. I haven't seen it since. It was just that short bubble of time. If you weren't there, you don't even believe it happened. I didn't articulate it to myself at the time, but what the point of the fairs was, was not to have artists displaying their works, finished products, but to have the supplies there so people could make their own art.... That was the basic idea of the fairs. It is not someone coming to observe his picture, but where whoever happened to walk up and see the paints could become the artist and do his thing, make his own art, be a participant. This was meant to be, and is, a very political thing. It was the beginning of this burgeoning toward not passively allowing the government to go on with the war.... This erasing of the difference between the performer and the performed upon was the real nitty gritty of that, the politics of the whole thing.¹⁴¹

The Digger Papers: Counterpoint to Ecstasy

In early Fall of 1966, two members of the San Francisco Mime Troupe who had been involved in the series of Artists Liberation Front planning meetings that summer began mimeographing and distributing street sheets with messages for the new community that was coalescing in the Haight-Ashbury (months before any national attention hit America's newsstands). At the suggestion of a member of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) who shared an office in the Mime Troupe's studio, Emmett Grogan and Billy Murcott adopted the name DIGGERS after the 17th century English radicals who had protested the early stirrings of capitalism in the form of the enclosure movement by moving onto the nearby commons and planting their crops to be shared

¹⁴¹ Noble, "The Artists Liberation Front."

freely with all, abolishing money along with all buying and selling as part of their living utopia. Gerrard Winstanley, one of the 17th century English Diggers, had written the group's manifestos, which outlined their beliefs and principles: "This work to make the Earth a Common Treasury, was shewed us by Voice in Trance, and out of Trance, which words were these, Work together, Eat Bread together, Declare this all abroad.... Know this, that we must neither buy nor sell; Money must not any longer (after our work of the Earth's community is advanced) be the great god, that hedges in some, and hedges out others."¹⁴²

The street sheets that Grogan and Murcott distributed on Haight Street in 1966 were instantly dubbed "Digger Papers" in the underground press. Their aim was to challenge what some were calling the "new bohemians."¹⁴³ As an anonymous Digger told the *Berkeley Barb*, the message was aimed at "showing the gap between psychedelica and radical political thought."¹⁴⁴

The Diggers had objected when the Artists Liberation Front debated allowing booths to sell food and other goods at the Free Fairs. Ultimately all buying and selling was banned at these proto-tribal gatherings. The early Digger Papers carry some of the themes that would become synonymous with the Digger message: rejecting Establishment norms; questioning all forms of authority and conformity; and creating new spheres of autonomy (personal and communal). In addition to these early

¹⁴² For an account of the naming of the San Francisco Diggers, see Grogan, *Ringolevio*. For their 17th century forebears, a good start is "The English Diggers (1649-50)," 1994, accessed June 1, 2024, https://diggers.org/english_diggers.htm.

¹⁴³ For an example of the early use of the phrase "new bohemians," see "Haight-Ashbury Meets Police," *S.F. Oracle*, September 20, 1966.

¹⁴⁴ "Burocops Proboscis Probes Digger Bag," *Berkeley Barb*, October 21, 1966.

broad­sides, there are several notices and articles that appeared in the *Berkeley Barb* that document these nascent days.¹⁴⁵

Hunter's Point Uprising: Community Under Siege

On Tuesday, September 27, 1966, a white policeman fatally shot Matthew "Peanut" Johnson, a Black teenager in the Hunter's Point neighborhood of San Francisco, after the officer suspected the car he was driving had been stolen. Within a few hours, crowds of young men gathered and began confronting the police, who were dressed in riot helmets and carrying shotguns on the streets of the predominantly Black neighborhood. All night long, pitched battles with the police took place, with the crowds throwing bricks and Molotov cocktails, breaking windows, setting fires, and looting stores. The police response was massive cordons of officers firing into the crowds. Dozens of arrests took place. The street confrontations between citizens and police spread into the Fillmore district across town, and Mayor John Shelley ordered a curfew until 6 a.m. The next day, California Governor Edmund Brown ordered the National Guard to patrol the streets of three San Francisco neighborhoods. The Haight-Ashbury, coterminous with the Fillmore district, was included in the occupation order.

¹⁴⁵ A Berkeley Barb article that reported on the daily free feeds was the first description in the underground press of the series of street sheets that Grogan and Murcott produced in Fall 1966. "Everyone was relaxed. Words were used to sparkle eyes, break mouths into smiles, letters into tongued vibrations and meaning in-coherent. The DIGGER PAPERS reflect this kind of atmosphere. They're mimeographed sheets with words jammed onto them and DIGGERS hand them out once or twice a week on Haight street around six o'clock. Nobody seems to know who writes them, but most agree that the DIGGERS are behind autonomy." ("Delving the Diggers," *Berkeley Barb*, October 21, 1966.) The byline for this article was "by George Metesky," which in a letter published in *Innerspace* magazine in December 1966 was acknowledged as one of the pseudonyms used by the elusive Diggers. Grogan would later write about his fascination with the real life Metesky, infamous mad bomber of New York.

Five hundred National Guardsmen patrolled the streets of the city for six days until the emergency abated.¹⁴⁶ During this week, residents of the Haight-Ashbury differed in their responses. Many merchants urged cooperation with the police. Students for a Democratic Society urged confrontation. The Diggers advised people to ignore the curfew and passed the word that free food would be served to all comers in the Panhandle, a sliver of Golden Gate Park adjacent to Haight-Ashbury.¹⁴⁷

Free Food Daily: Bring Your Bowl and Spoon

The act of offering free food in the form of Digger stew every day at 4pm in Haight-Ashbury's version of the "English commons" was an electrifying event in late September/early October 1966. Quickly, the movement snowballed. As one of the later Digger Papers put it:

And so, six months ago you watched two guys bring a milk can full of turkey stew into the panhandle and start the diggers. two weeks later free food in the panhandle at four o'clock was advertised in the berkeley barb and it never missed a day. somebody asked: Why free food? and anyone answered: free clothes. the first free store opened in a six car garage on page street and it was small and the crowd knew each other and someone had written winstanley on the door and then the rains came and the roof fell in, the landlord was harassed by the police and said please ... and someone said it was nice while it lasted. And the diggers grew.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ The *San Francisco Chronicle* published daily articles during the National Guard occupation. The first was "Riots in S.F.--Guard Called," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 28, 1966.

¹⁴⁷ "Burocops Proboscis Probes Digger Bag."

¹⁴⁸ See "About Time We Started Doin' Our Own Livin' and Dyin'," (San Francisco: Communication Company, April 20, 1967), Broadsheet, CC-032a, The Digger Archives. https://diggers.org/bibcit_fulltext_SQL.asp?bib2=35.

The Panhandle is a strip eight blocks long by one block wide filled with lush lawns, towering eucalyptus trees, open playgrounds, and walking paths; it forms the northern border of the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. As soon as the Diggers started serving free daily meals at the corner of Oak and Ashbury in the fall of 1966, the Panhandle became the new community's gathering place, like the central plaza of a Spanish pueblo or the Boston Commons during the American pre-revolutionary era. In subsequent months, the Panhandle hosted a variety of communal events. The Diggers brought flatbed trucks and set up the first outdoor music celebrations featuring the plethora of neighborhood bands such as the Grateful Dead, whose members lived in a communal household on Ashbury Street three blocks away. The Parks Department, after numerous run-ins with the new denizens of the neighborhood, sponsored a "chalk-in" where budding artists left dozens of transient psychedelic designs (including the first use of the term "flower power") on the concrete walkways. A Digger-sponsored candlelit poetry reading protesting the war in Vietnam embodied both the anger that many young people felt but also the joy that this new counterculture embodied.¹⁴⁹

Free Stores: It's Free Because It's Yours

Within weeks of the first Free Feeds in the Panhandle, the Diggers rented a six-car garage a block away on Page Street. The garage contained dozens of picture frames,

¹⁴⁹ These three examples offer a sense of the importance the Panhandle played in the development of the new community in the Haight-Ashbury. "Angels Join the Hippies for a Party," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 2, 1967; *Candle Opera*, (San Francisco: Communication Company, Ca. April 15, 1967), Broadside, CC-158, The Digger Archives. <https://www.diggers.org/bibscans/cc-158-m.jpg>; "Free Art, Free Play -- Free Fair," *Berkeley Barb*, October 21, 1966.

which inspired the Diggers to construct a twelve-foot square frame of loose 2x4s. Painted bright orange, it became the first prop the Diggers used in their street theater — all comers at the Free Feeds had to step through the “Free Frame of Reference” to partake of that day's stew “changing their frame of reference as they did.”¹⁵⁰ The name also stuck for the garage after the Diggers turned it into the first Free Store, where all items were free for the taking. No buying, no selling.¹⁵¹

Within weeks, City Hall, in the guise of the Department of Building Inspection, closed the Free Frame of Reference free store. Undeterred, the Diggers opened two more in the coming months.¹⁵² The longest lasting incarnation was known as Trip Without a Ticket, located at Cole and Carl Streets in the upper Haight. This was where street survival classes took place for new arrivals in the youth mecca. This was where the first free medical services were offered by local doctors and nurses who became enamored with the Digger ideal. This was where the first tie-dye lessons, which transformed clothing styles for a generation, took place. By the time this third Free Store closed its doors, dozens of communes had sprung up in the Bay Area, many of which replicated the Free Store concept with a communal room open to anyone passing through. Decades later, Free Boxes outside natural foods and other stores continue to proliferate in counterculture niches from Santa Cruz, California, to Burlington, Vermont. Full blown Free Stores continue to operate in the 2020s, especially in low-income areas across the country.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 250.

¹⁵¹ "Diggers New Game: The Frame," *Berkeley Barb*, November 4, 1966.

¹⁵² "Free Frame 2 Has Everything But a View," *Berkeley Barb*, January 6, 1967.

¹⁵³ The first mention of the third and longest lasting Digger Free store appeared in "On Taking a Trip Without a Ticket," *Berkeley Barb*, March 24, 1967. An announcement of free

One of the best-known free stores was the Black People's Free Store. Roy Ballard, a long-time Black civil rights activist in San Francisco, collaborated with the Diggers in the early months of 1967 and opened the first free store in the Fillmore district in June. It was an immediate success and continued for several years, eventually becoming host to a medical clinic and community center. Roy's vision of the role of free stores as reparations for the legacy of slavery is still an acute indictment of American society.¹⁵⁴

Digger Event Cycle: Create the Condition You Describe

One of the early Digger Papers states, "The relationship between poetry and revolution has lost its ambiguity. Gregory Corso's poem POWER was the sole reason behind the concept of the Diggers: autonomy. The issue is no longer the status of an American minority, but the status of America. The Diggers are a rebellion against commodities and the hierarchy of commodity values.... Create alternatives. Turn people onto their own creative powers. The public is any fool on the street and power is standing on a street corner waiting for no one."¹⁵⁵

survival classes at the Trip Without a Ticket free store: "Survival School | How to Stay Alive on Haight Street," (San Francisco: Communication Company, 1967), Broadside, CC-004, The Digger Archives. https://diggers.org/bibcit_fulltext_SQL.asp?bib2=4. For an example of how free stores spread throughout the counterculture, see "Free Store," *The New Yorker* (October 14, 1967). The Kaliflower Commune, similar to the Diggers, turned free stores into high theater, using the term "garbage yoga" to valorize the practice. See, for example, "The Garbage Yoga Institute has opened ...", *Kaliflower* 2, no. 48 (March 25, 1971). For an example of a free store with current operations, see "Charitable Union reopening its free store," *Marshall Advisor and Chronicle* (Marshall, MI), June 6, 2020. The Free Store section of the online Digger Archives is at https://diggers.org/free_store1.htm.

¹⁵⁴ Glide Memorial Methodist Church published an issue of its in-house magazine devoted to Roy Ballard and the free store he founded: "The Black People's Free Store," *Venture*, August, 1967. The section of the online Digger Archives devoted to the Black People's Free Store is at https://diggers.org/black_peoples_free_store.htm.

¹⁵⁵ "Term Paper," (San Francisco: San Francisco Diggers, 1967), Broadside, DP-018, The

Over the course of two years on the stage of public awareness, the Diggers choreographed a cycle of public events in San Francisco. The working model for a Digger event was: “Life acts! Acts that can create the condition of life they describe!”¹⁵⁶ The condition the Diggers were describing first and foremost was the impulse to “create alternatives” and to “turn people onto their own creative powers” — which for the Diggers was the definition of autonomy. Later anarchist theory would give a fancy name to this idea of “life acts” as “creating the condition” of alternative social relations. In anarchist theory, “prefigurative politics” is the imperative to replicate ultimate social ends in everyday practice. For example, if your aim is a non-hierarchical society, then you structure your current practice to reflect non-hierarchical relations.¹⁵⁷

Starting with The Intersection Game on Halloween, October 31, 1966 — barely a month after the first Free Feed in the Panhandle — Digger events created public spaces for acting out individual visions within a collective autonomy. The flyer for this first event described the “game board” as the intersection of Haight and Masonic streets. A

Digger Archives.

¹⁵⁶ “Free City Bloodlight,” in *The Digger Papers* (New York; San Francisco: Paul Krassner; Free City Collective, 1968).

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, David Graeber, “The New Anarchists,” *New Left Review* 13 (January-February 2002), The Anarchist Library: <http://theanarchistlibrary.org>. In his account of Occupy Wall Street, Graeber’s summary of that movement sounds like a close parallel to the Digger experiment. Under the heading “The embrace of prefigurative politics,” Graeber stated, “As a result, Zuccotti Park, and all subsequent encampments, became spaces of experiment with creating the institutions of a new society — not only democratic General Assemblies but kitchens, libraries, clinics, media centres and a host of other institutions, all operating on anarchist principles of mutual aid and self-organisation — a genuine attempt to create the institutions of a new society in the shell of the old.” David Graeber, “Occupy Wall Street’s Anarchist Roots,” *Aljazeera.com* 30 Nov, 2011, (<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/2011112872835904508.html>).

diagram showed an intersection with lines connecting all the corners. The object of the game was to “complete all designs within [the] diagram” including “lesser triangle, greater triangle, double triangle, square.” Various styles were suggested for the Intersection Game: “umbrella step, stroll, cake-walk, sombersault [sic], finger crawl, squat-jump, pilgrimage, Philly dog, etc.”¹⁵⁸ The Diggers brought their twelve-foot-tall “Free Frame of Reference” to the intersection of Haight and Ashbury after the free feed that All Hallows’ Eve. Immediately, a crowd gathered. The *Berkeley Barb* reported what happened next:

Two large puppets appeared, each about 8 feet high and operated by two men. There followed an ad lib puppet play called, “Any Fool on the Street,” dealing with the “Frame of Reference,” like which side was which, which “inside,” which “outside,” and so on. ... Next came the game of “Intersection,” where everyone tried to make as many polygons as they could by crossing the intersection in different directions. Some people got off passing buses and left their cars to view the game and join in, while others looked through different people’s Frames of Reference at the unfolding scene. By 6:00 there were about 600 people distributed around the intersections, lots of Berkeleyans among them. There were kids with jack-o’-lanterns, Halloween costumes and trick-or-treat bags. A lot of people walked in and out of the big Frame of Reference and all around it. Suddenly five police cars and a paddy wagon sirened their way into the intersection, blocking it completely, and the fuzz started redirecting traffic. One hippy looked at the massed police vehicles and remarked, “It kinda creates a road-block, doesn’t it?”

Maybe it was a Halloween hex or a ghostie-goblin spell, but at that point the police started talking to the puppets and the puppets answered them! The fuzz told the puppets that they were creating a

¹⁵⁸ The Diggers, “Public Nonsense Nuisance Public Essence Newsense Public News,” (1966), Broadside, DP-002, The Digger Archives. https://diggers.org/digger_sheets.htm.

public nuisance by walking in and out of the Frame of Reference, and that if they continued they would be arrested.

Cop: "We warn you that if you don't remove yourselves from the area you'll be arrested for blocking a public thoroughfare."

Puppet: "Who is the public?" Cop: "I couldn't care less; I'll take you in. Now get a move on." Puppet: "I declare myself public — I am a public. The streets are public — the streets are free."

The puppets then walked on, whereupon the cops grabbed them and the puppeteers under them and arrested them. They threw the puppets and five of the Diggers in the paddy wagon. ... About 200 people outside the wagon started booing, then chanted, "FRAME — UP, FRAME — UP!" The Diggers inside responded with "PUB — LIC, PUB — LIC!" Some of the chanters on the outside looked through their frame mandalas and switched to "CHECK YOUR FRAMES OF REFERENCE!"¹⁵⁹

The theme of creating public space for acting out individual and collective autonomy ran through the whole cycle of Digger events, always with the project of creating alternatives to the American mass consumer and capitalist economy. From 1966 to 1968, the Diggers choreographed a dozen public spectacles. These, along with the daily food events, the free stores, and the Digger Papers would create the condition that gave rise to a social movement. "Digger Do" was the term that encompassed this vision.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Diggers, "Public Nonsense Nuisance."

¹⁶⁰ The following is a list of the most visible moments in the year-and-a-half span of the Digger cycle of public spectacle: The Intersection Game (October 31, 1966); Death of Money Parade (December 17, 1966); New Year's Wail (January 1, 1967); The Invisible Circus (February 24-26, 1967); Gentleness in the Pursuit of Extremity (April 2, 1967); Summer of Love Solstice (June 21, 1967); Death of Hippie / Birth of Free (October 6, 1967); End of the War (November 5, 1967); Noon Poetry Forever (Spring 1968, City Hall steps); Free City Convention (May 1, 1968); Summer Solstice 1968 (June 21, 1968).

Autonomy Redux: “Do Your Own Thing”

As the Digger street sheet “Term Paper” stated somewhat simplistically: “Gregory Corso's poem POWER was the sole reason behind the concept of the Diggers: autonomy.” The term appears in Digger literature throughout the two-year span of their street publishing. The first article (written anonymously by Emmett Grogan) in the *Berkeley Barb* described the Digger Papers and noted that “nobody seems to know who writes them, but most agree that the DIGGERS are behind autonomy.”¹⁶¹ That was in October 1966. Two years later, on the steps of City Hall, the Diggers announced “A Modest Proposal,” which included five recommendations, one of which read, “that all foodstuffs & materials in surplus not accounted for in current welfare distribution be returned to the people for redistribution free through ten **autonomous** neighborhood free stores whose rent shall [be] paid by the city.”¹⁶² [Emphasis added.] Grogan illustrated the idea of autonomy in his description of the Free Store. If someone asked “to speak with whoever was in charge of the operation they were told, ‘You're in charge! You wanna see someone in charge? You be in charge!’” Grogan cited this as an

Peter Berg explained the concept of “Digger Do” in an interview: Alice Gaillard and Celine Deransart, *Les Diggers de San Francisco* (France: La Seine/Planete, 1998), Film (16-mm); Videocassette, 84 min. Berg explained, “Mutualism, sharing, all of those ideas, are corrupted when the only basis for the social contract is money. So, an alternative to money is a necessary and good thing in my mind. How to bring that about, it was obvious to me that we couldn't get from ‘money’ to ‘no money’ without a step in between. So, in the revolution to create a mutualist society, there had to be an introduction of this idea. From my perspective, all of the ‘Digger Do,’ I called it — was to create this perspective.” For a description of the “Death of Money Parade,” see “Trip Without a Ticket” in *The Digger Papers*, (San Francisco: Free City Collective, 1968).

¹⁶¹ “Delving the Diggers.”

¹⁶² “A Modest Proposal,” (San Francisco: Free City Collective, April 25, 1968), Broadsheet. <http://www.diggers.org/freecity/freenews1.html>.

example of the Digger “concept of assuming freedom.”¹⁶³

The Diggers coined a phrase that succinctly expressed their concept of autonomy. In the early manifesto “Trip Without a Ticket” (published anonymously as an eight-page booklet) is the following sentence: “The Diggers are hip to property. Everything is free, **do your own thing.**”¹⁶⁴ [Emphasis added.] That phrase “do your own thing” would become a common expression in the counterculture and eventually it would enter the American lexicon.¹⁶⁵ Not only has the Digger phrase been widely adopted, but it has also come under a barrage of criticism over the years. For example, an article in a religious journal recently equated “do your own thing” with “expressive individualism” and noted that it “captures the largest ideological shift in America during the twentieth century” and undermines the Christian message.¹⁶⁶

What is important in this discussion is to understand the original intent behind the Diggers’ “do your own thing” — autonomy that was individual AND collective in

¹⁶³ Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 249.

¹⁶⁴ Peter [Anon.] Berg, “Trip Without A Ticket,” (San Francisco: Communication Company, 1967), Booklet, CC-177, The Digger Archives.

¹⁶⁵ As an example of the widespread adoption of the phrase, here is a quotation from Jay Van Andel, the billionaire co-founder of Amway, “We decided to use the idea of free enterprise—of the small businessman being able to go off on his own. We believed then, and we still do, that this is the heart and soul of the American ideal—to make your own way. You can start your own business, whether a fruit stand, a farm or whatever, and **you can do your own thing** in life.” [Emphasis added.] Melinda Cooper, “Family Capitalism and the Small Business Insurrection,” *Dissent*, Winter, 2022, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/family-capitalism-and-the-small-business-insurrection/>. Appearance of the phrase in the *New York Times* began in October 1967 in a letter to the editor commenting on a previous article about hippies. Subsequently, the phrase first appears in advertisements, such as one in 1968 for the men’s clothier Hart Schaffner & Marx. (“Display Ad,” *New York Times*, March 14, 1968, 19.)

¹⁶⁶ Jonathan Parnell, “Church Discipline and Expressive Individualism,” *9Marks* (March 18, 2022), <https://www.9marks.org/article/church-discipline-and-expressive-individualism/>.

nature. In 1981, at a conference of Bay Area collectives, Judy (Berg) Goldhaft gave a talk about the Diggers. Her explanation of “do your own thing” captures the original intent:

The structure of how the Diggers worked might be interesting to people. It's always obvious what people are good at doing. "Do your own thing" means: do what you're good at doing and go ahead and do it. So when we were planning to do something, there were one or two people who had an idea and said, "Let's do this." Other people would provide their input, and the original idea would expand. The Diggers were leaderless in general, but whoever was good at doing something or who had an idea for doing something became the leader for that project.¹⁶⁷

Communication Company: Instant News Service

In December 1966, the Diggers held their second public spectacle, the Death of Money Parade on Haight Street, which featured a coffin with “black shrouded messengers holding staffs topped with reflective dollar signs.”¹⁶⁸ Two Hells Angels happened upon the street event and joined in. After one of the Diggers rode on the back of an Angel motorcycle and stood waving a sign with the word “NOW” down Haight Street, the police arrested her and the two Hells Angels. The Diggers subsequently organized a march to the local police station, where they proceeded to raise bail money. In appreciation, the San Francisco chapter of the Hells Angels decided to throw a party for the Diggers. The event, “New Year's Wail,” took place on January 1, 1967, in the Panhandle. From that moment on, there was a close relationship between the two groups.¹⁶⁹ During the all-day celebration, two recent arrivals on the scene took notice of

¹⁶⁷ Curl, *History of Collectivity in the San Francisco Bay Area*, 33.

¹⁶⁸ Berg, “Trip Without A Ticket.”

¹⁶⁹ The ongoing relationship between certain individuals in the Diggers and the Hells Angels would make for an interesting detour but is not germane to this history.

the Digger ethos and became inspired to launch an instant news service for the Haight-Ashbury. They called it the Communication Company.¹⁷⁰ Their first street sheet announced their aims, among which was “to print anything the Diggers want printed ... to be outrageous pamphleteers.”¹⁷¹

The collective members (there were a total of five) of the Communication Company fashioned themselves the publishing arm of the Diggers. Their record of broadsides, manifestos, leaflets, and street sheets leaves us a rich slice of the Summer of Love and of Digger praxis as it played out on the streets of Haight-Ashbury during the first eight months of 1967. Many of the 700+ street sheets (most published anonymously except for the “Com/Co” imprint, which would always be appended to each publication) came from the Diggers themselves; others were penned by the elder statesman of the Communication Company collective, Chester Anderson, himself a Beat Movement survivor from North Beach and Greenwich Village who gravitated to the new scene in the Haight.

Anderson later wrote a short history (and how-to manual) about the Communication Company and how the Diggers had inspired its commitment to Free.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ For a description of the New Year’s Wail event, see Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: a history* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 74.

¹⁷¹ Claude Hayward and Chester Anderson, “The Communication Company, Haight/Ashbury, Our Policy,” (San Francisco: Communication Company, 1967), Broadside, CC-001, The Digger Archives. https://diggers.org/bibcit_fulltext_SQL.asp?bib2=1.

¹⁷² Chester Anderson, “The Revolutionary Gang,” *Chicago Seed*, May 1, 1970, 9. Anderson recounted, “That first weekend my partner and I composed and ran off a few dozen one-page flyers, very heavy on the aesthetics as befit the temper of our psychedelic subculture ... proclaiming our existence and policy. (That same weekend we taped a charismatic 4-hour Digger rap about freedom, which hooked us completely and pretty much established our policy for us.)”

The printing operation included two Gestetner mimeograph machines that had been obtained on credit through Hayward's employment at *Ramparts* magazine. The Communication Company was perhaps the first truly underground news operation when the equipment itself became surreptitious fugitives after non-payment of the monthly installment charges.¹⁷³ Everything (or nearly everything) the Communication Company printed was free of charge. If someone overheard a rumor of an upcoming bust, or had a good lead on free food, or wanted to announce a poetry reading, Com/Co's roving reporters would rush at a moment's notice back to the commune where the Gestetners were kept. Within a short time, a new street sheet would appear, distributed by the volunteers who used telephone and electrical poles as their community bulletin board.¹⁷⁴

The Summer of Love: News Gets Out

Backing up a bit in terms of chronology, on Tuesday, November 15, 1966, San Francisco police officers working the Vice Squad arrested the store clerk at the Psychedelic Shop on Haight Street for selling copies of a book of poetry by Lenore Kandel, a longtime member of North Beach bohemian society. The title of the poems was *The Love Book* and this event became known as The Love Book Bust. Subsequently,

¹⁷³ Linn House: "Somebody took all this stuff [Free City News sheets] to Gestetner and said, 'We've created an art form, using your machines, and what you should do is give us this machine that we're hiding out from you.' And they wouldn't hear of it. This machine was hot, all the time it was being printed on. ... They were being moved from basement to basement." Linn House and Ivory Waterworth, "Interview by the Scott Street Commune," March 9, 1973, https://diggers.org/linn_house.htm.

¹⁷⁴ See the interview with Claude Hayward in Kristine McKenna and David Hollander, *Notes From a Revolution : Com/co, the Diggers & the Haight* (Santa Monica, Calif: Foggy Notion Books, 2012), 43. The Virtual Communication Company Archives are at <https://diggers.org/Communication-Company-Archives/index.html>.

the police arrested the owner of the Psychedelic Shop as well as a store clerk at City Lights Bookstore on the grounds that *The Love Book* was obscene. The case became the longest running criminal trial in San Francisco history to that point. The new community that had migrated to the Haight-Ashbury was outraged by the ongoing harassment of the police and City Hall, which, it seemed obvious, were determined to rid San Francisco of this fringe subculture before things really got out of hand. By this moment in late 1966, LSD usage had become common among the “new bohemians” (as some would continue to call them — the term “hippies” had only recently been used). Members of the new community called for a meeting to band together to resist this onslaught by the Establishment. The result was a meeting that included some of the new “hip” merchants, artists, publishers, writers, and representatives of collective groups — including the Diggers — and some of the neighborhood rock groups like the Family Dog and the Grateful Dead. Using the eponymous title of Lenore Kandel's poetry book, this group of new leaders proclaimed the coming season to be the “Summer of Love” and set about inviting the world to their doorstep.¹⁷⁵

As soon as some of the members of the “Council for a Summer of Love” began

¹⁷⁵ For a sampling of the dozens of articles in the San Francisco Chronicle from the first arrest through the trial, see “6 Professors in Search of the Obscene,” *San Francisco Oracle* (San Francisco), Dec 16 1966; “3 Enter Pleas in ‘Love Book’ Case,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb 9 1967; Donovan Bess, “Another ‘Love Book’ Arrest Here,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Nov. 17, 1966; Donovan Bess, “‘Love Book’ Jury Is Sworn In,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Apr. 28, 1967; Donovan Bess, “Final Pleas on ‘Love Book’ — Jury Gets Case Today,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 26, 1967; Donovan Bess, “‘The Love Book’ As a Primer: Defense Plan,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Apr 29 1967; Donovan Bess, “A Minister's Wife Praises ‘Love Book’,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 13, 1967; Donovan Bess, “Jury Finds ‘Love Book’ Obscene,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 27, 1967. For an account of the Love Book Trial, see Eric Noble, “Love ... Another Four-Letter Word: the 1966 Love Book raids and subsequent events” (San Francisco State University, History Department, 2016).

predicting the imminent arrival of thousands of young people to the Haight-Ashbury, the Mayor and the city establishment reacted in horror. One headline read “Hippies Warn S.F. / Huge Invasion” in the March 22, 1967, issue of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. A later edition changed the headline to read: “Police Chief Warns Hippies.” This began a sustained assault by the police and bureaucrats that continued daily and weekly throughout the summer, into the fall and winter, and even into the next year. All the while, the Diggers continued serving up “Digger Do,” the term that Peter Berg coined to denote their action-oriented ideology.

Eventually, the scene in the Haight imploded and became a burned-out shell of its former self. The combined pressure of the thousands of young people who made the pilgrimage to Haight-Ashbury that Summer of Love — and at the same time, the relentless arrests and harassment by the Establishment — forced a retreat. Just as the Diggers had jumped off the stage of the Mime Troupe onto the streets to carry out their agit-prop theater, now there was a pulling inward. Hundreds of communes formed in the ensuing months and much of the counterculture action went indoors.¹⁷⁶

The Movement Expands: Free Bakeries, Free Clinics, Free City

The thing about social movements is that they can take on the characteristic of an avalanche that starts with a snowball cascading downhill and picking up energy and

¹⁷⁶ The first report of the predicted arrival of thousands of hippies is "Huge Invasion, Hippies Warn S.F.," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 22, 1967. The Communication Company reprinted both the original article and the subsequent reaction by the Chief of Police: "Huge Invasion | Hippies | Warn S.F.," (San Francisco: Communication Company, March 22, 1967), Broadsheet, CC-119a/b, The Digger Archives. https://diggers.org/bibcit_fulltext_SQL.asp?bib2=134; "Wednesday March 22, 1967 | Police Chief Warns | Hippies," (San Francisco: Communication Company, March 22, 1967), Broadsheet, CC-120a/b, The Digger Archives. https://diggers.org/bibcit_fulltext_SQL.asp?bib2=136.

mass from its gravity. That is what happened with the Digger Movement.

One Saturday in June 1967, an engineer and his wife from Palo Alto, who had read about the Diggers, brought 400 lbs. of whole wheat flour to the All Saints Church on Waller Street. The prelate of the church had become inspired by the Digger idea and gave over his office to a group of "street Diggers" who had set themselves up as one wing of the growing movement. Installed in the kitchen of the church were two large ovens. The Palo Alto couple, Walt and Ruth Reynolds, offered to teach the Diggers how to bake whole wheat bread. There were no baking trays, so Walt suggested using one- and two-pound coffee cans, which became the trademark identity of Digger Bread. The Reynolds were adamant about using ONLY whole wheat flour for the baking, and their passion for whole grains quickly found a receptive audience throughout the Haight and the larger counterculture (as evidenced by numerous articles and recipes in underground newspapers). Free bakeries sprang up during the coming years and decades wherever young people gathered. One of the most renowned was the God's Eye Bakery at Resurrection City in 1968 at Martin Luther King Jr.'s last crusade, the Poor People's Campaign in Washington, D.C., where Walt and Ruth and a group of volunteers set up a large tent, daily baking hundreds of loaves of whole wheat bread in the signature coffee cans.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ The first mention of the Free Bakery appeared in "Bake-In Spreads Joy in Haight," *Berkeley Barb*, June 30, 1967. A subsequent article has a photograph of Walter Reynolds as he is mixing dough: "Lots of Bread for Fun and Free," *Berkeley Barb*, July 7, 1967. A third article reports that the baking is taking place twice a week, and three if enough donations of supplies materializes: "Lots of Bread's Good For All," *Berkeley Barb*, July 14, 1967. The "Scenedrome" section of the *Berkeley Barb* contained subsequent weekly notices advertising the Digger free bakery at the All Saints Church. For example: "FREE BAKERY: bakers needed (free bread), Wed. & Sat, 9am on; All Saint's Church, 1350 Waller, SF, info 362-6374, spons Diggers." (*Berkeley*

Meanwhile, at the Free Frame of Reference (#2) and subsequently at Trip Without a Ticket, the second and third Digger free stores, a group of interns and doctors had come together to volunteer their services for the young people who were gravitating to the Haight. From this nexus emerged the Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinic, founded by a doctor on staff at the University of California San Francisco Medical School. The Free Clinic became an instant success and longstanding institution. Dr. David Smith, founder of the Free Clinic, recalled the inspiration he derived from the Diggers. "The Diggers set the philosophical tone. It was absolutely fascinating to watch them and hear them speak. They would give talks and pass out the food and present their philosophy. Many of us, including myself, had never heard of a philosophy like that. It was a very interesting experience. It certainly changed my life. Free was not just an economic term. We didn't charge at the point of providing care, but it was also a philosophical term. Free of bureaucratic entanglements. The philosophy that health care

Barb, August 4, 1967, 15). News of the Digger Free Bakery spread throughout the counterculture and articles appeared in the underground press around the country, inspiring similar operations based on the Digger idea. One of the Diggers at All Saint's Church was Mary McClain. She wrote a scathing letter to the editor of the *Los Angeles Free Press* excoriating a previous article that extolled the Summer of Love in San Francisco. McClain warned of the dangers and difficulties awaiting any young person intent on a pilgrimage to the city that summer. In the course of her letter, she gave a status report on the Diggers, including the operation of the free bakery. Mary McClain, "SF Scene Uncool," *Los Angeles Free Press*, September 8, 1967.

The Resurrection City incarnation, known as the God's Eye Bakery, is recounted in "H'Ash Baker Feeds Poor People's City," *Berkeley Barb*, June 14, 1968. A history of the various Digger free bakeries is told here: "Digger Bread & The Free Bakery (ies)," The Digger Archives, 2018, accessed 4 Mar 2019, 2019, <http://diggers.org/diggers/digbread.html>. An account of the free bakery at Resurrection City by Ángel L. Martínez, including photographs, is here: "The Story of God's Eye Bakery: The Diggers at Resurrection City (Memories Passed on to Me)," The Digger Archives, 2021, accessed 2024-07-27, <https://diggers.org/resurrection.htm>.

is a right, not a privilege — which in the United States at that time was very controversial and radical statement.”¹⁷⁸ The idea that the Free Clinic promoted — health care as a right not a privilege — became the working motto of Free Clinics ever since.

In the summer of 1967, the Diggers gave away their last, final, possession — their name. Henceforth, they called themselves Free City.¹⁷⁹ One of the last events that the Diggers (under that name) created was the Death of Hippie in October 1967. This was an attempt to discard a word that had been invented by the mass media.¹⁸⁰ The full

¹⁷⁸ The segment with Dr. David Smith, starts at timecode 44:31 in Gaillard and Deransart, *Les Diggers de San Francisco*.

¹⁷⁹ The story is told in Free City Collective, "The Birth of Digger Batman (in The Digger Papers)," *The Realist*, August, 1968. A copy in the online Digger Archives is here: <https://diggers.org/digpaps68/birthdig.html>

¹⁸⁰ The Diggers objected to the term “hippie” as a creation of the mass media. “Hippie” had first appeared in print associated with the jazz music scene in San Francisco. Ralph Gleason, the *San Francisco Chronicle* music critic, reported a conversation with a disillusioned jazz musician in 1957: “Later that night, at the coffee joint, the other hippies are laying down a lot of trash about long lines of improvisation, augmented chords and dissonance. But the cool cat just keeps saying ‘Man, they didn’t reach me.’ And that’s what bugs me.” (Ralph Gleason, “Indubitably Perturbable, Those Harpin’ Hippies,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jul 11 1957.) Another of the regular *Chronicle* columnists, Herb Caen (famous for his “three dot journalism”), wrote in 1960, “Still thinks it makes no difference who conducts an orchestra? You ought to, if you haven’t, hear the S.F. Symphony under Pierre Monteux, playing their hearts out ten miles over their heads. As the hippies would put it, what a crazy sound! [...]” (Herb Caen, “Sanfranciscaena,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 19, 1960.)

Even though the term had been in print for a decade, a series of articles in the *San Francisco Examiner* by Michael Fallon in September 1965 is the earliest appearance in print when the new residents of the Haight-Ashbury were introduced as “hippies.” The term stuck for a whole generation. “Haight-Ashbury is the City’s new bohemian quarter for serious writers, painters and musicians, civil rights workers, crusaders for all kinds of causes, homosexuals, lesbians, marijuana users, young working couples of artistic bent and the outer fringe of the bohemian fringe — the ‘hippies,’ the ‘heads,’ the beatniks.” Fallon’s articles ran over four days: Michael Fallon, “A new paradise for Beatniks,” *San Francisco Examiner*, Sept 5 1965; Michael Fallon, “Are ‘Beats’ Good Business?,” *San Francisco Examiner*, Sep 8 1965; Michael Fallon,

name of the event was “Death of Hippie and Birth of Free.” One of the Digger street sheets explained the intent:

MEDIA CREATED THE HIPPIE WITH YOUR HUNGRY CONSENT.
BE SOMEBODY. CAREERS ARE TO BE HAD FOR THE
ENTERPRISING HIPPIE. The media cast nets, create bags for the
identity-hungry to climb in. Your face on TV, your style immortalized
without soul in the captions of the Chronicle. NBC says you exist, ergo I
am. Narcissism, plebian vanity. ...¹⁸¹

The Digger vision, which had loosely been “Free Street,” now expanded into the vision of FREE CITY — which included not just Haight-Ashbury but many other of San Francisco's unique neighborhoods: the Mission, Fillmore, Chinatown, Castro, Potrero Hill, Noe Valley. The Free City Collective life-actors, looking to expand their performance space, brought their “Digger Do” to the stage of the larger urban context with a series of events before their public exit — the Free City Convention; Noon Poetry Forever on City Hall Steps; and the Spring Equinox and Summer Solstice celebrations.¹⁸² These were the cycle of events that the Free City Collective created in 1968 to put forth a more inclusive, communal energy. Free Feeds in the Panhandle morphed into the “Free Food Home Delivery Service,” which brought scrounged fruits and vegetables from the

"Bohemia's New Haven," *San Francisco Examiner*, Sep 7 1965; Michael Fallon, "New Hip Hangout--The Blue Unicorn," *San Francisco Examiner*, Sep 6 1965.

¹⁸¹ "October Sixth Nineteen Hundred and Sixty Seven," (San Francisco: Free City Collective, October 6, 1967), Broadside. https://diggers.org/free_city_misc_sheets.htm.

¹⁸² By 1968, there were at least three underground newspapers that reported on the Diggers/Free City events on a regular basis. The *Berkeley Barb* had been the first underground paper to cover the Diggers in 1966. The *Los Angeles Free Press* followed in 1967. The *San Francisco Express Times* began publication in January 1968, just in time to cover the final cycle of Digger activity.

Produce Market to the communes that formed the Free City network.¹⁸³ One of the groups that ended up on the delivery route was the headquarters of the Black Panthers in Oakland. David Hilliard, chief of staff of the Panthers, describes in his autobiography how the Diggers inspired the Panthers' Free Food and Breakfast for Children programs.¹⁸⁴ The Free Food Home Delivery Service also was a model for the formation

¹⁸³ The following announcement of the Free Food Home Delivery Service is evidence that the Digger mission had evolved from serving the street to creating an intercommunal mutual aid network: "Free Food ... every morning delivered to your commune. It's Free Because It's Yours | Give your address and the number of people in your commune to the behind the counter cousin at the Psychedelic Shop." ["Free Food Is Good Soup," in *Free City* (San Francisco: Free City Collective, 1967).] Grogan, in Ringolevio, gives an account of the new food program. See Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 440.

¹⁸⁴ David Hilliard described the encounter between the Black Panthers and the Diggers: "Emmett Grogan sticks his head in the office. Emmett is the founder of the Diggers, a tribe — that's what some radicals call their groups — who organize the 'street people' of the Haight into revolutionary activity. A few weeks ago, Emmett left off some bags of food his group distributes to the runaways, draft resisters, and freaks who have flocked to Berkeley, turning the town into the nation's counterculture capital. We told him to put the stuff outside the office: in a few minutes people were flocking by, stocking up on onions and potatoes. Now Emmett donates the food regularly. ... One day [Bobby Seale, Chairman of the Black Panther Party] enters the office after Emmett has left off bags of beans and rice. 'Damn, this is a good idea,' he says. 'We should do this. ... we should establish it. Every day. A Free Food Program. Get contributions from the local businessmen and put together packages. Help people survive.'" Hilliard described how, "One aspect of our strength is that we're starting new programs. We begin a program called Breakfast for Children, collecting donations of food and supplies from local merchants and offering hot meals in St. Augustine's Episcopal Church under the auspices of a Party friend named Father Earl Neil. The program grows naturally from our new lives — Emmett Grogan's free food baskets, the need now to feed our own kids, our desire to show the community we do something more than shoot it out with cops. We call the program a 'survival' program — survival pending revolution — not something to replace revolution or challenge the power relations demanding radical action, but an activity that strengthens us for the coming fight, a lifeboat raft leading us safely to shore. Plus, the program helps organize people into the Party and provides members with something to do other than worrying about when they're going to off a pig. Bobby talks of initiating many free programs, helping the old people cash their checks, giving medical aid, providing education, all the necessities people do without."

of the Bay Area's first Food Conspiracy, which was a key moment in the genesis of the natural food movement.¹⁸⁵

In late summer 1967, some Diggers forcibly appropriated the Gestetner equipment that had been used to produce the hundreds of Communication Company (Com/Co) street sheets.¹⁸⁶ The Free City Collective used these machines to create Free City News, which supplanted the Com/Co operations. The hard-edge editorials and black and white productions typical of Com/Co were replaced by a larger (8-1/2" x 14") format, colorful designs, and more poetic pronouncements. The final publication of the Free City Collective was a twenty-four-page pamphlet that contained an anthology of Digger writings which they titled *The Digger Papers*. The Diggers struck a deal with Paul Krassner, the editor of *The Realist*, to use the anthology of writings as the entire content of the August 1968 issue of *The Realist*; in exchange, Krassner printed 40,000 copies with a separate cover page for a FREE edition which the Diggers handed out at a massive poetry reading in June. The Digger Papers would become a blueprint for future social

David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993).

¹⁸⁵ The story of the Food Conspiracy, and its connections to the Free Food Home Delivery Service, is elaborated in chapter five.

¹⁸⁶ Charles Perry describes the Digger takeover of the Communication Company equipment in Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (New York: Random House, 1984), 122, 40. Chester Anderson wrote a final street sheet detailing the takeover and his plans for a "communication company in exile" in which he explained the split that had taken place. See Chester Anderson, "Hippy Siamese Twins Split (Haight/Ashbury Newsletter 8/19/67)," (San Francisco: Communication Company, March 22, 1967), Leaflet, CC-265, The Digger Archives. https://diggers.org/bibcit_fulltext_SQL.asp?bib2=308. In conversation with Anderson, he divulged, "Claude stole the equipment and took it to the basement of the Free Store at Cole/Carl. Chester stole the equipment back, took it to Corte Madera. Then Emmett and friends, at gun point, took the equipment to Pine Street." "Chester Anderson, Memcon with Eric Noble, May 27, 1976."

movements, specifically the Kaliflower intercommunal network.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ *The Realist*, Issue 81 (August 1968) was simply titled *The Digger Papers*. Other than the cover page, the remaining twenty-three pages were exactly the same as in the FREE edition of 40,000 copies that Diggers distributed. The *Realist* cover page had one critical piece missing from the FREE edition — “Memo to the Reader”:

When Time magazine decided to do a cover story on the hippies last year, a cable to their San Francisco bureau instructed researchers to “go at the description and delineation of the subculture as if you were studying the Samoans or the Trobriand Islanders.”

Thus were they supposed to remain—a frozen fad for posterity.

But a few months ago, police rioted on Haight St. Next day, at a town hall meeting in the Straight Theater, the spectrum of reaction ranged from “Let’s have another be-in” to “We gotta get guns!” A compromise was reached: bottles painted Love were thrown at the cops.

And yet, the question remains—What is being defended?

This issue of the *Realist*, therefore, has been created entirely by The Diggers, in an attempt to convey the flavor and feeling-tone of a revolutionary community.

An inadequate list of the brothers and sisters whose work is represented in this document:

Antonin Artaud, Richard, Avedon, Billy Batman, Peter Berg, Wally Berman, Richard Brautigan, Bryden, William Burroughs, Martin Carey, Neil Cassidy, Fidel Castro, Don Cochran, Peter Cohon, Gregory Corso, Dangerfield, Kirby Doyle, Bill Fritsch, Allen Ginsberg, Emmett Grogan, Dave Hazelwood, George Hermes, Linn House, Lenore Kandel, Billy Landout, Norman Mailer, Don Martin, Michael McClure, George Metesky, George Montana, Malcolm X, Natural Suzanne, Huey Newton, Pam Parker, Rose-a-Lee, David Simpson, Gary Snyder, Ron Thelin, Rip Torn, Time Inc., Lew Welch, Thomas Weir, Gerard Winstanley, and Anonymous.

The contents herein are not copyrighted. Anyone may reprint anything without permission. Additional copies are available at the rate of 5 for \$1. The Diggers have been given 40,000 copies to spread their word: free. (Free City Collective, “The Digger Papers,” *The Realist*, August, 1968.)

Passing of the Dharma

We now can return to the story of Irving Rosenthal. When Irving arrived in San Francisco in the fall of 1967, in the midst of the cultural revolution taking place in the Haight-Ashbury, he set out to find the Diggers, but to no avail. He complained to Allen Ginsberg, who then supplied a list of contacts, including Lenore Kandel, poet laureate of the Haight Ashbury, and Allen Cohen, editor of the *San Francisco Oracle*. The former could offer no help, and Cohen was on his way out of the city, as were others on Ginsberg's list. It seemed to Irving that the show was shutting down just as he made his big entrance. Then, one day while Irving was walking with Ginsberg in Golden Gate Park, they ran into Peter Berg.¹⁸⁸ Ginsberg made the introductions. As soon as it became

A full transcription of *The Digger Papers* is available at the online Digger Archives, along with a collection of Free City publications: https://diggers.org/free_city.htm. The film "NOWSREAL" which the Diggers produced during the Free City event cycle is accessible at: <https://diggers.org/newsreal.htm>. A PDF of *The Digger Papers* (1968) is available at: https://diggers.org/diggers/digger_papers_1968.pdf. Irving Rosenthal encapsulated the historical view of the final Digger statement: "The Digger Papers, which came out in late summer 1968, is a document that cannot be praised enough. It is the epitome of Digger idealism, and the last act that should be required of any actors on the stage of history: a final summary written by themselves." (Rosenthal, "Back in 1966...".)

¹⁸⁸ Irving Rosenthal wrote about this episode in a memoir that he contributed to a tenth anniversary edition of *Kaliflower*:

As soon as I arrived in San Francisco in October, I walked around the Haight, trying to make contact with the Diggers — to no avail. I wanted to live and die with them, whoever they might be. But I couldn't find one. I complained sadly to Allen Ginsberg, who was in town for a few weeks, and he scribbled some names and addresses on a paper napkin. I went to see Allen Cohen at the Oracle office. He was just resigning the editorship and about to leave town. I went to see Lenore Kandel. She was polite, but had no information or advice to give me. A couple of others on my list had already left town. Everything seemed to be closing down, and no one seemed interested in my

known that Irving had been the editor of *Big Table 1*, a publication which “had apparently meant something to a number of them,” doors that had previously been closed flew open.¹⁸⁹

The Diggers had just published the first set of a dozen multi-colored legal-sized sheets simply titled “Free City” (alerting the world to their new project).¹⁹⁰ The sheets contained several manifestos of prophetic announcements (“San Francisco to be the first Free City on the planet by end of ‘68 or middle of ‘69 by the latest”); reflections on the state of the counterculture (“The Underground Press Syndicate is a self-indulgent bore & rigged-up bullshit fraud”); a recipe for a “fire bomb” (aka Molotov cocktail); a listing

interest. I had the terrible feeling of having rushed across the country to make the last showing, and entered the auditorium just as the last few members of the audience were leaving.

One afternoon, when Allen G. and I were walking through Golden Gate Park, we bumped into Peter Berg, to whom Alan introduced me. From that point on I was a “somebody,” and came into direct touch with the waning Digger energy in San Francisco. Little by little our commune was visited by most of the Digger family left in the City. I was identified as the man who had edited *Big Table I*, a magazine that had apparently meant something to a number of them. Free produce started to be delivered to our commune — arranged through Richard Brautigan, who was like their poet laureate.

¹⁸⁹ Recall that the Digger broadside “term paper” had named Gregory Corso’s poem “POWER” as “the sole reason behind the concept of the Diggers: autonomy.” Rosenthal had solicited Corso’s poem for the Winter 1958 issue of the *Chicago Review*. After the University of Chicago banned that issue, Rosenthal quit and included the censored pieces, including Corso’s poem, in *Big Table 1*. Rosenthal’s account of the censorship incident appears in Rosenthal, “Editorial.”

¹⁹⁰ The publication of Free City Set #1 was reported in the *Berkeley Barb*: “‘Free City,’ the San Francisco Diggers free newspaper-magazine-rap sheet, is due to hit the streets at any moment. A pre-release copy of the multi-color Gestetner publication reached BARB’s hands.” (“FREE!,” *Berkeley Barb*, September 29, 1967.)

of free resources in San Francisco and elsewhere; poetry ("Here Lies Bob Dylan / murdered from behind by trembling flesh ..."); a paean to long hair; an "enumeration of erotic postures" (87 in number along with Egyptian hieroglyphs); an excerpt from the original English Diggers song "Stand Up Now"; and an anonymous philosophical treatise done in the inimitable style of one of the original Diggers ("The Road of Excess Leads to the Palace of Wisdom"). On the reverse of the latter sheet was an announcement for the new Digger free food program — but with a twist. The "home delivery service" was for communes only.¹⁹¹ Through the good graces of Richard Brautigan, Beat poet laureate who had been collaborating with the Diggers over the previous year, Irving got his new commune signed up for the weekly delivery of fruits and vegetables.¹⁹² At that point, the Sutter Street Commune was pulled into the Digger orbit.

Over the coming months of 1968, the commune would have numerous points of involvement with Free City. Mutty at some point took over driving the truck that was used for the Free Food home delivery service. Irving described how Mutty at one point was discouraged because it seemed that most of the recipients of free food were couples, not communes. Irving encouraged him to drop anyone he thought not deserving and add groups that were.¹⁹³ From the Spring Equinox through the Summer Solstice of 1968, the Free City Collective choreographed numerous events, the main one consisting of daily noontime rallies on the steps of City Hall, where various scenes took

¹⁹¹ This is referenced in footnote 183.

¹⁹² Rosenthal, "Back in 1966...".

¹⁹³ Rosenthal, "Back in 1966...".

place under the bemused eyes of office workers and police.¹⁹⁴ At one of these “City Hall Steps / Noon Forever” gatherings, two of the Diggers, David Simpson and Vinnie Rinaldi, took Irving aside and asked about the print shop he had left back in New York on the Lower East Side. They mentioned that it would surely be useful to have a free print shop for the Free City. The upshot of this serendipitous conversation was that Irving agreed to the proposal. Rinaldi went to New York, where he purchased a station wagon and rented a trailer to bring the Carp & Whitefish printing equipment to Sutter Street.¹⁹⁵ The commune set up the equipment in the basement of 1869 Sutter, one of the three Victorian flats they occupied. In August 1968, the Free Print Shop published a three-color split-fountain design announcing that “Sutter Street Commune Invites You to Submit Manuscripts Drawings Manifestoes to Our Free Print Shop. Free distribution guaranteed for whatever we print.” The psychedelic design with what appeared to be stylized dragonflies was printed on silk paper with a beaded string for wall hanging.¹⁹⁶

The effect that the Diggers had on Irving’s social philosophy can be seen in some of his correspondence from 1968. In February, prior to any extensive contact with Free City, he sent a letter to Barry Bassin, who was caretaking the Carp & Whitefish print shop on Suffolk Street. Irving laid out the list of equipment pieces and wrote, “Sell the

¹⁹⁴ Much of the footage that the Diggers filmed in 1968 was scenes from the City Hall Steps gatherings and can be seen in Free City Collective, “NOWSREAL,” (1968). <https://diggers.org/newsreal.htm>.

¹⁹⁵ Rosenthal recounts this turning point in the following: Rosenthal, “Back in 1966...”; [Irving Rosenthal], *Deep Tried Frees (Kaliflower N.S. 3)* ([Free Print Shop], April 30, 1978). Recent research discoveries have turned up photographs from the cross-country trip that Rinaldi made with the Carp & Whitefish press equipment.

¹⁹⁶ “The Sutter Street Commune Invites You to Submit Manuscripts ...”, (San Francisco: Free Print Shop, August 1968), Broadside. https://diggers.org/fps_catalog_annot.htm.

print shop complete if possible to a non-commercial group for 3 grand.”¹⁹⁷ He made a list of all the pieces of equipment that were to be advertised separately (in case there was no buyer for the whole shop). Two months later, in late April, Irving again wrote back to Bassin with instructions for moving the print shop lock stock and barrel to Sutter Street.¹⁹⁸ In another letter, he alerted David Gurin that an “S.F. Digger” (“or to be more accurate, Free Citizen”) was on his way to bring Irving’s shop back to San Francisco and asked if Gurin would help oversee the operation.¹⁹⁹ We can date Irving’s conversion to the Digger ideology from this period. Digger Free philosophy would infuse all of the commune’s projects, starting with the Free Print Shop.

The Intercommunal Explosion of Digger Do

The January 7, 1969, issue of *The San Francisco Express Times* contained an article by Marjorie Heins, a recent anthropology student, who had recently arrived in San Francisco. Heins quoted from the anthropologist Edward Sapir and from *The Digger Papers* to theorize on the state of the counterculture. Her conclusions were not hopeful. In what seems like a sense of regret for having missed the main action, she wrote wistfully:

Free City was a very ambitious attempt to make new ways of living viable through communal food distribution, housing, garages, news services, stores and treasuries. These economic foundations were based on an updated Marxist dictum: “Every brother should have what he needs to do his thing.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Rosenthal to Barry Bassin, February 6, 1968, in Irving Rosenthal Papers.

¹⁹⁸ Rosenthal to Barry Bassin, April 23, 1968, in Irving Rosenthal Papers.

¹⁹⁹ Rosenthal to David Gurin, April 21, 1968, in Irving Rosenthal Papers.

²⁰⁰ Marjorie Heins, “Who’s Going to Collect the Garbage?,” *San Francisco Express Times* (January 7 1969).

Then she reported, “Scant months since the appearance of the *Digger Papers*, Free City has disappeared.” This article was written just as the Sutter Street Commune was about to embark on a project that would weave together a network of hundreds of communes with the vision of Free City that Marjorie Heins thought had disappeared.

The following three chapters chart the outcomes of this series of interactions between the Diggers (as Free City) and the Sutter Street Commune. A particularly fruitful creation was the Angels of Light Free Theatre, which provided communal performances to the growing network of communes that received the weekly hand delivered issues of *Kaliflower*. Another outcome, through personal contact and free printing services, was the collaboration with the first gay liberation organization in San Francisco, the Committee for Homosexual Freedom, whose history of public protests preceded the New York City Stonewall rebellion by several months. Finally, the last chapter will deal with the Free Food Family, which represented the coalescing of dozens of *Kaliflower* communes that set up an all-inclusive food network to supply everyone’s needs. The end of this experiment represents an end to this story of the internetwork of communes in San Francisco, and in an odd parallel, to the Sixties Counterculture in general.

Coda: Celebrate and Protect the Commons

Before we move on to the “Acts” of Free, it would be prudent to consider a factor that has been overlooked in the story of the Haight Ashbury as the incubator of the Sixties Counterculture. That factor is the importance of the Panhandle in this history. That eight-block long strip of green that defined the boundary of the Haight was for the San Francisco Diggers what St. George’s Hill was for the 17th Century English Diggers. As the English Diggers moved onto St. George’s Hill in 1649 just at the moment when

English aristocracy was enclosing the commons lands, so too the 20th Century Diggers turned to the Panhandle at a moment when it had barely escaped a similar fate. In March 1966, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors (the equivalent of City Councils elsewhere) had finally defeated a plan to build an eight-lane freeway through the Panhandle to connect with the Golden Gate Bridge. The plan had been brewing for two decades and would have destroyed this expanse of open space within a dense residential neighborhood.²⁰¹

As part of the “Great Freeway Revolt” in San Francisco, a neighborhood citizens’ group based in the Haight-Ashbury had formed and vociferously opposed the Panhandle Freeway at every turn. Arrayed against big business, big labor, and the state highway engineers with their elaborate maps that depicted San Francisco crisscrossed with concrete veins every which direction, the dedicated group of Haight-Ashbury citizens deserve — at the least — a plaque to commemorate their steadfastness.²⁰²

²⁰¹ The history of the fight to stop the construction of freeways in San Francisco encompasses decades of actions by citizen neighborhood groups. The local newspapers contained numerous articles reporting on the movement. The final decision to stop the Panhandle Freeway took place on March 21, 1966. Mel Wax, “Freeways Defeated: Panhandle, Golden Gate Voted Down, 6-5 — Huge Crowd Cheers,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 22, 1966.

²⁰² The term “great freeway revolt” comes from Harold Gilliam, the famed environmentalist and longtime *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist. He documented the nationwide movement that began in San Francisco in the mid-1950s in opposition to the ambitious plans to crisscross San Francisco with freeways, including the Panhandle Freeway: Harold Gilliam, “S.F.’s Freeway Revolt,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 13, 1964. One of the neighborhood activists who was most responsible for the success in defeating the Panhandle Freeway was Sue Bierman. She is seen in a photograph from a protest in April 1964 wrapping strips of orange crepe paper around the 200+ trees slated to be demolished for the freeway. “Anti-Freeway Rally in Panhandle,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 5, 1964. In 2001, a memorial grove at the western end of the Panhandle was dedicated to Bierman, who later was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

If the Board of Supervisors had not turned down the Panhandle Freeway by one vote in March 1966, the state would have fenced off the Panhandle in preparation for digging a trench 170 feet wide the length of the eight-block greenspace. The Digger free feeds would not have happened. The first flatbed rock concerts that the Diggers organized would not have happened.²⁰³ The Panhandle was the commons where the new community first gathered in a free space, outside the confines of commercial venues. The Panhandle was the catalyst for a sense of communal exuberance and communal self-recognition. Numerous similar public commons contributed to the development of the Sixties Counterculture, such as the Polo Field in Golden Gate Park (Human Be-In, January 1967), Sheep Meadow in Central Park (the New York Easter Be-In, March 1967), Tompkins Square Park in New York City's Lower East Side, Griffith Park in Los Angeles, the Boston Commons, Berkeley's Provo Park and People's Park, Max Yasgur's Dairy Farm (Woodstock Music Festival, 1969). Open commons and public spaces are where the Sixties Counterculture emerged.

²⁰³ A fair question might be — why would the Digger gatherings not have taken place elsewhere such as Golden Park or Buena Vista Park? The answer is accessibility and centrality. Both locations are two or three times the distance from the Digger's garage on Page Street, but more importantly lack vehicle access. The Panhandle was the Haight's natural gathering spot.



Figure 5. Origins: English Diggers (1649)



Figure 6. Digger Ideology as TEXTS

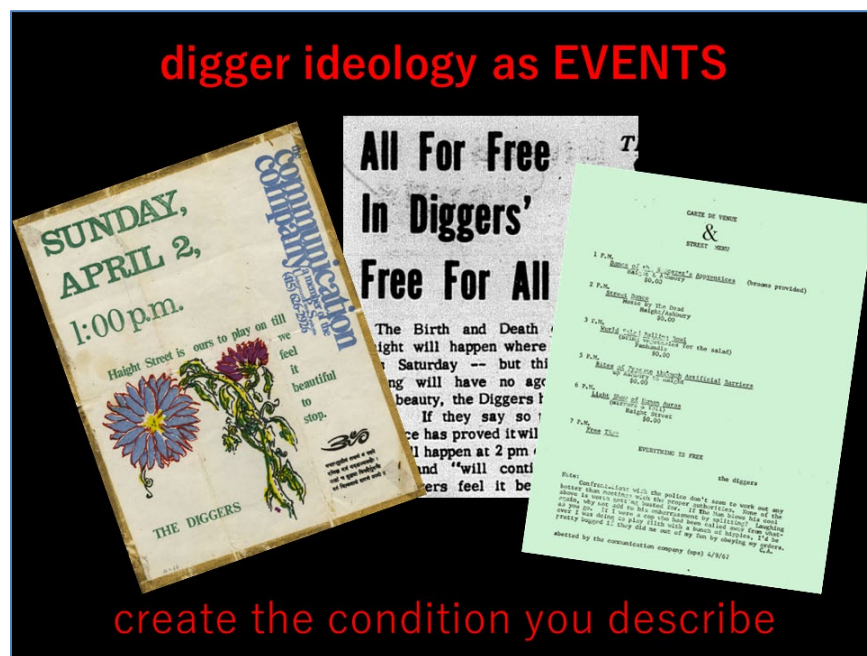


Figure 7. Digger Ideology as EVENTS

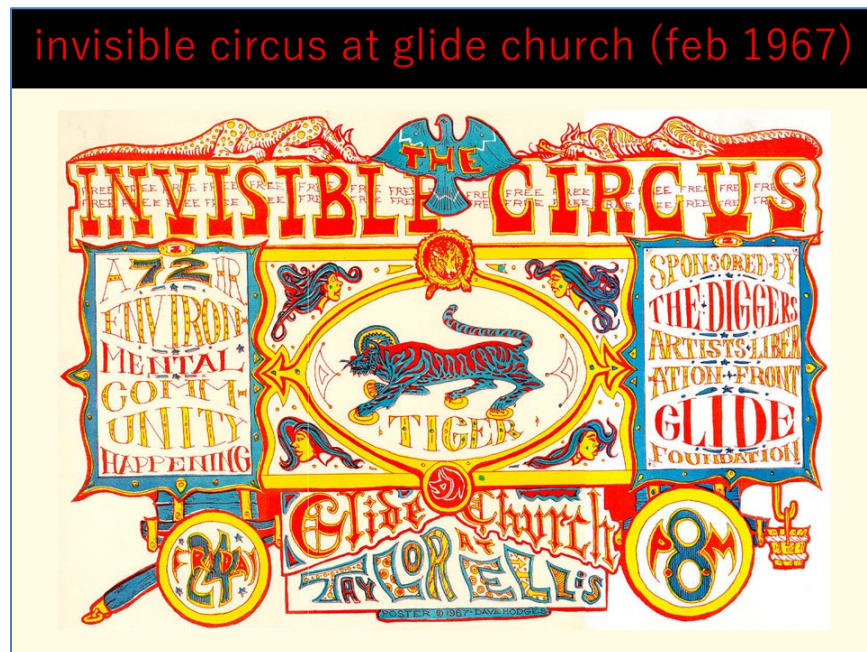


Figure 8. Invisible Circus at Glide Church (Feb 1967)



Figure 9. Digger Free Food Home Delivery Service (1967-68)



Figure 10. Free City (1967-68)

Chapter Three. Psalms of the Angels

Spawned in the sixties, we ate neck-soup out of tin-cans in the Panhandle prepared by the Diggers; were clothed in their Free Stores, fed on the manna of their ideas, that gloriously, we could exist without cash, sharing our treasures with everyone.

—*Jilala's Invocation*²⁰⁴

The Angels of Light Free Theatre brought the magic of the Kaliflower communal lifestyle to the stage, blending an LSD-infused queer aesthetic with the radical social vision of the San Francisco Diggers. Hibiscus served as the inspirational flame for the troupe, his energy drawing dozens—then hundreds—into his orbit, becoming the nucleus around which theater took form. The pages of *Kaliflower* were instrumental in the early development of the Angels, as the feedback from a communal audience helped transform free theater into a vehicle for social and cultural change.

In his memoir of life with the Angels of Light, Walter Fitzwater described the first time he met the troupe and visited one of their communal houses in 1972. Walter and his friend Jeremy had recently arrived in San Francisco from Florida. After hearing

²⁰⁴ James Tressler, "On The Angels of Light," *White Crane* (Fall 2008): 22. The full quotation by James Tressler (a.k.a. Jilala or JET) is: "In any culture there are aesthetic secrets, evidences of what seems to pass as an alien or spiritual event. We cannot explain these always and sometimes refer to inspiration or actual religious experience to communicate to subsequent generations what happened. We, the first whole generation fueled by Lysergic Acid and magic mushrooms, began to transform our every aspect, clothing, food, literature, music and clearly, theatre into tenets of a new religion, invented by us for us. Spawned in the sixties, we ate neck-soup out of tin-cans in the Panhandle prepared by the Diggers; were clothed in their Free Stores, fed on the manna of their ideas, that gloriously, we could exist without cash, sharing our treasures with everyone. Not signing our egoless masterpieces was a start. The early Platos of San Francisco in the late 60's, imagining a Free City, created the template we were following — heavenly and practical solutions for Earth's final day."

about the Krishna Festival in Golden Gate Park, they decided to attend. Walter dressed in flowing robes with his face painted blue in the style of Krishna (he had been reading the Bhagavad Gita).²⁰⁵ At the festival, Walter dances wildly to the rhythm of the chanting. His ecstatic abandon draws him into the circle of the Angels, and they invite him to come home and spend the night. At one point, Michael Ruby, one of the commune members, describes who the Angels are:

“We are The Angels of Light, a theatre commune that is part of a larger group of hippy communes in the city.”

This is fascinating; I have a faint idea of what he is talking about, but not totally. I have read science fiction, but hell, this is for real. “How do you guys manage?” I venture to ask.

Ruby explains, “We contribute together. There is a food commune and many other houses with wonderful names like Hunga Dunga, the Fell Street boys, the Rio Nido group at the Russian River, and quite a few more.” He goes on for a while when I interrupt him, “So, is there a main house?”

“The main house is Kaliflower, where Irving lives.” Adding, “He is the main man, Irving Rosenthal.”

He tells me that most of the rules come from him and that this guy is the guru. Wow! How exciting, our guru. I want to know a little more. “When did this get started?”

“There is a monthly magazine the Kaliflower commune publishes, which tells you all its ideas and history. You should pick it up and read some.” He adds.

²⁰⁵ The Fifth International Hare Krishna Festival and Parade, July 16, 1972. See *Berkeley Barb*, July 14, 1972, 22. Jilala’s footage of the event (at which Walter, with face painted blue, met the Angels) is at <https://vimeo.com/574070374/58caeab24f?share=copy>

"I will do that. Where can I get one?"

"They have them in most commune houses. It doesn't stay here long.
We're not big readers. . . ." ²⁰⁶

This chapter will cover the early history of the Angels of Light Free Theatre. The early breadcrumbs in their history are scattered throughout the pages of *Kaliflower* where Hibiscus, Jilala, and Ralph drew and penned their visions. One of the crucial functions of *Kaliflower* was the instant feedback that came "through the bamboo tube."²⁰⁷ The comments the Angels received on their performances mark the evolution of their theatrical style. After *Kaliflower* ended publication in 1972, this crucial evidence of intercommunal feedback is missing. The later history of the troupe, up until their final shows in 1984, can be found in published newspaper stories and memoirs.²⁰⁸ This

²⁰⁶Walter De Jesus Fitzwater, *Memoirs From An Angel: Angels of Light*, ed. An Goldbauer (Burrow's Bees Pandemic Zoom: The Digger Archives, 2024), Chap. 4.

²⁰⁷ The plywood boards that held each week's issue of *Kaliflower* hung in a communal space (usually the kitchen). This is where a deliverer would hang the current issue with the clothes pins that were attached to the board. These were the "Kaliflower Boards" that the Sutter Street commune initially constructed for each commune receiving the newspaper. At the bottom edge of the board was a six-inch length of hollow giant timber bamboo. Any messages meant to go back to *Kaliflower* would be rolled up and inserted inside the bamboo. This is where the phrase "reply through the bamboo tube" originated. See, for example, "Somewhere Over the Rainbow: Up North Communes," *Kaliflower* 1, no. 10 (June 26, 1969).

²⁰⁸ Aside from newspaper items, there are at least three memoirs of the Angels of Light — one published and two unpublished. The only published account that has appeared is *Flights of Angels* by Adrian Brooks, which is considered by most people with first-hand knowledge to be quite lopsided in its outlook. For one thing, Brooks did not arrive on the scene until 1974, four years after the first Angels performance. Despite this late arrival, Brooks is touted as a "charter member" of the troupe in reviews of his memoir. Adrian Brooks and Daniel Nicoletta, *Flights of Angels: My Life With the Angels of Light* (Vancouver, Canada: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2008).

Another memoir is by Tahara, who has posted several hundred pages on Facebook over a decade. Tahara was one of the original Angels of Light. The third memoir, by Walter Fitzwater, is "in the process of finding a publisher." Walter joined the Angels in 1972.

particular history will focus on how the idea of the Angels of Light first burst forth from the intersection of queer aesthetic and Digger Free. The hope is that this history will give an accurate picture of the ideas and influences that gave birth to the Angels of Light as well as recounting the early chronology. The ideology behind an Angels show may not have been obvious in the glitter of the performances, dances, songs, costumes, and sets on stage. But ideas set the world in motion, and that is what I am attempting to uncover.

For anyone who has never experienced an Angels of Light show, the visual spectacle must be seen either in the rare footage we have or in the mind's eye. An Angels of Light performance contained its own language of form, color, and queer identity. Angels of Light shows combined surrealist imagery, improvisation, and a dazzling aesthetic inspired by the Ballet Russe, psychedelics, and Eastern spirituality. Nudity, sequins, cardboard sets, and handmade costumes transformed stages into kaleidoscopic worlds of fantasy, challenging audiences to rethink the boundaries of performance, identity, and community. Their performances transcended mere entertainment to become acts of communal expression and defiance. Figure 26 lists the videos that we have from Jilala's footage, which he shot with his Super 8 film camera. Immerse yourself in the fast-paced camera work to get a sense of the anarchic, creative, and ecstatic transgressive energy the Angels conjured for their audiences.²⁰⁹

Life Acting ("Create the Condition You Describe")

The epigraph for this chapter comes from a piece Jilala wrote.²¹⁰ As a young

²⁰⁹ See Figure 26 for a listing of Angels of Light video recordings.

²¹⁰ James Tressler was one of the early members drawn to the Sutter Street Commune in 1967. He later took the nom de theatre of Jilala and is also known as J.E.T.

hippie working for the Post Office as a mail carrier, Jilala lived in the Haight Ashbury and became enthralled with the Diggers after they mysteriously appeared ladling free homemade stew to all comers in the fall of 1966. Jilala ended up helping to cook for the Diggers in his kitchen on Shrader Street.²¹¹ The food would then be brought to the Panhandle, where everyone was invited to “bring your bowl and spoon” every day at four o’clock.²¹² In the epigraph, an excerpt from Jilala’s enigmatic history of the Angels, he gives credit to the Diggers for bequeathing Free to the subsequent iterations of the counterculture that adopted the stricture of no buying and selling, the root of the intercommunal society that grew up around *Kaliflower*. The Angels of Light were progeny of that inheritance.

Aside from Digger Free, though, there was another important theoretical tool the Diggers contributed. This is their concept of “life acting” as a prescriptive for a social movement’s program. Peter Berg, one of the original Diggers, explained the concept of “life acting” in a filmed interview for the French documentary *Les Diggers de San Francisco*. Peter read an excerpt from “Trip Without a Ticket,” one of the foundational Digger texts:

The Diggers are hip to property. Everything is free, do your own thing. Human beings are the means of exchange. Food, machines, clothing, materials, shelter and props are simply there. Stuff. A perfect dispenser would be an open automat on the street. ... Ticketless theater. Out of money and control. Diggers assume free stores to liberate human nature. First free the space, goods and services. Let theories of economics follow social facts. Once a free store is assumed, human wanting and giving, needing and taking, become wide open to

²¹¹ James Tressler, interview by Eric Noble, March 10, 2019.

²¹² This was the phrase attached to the weekly announcements in the *Berkeley Barb* for the Digger free feeds in the Panhandle. See, for example, *Berkeley Barb*, November 4, 1966, 12.

improvisation. A sign: If Someone Asks to See the Manager Tell Him He's the Manager. No owner, no manager, no employees and no cash-register. A salesman in a free store is a life-actor.

And it hit me. You know, this is life acting. You create the condition you describe and if we're lucky, the condition lasts for a long time. And if it doesn't, well, at least we tried. And there were people that didn't get it. I mean, there were people that you would give free money to and they wouldn't get it. Or sometimes social critics said we were Robin Hoods — that we were taking from the rich and giving to the poor. That isn't what we were doing. I mean, we got things from all sorts of sources, and that was magical. But what we did with it was to create a theater that described everything being free, hoping that that would lead to a social movement.²¹³

The Digger idea of “life acting” was an extension of “guerrilla theatre” — a concept that R.G. (“Ronnie”) Davis, the founder of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, formulated in his 1966 essay:

The motives, aspirations, and practice of U.S. theatre must be readapted in order to:

- teach
- direct toward change
- be an example of change

To teach, one must know something. It is necessary to direct toward change because “the system” is debilitating, repressive, and non-aesthetic. The Guerrilla company must exemplify change as a group. The group formation—its cooperative relationships and corporate identity—must have a morality at its core. The corporate entity ordinarily has no morality. This must be the difference in a sea of savagery. There is to be no distinction between public behavior and

²¹³ Peter Berg interviewed in Gaillard and Deransart, *Les Diggers de San Francisco*.

private behavior. Do in public what you do in private, or stop doing it in private.²¹⁴

The Angels of Light performances portrayed a communal queer aesthetic that mirrored their participation in the Kaliflower/Digger-inspired intercommunal network and within the wider counterculture. Their shows were thus an example of the social change that was described in the pages of *Kaliflower*. As Peter Berg explained, life acting was theater “that described everything being free — hoping that would lead to a social movement.” In this way, the Angels of Light were living examples of life acting.

Queer Aesthetic

Digger Free would become the foundation of the alternative social economy that developed among the Kaliflower communes. But there was another aspect of this communal culture that had been missing from the Digger ethos. The Angels of Light combined social commentary with a queer aesthetic in their transgressive costumes, characters, songs, and backdrop sets. Their shows were free in the Digger sense, but they challenged traditional gender roles in ways that the Diggers had never approached.

Where did this queer aesthetic come from? In large part, I would argue, from Irving Rosenthal. One of the early Free Print Shop posters is a good example of this syncretism between the Diggers and a queer aesthetic.²¹⁵ The image of two nude transgressive figures, one with an erection, combined with a hooded magician, drawn in stylistic psychedelic lettering, advertised a want ad seeking “ALL FREE 16mm sound

²¹⁴ Davis, “Guerrilla Theatre.”

²¹⁵ “Wanted ... for a first film” in “Catalog of Free Print Shop Publications,” 1973, https://diggers.org/fps_catalog.htm.

equipment and costumes and torch song music and lyrics for a first film by I. Von Rosenthal” with the Sutter Street Commune’s phone number appended. The transgressive design with homoerotic tinges was a new development in the world of psychedelic poster art. The film that the poster was advertising was Irving’s answer to the filmmaker Jack Smith, with whom Irving had worked in New York City. The two had a contentious relationship. At one point, Jack broke Irving’s jaw when Irving showed up on set with a month-long beard for the film in which Irving was portraying a kidnapped baby. When Irving decided to make a film of his own at the Sutter Street Commune, he enlisted Ralph to play the role of a geisha. When Ralph wanted to play the role with his full beard intact, Irving was delighted. With Hibiscus peeking around the corner as Irving directed Ralph in this breakthrough performance, the style of communal bearded drag (known in the pages of *Kaliflower* as “genderfuck”) was born.²¹⁶

Irving had appeared in Jack Smith’s infamous underground film *Flaming Creatures*, which was banned, confiscated, and condemned by local police around the country and, notoriously, on the floor of the U.S. Senate. The film’s distributor was arrested during a 1964 screening and convicted of distributing obscene material. Even though the obscenity rulings were never formally overturned in a higher court, by the 1970s, the film was being shown more freely as the legal and cultural climate shifted to accommodate greater artistic freedom. Today, *Flaming Creatures* is regarded as a

²¹⁶ The incident with Jack Smith beating up Irving for showing up on set with a month-old-beard is related in Rosenthal to Dave Hazelwood, 2 July 1967, Box 10, Folder 14, Irving Rosenthal Papers, January 28 Special Collections (M1550, Box 10, Folder 7), M1550, Stanford University Library.

landmark in avant-garde cinema and an important work in the history of queer film, celebrated for its influence rather than condemned for its content.

Irving can be seen in clips from the black and white film (which is rarely shown).²¹⁷ Even though Jack and Irving had a tumultuous relationship, their collaboration is evident at several points. The photo of Irving primping for the Sunset Boulevard cameo that appeared on the dust jacket of his queer novel *Sheeper* in 1967 was shot by Jack. Many have said that Irving owed his queer aesthetic to the influence of Jack Smith. But I would contend that their artistic relationship was at least reciprocal. Irving's queer aesthetic was evident as early as his editorship of the *Chicago Review* and his publishing of Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. Smith's indebtedness to Rosenthal is evident in his 1965 experimental cinema piece *Rehearsal for the Destruction of Atlantis*, which Smith dedicated to Irving.²¹⁸ The creative exchange between these two aesthetes likely contributed to shaping both of their artistic sensibilities. By acknowledging this reciprocal influence, we see how artistic styles can develop and evolve through mutual collaboration.

The influence of Irving's queer sensibility is most obvious in the transformation that took place in James Tressler, George Harris, and Ralph Sauer, three of the early members of the Sutter Street Commune. Photos of the three before they moved into the commune show them dressed in conventional hippie garb. Another set of photos shows

²¹⁷ For a discussion of Jack Smith's work from a queer theoretical perspective, see Renate Lorenz, Daniel Hendrickson (trans.), and Freaky Queer Art Conference, *Queer Art: A Freak Theory* (2012), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/11018509>. A recent account of Jack Smith's defining masterpiece is Constantine Verevis, *Flaming Creatures* (Columbia University Press, 2020). The latter only superficially touches on Rosenthal and Smith's relationship.

²¹⁸ Jack Smith, "Rehearsal for the Destruction of Atlantis," *Film Culture*, Spring, 1966.

the three as Jilala, Hibiscus, and Ralif — the noms de théâtre they took — dressed in elaborate scrounged free drag with makeup and glitter galore — in other words, the personae they created under Irving's guise. These three would form a triad of queer energy that was the core of the Angels of Light.²¹⁹

One of the early legendary scenes at the Scott Street Commune had Hibiscus, Jilala, and Ralph dressing up and performing in Broadway musical style while preparing the typical fare of brown rice and free vegetables from the Diggers for the nightly communal meal. The name the three budding gender drag performers called themselves was the Kitchen Sluts. A page from an early issue of *Kaliflower* announced the Kitchen Sluts' infamous recipe for "come bread that we whores make for our lover men."²²⁰ Here is Irving's description of Jilala at the time:

He often wore lipstick, fingernail polish, or huge clip earrings — mind you this was in the pre-genderfuck days — and all these hippy cowboy and Hells Angel types would drop by — and this immense exotic creature like Punjab in Orphan Annie — but with an Afro and wearing lipstick — would come in with a tray full of coffee cups. Jim designed our first Free Print Shop posters and later projected our deepest and softest dreams into *Kaliflower* by means of his psychomagnetic wave drawings.²²¹

²¹⁹ See Figure 15 for the "before and after" photos of the three. In his autobiography, James "Tahara" Windsor described Irving's influence: "Then it was the turn of Hibiscus to be filmed. He was wearing a crown of daisies on his head, a typical hippie look. Irving began adding ferns flowers beads in the Jack Smith style to the daisies and thus the famous look of Hibiscus the Artist was born. ... But what I am really trying to say is that the exotic look of Hibiscus originated because of the artist Jack Smith who passed his ideas to Irving Rosenthal, who then passed those ideas to Hibiscus, Ralph added the beard, and in turn Hibiscus passed them to the Cockettes." James "Tahara" Windsor, *Autobiography*, 2020.

²²⁰ "Mouldy Novelties from the Kitchen Sluts," *Kaliflower* 1, no. 2 (May 1, 1969).

²²¹ Rosenthal, "Back in 1966...".

Another early *Kaliflower* page of communal recipes designed by Hibiscus was titled “Angels of Light dancing by the River Ganges.”²²² This was the first time that the phrase “Angels of Light” appeared in print. In his filmed interview for *The Cockettes*, Ralph recounted that Hibiscus always said the phrase was from an Allen Ginsberg poem. I have never, however, been able to locate anything remotely similar in Ginsberg’s work.²²³ For now, it can only be attributed to Hibiscus’ poetic imagination. On the same page are more recipes titled “Blue Heaven from the Kitchen Llamas.” The tales of the Kitchen Sluts and their showcase preparing the nightly vegetarian meal is particularly illuminating because it is an example of how communal work becomes an act of theater performed in the course of everyday mundane tasks, another aspect perhaps of “life acting.” Ordinary existence becomes ethereal through the transformation of art, an important principle that would be a continuing theme in the Angels of Light story.²²⁴

²²² “Angels of Light Dancing by the River Ganges,” *Kaliflower* 1, no. 4 (May 15, 1969).

²²³ Ralph Sauer, interview by David Weissman, ca. 2001. David Weissman shared the video recording that he made of his interview with Ralph for the film, *The Cockettes*. There was no date on the recording.

²²⁴ In an interview, Paula Downing (the editor of *Kaliflower* during the second year) recalled when she first started visiting the Sutter Street Commune: “First impressions. My first real memories of the food were the rotting boxes of food from the Produce Market. And then the guys. Hibiscus and ...” Q: “The Kitchen Sluts.” Paula: “Yeah. I can remember them, Hibiscus, Jim [Jilala], and Ralph in the kitchen. And they knew the show tunes. They would sing the show tunes. And that was so appealing to me. I just loved being in the kitchen with those guys while they sang show tunes and made bread and cut up vegetables. And I could do that. I mean, I could cut up vegetables and be entertained. So that kind of made another layer of involvement. Hanging around the kitchen with the guys.” Paula Downing, interview by Eric Noble, January 4, 2010.

Communal Role Model

Kaliflower early on set the ideological tone of the intercommunal experiment. In its pages were reports from the communes and articles with advice on common problems, survival tips, and always pages for Free Ads with everything from newborn kittens to kitchen appliances being offered for free. No ads for money were accepted. The emphasis on “communal how-to” articles developed a body of practice that was widely modeled in the individual communes. Around the time that *Kaliflower* started, the Sutter Street Commune learned about the Oneida Community from the 1800s in upstate New York. The writings of John Humphrey Noyes would play an important role not just for the Sutter Street Commune but for many of the communes that were inspired through the pages of *Kaliflower*. Oneida practices such as group marriage, free love, third persons, ritual criticism — all would be publicized and explained over the next three years in the pages of *Kaliflower*.²²⁵

In the ninth issue of *Kaliflower*, the article “Silver Wigs” reads like an annual report from a new corporate entity, except it was the Sutter Street Commune laying out their visions, goals, and the progress they had made to that point. Irving had written to

²²⁵ Art Downing (personal communication) recalled that it was Dunbar Aitkens who introduced the Sutter Street Commune to the compendium of 19th century intentional communities, *History of American Socialisms* by John Humphrey Noyes. The first of many subsequent excerpts from Oneida writings appeared in the sixth issue of *Kaliflower*, May 29, 1969. “We affirm that there is no intrinsic difference between property in persons and property in things; and that the same spirit which abolished exclusiveness in regard to money, would abolish, if circumstances allowed full scope to it, exclusiveness in regard to women and children. —John Humphrey Noyes (founder of the Oneida Community of 1847-1879).” The Sutter Street Commune studied the writings of the Oneida Community and eventually adopted several of its communal practices. The first blurb that explained one of these practices appeared in “Sutter Street Commune Is Run With Government by Criticism, ...”.

David Haber in January 1968, boasting that his commune was “a work commune” and the list of activities reported in “Silver Wigs” would surely qualify as such.²²⁶ Many of the practices highlighted by this article (and subsequent ones) became standard, not just for Sutter Street, but for the Angels of Light, Hunga Dunga, the Free Medical Opera, and dozens of other communes that were known by their street address location.²²⁷

“Silver Wigs” reported that the Sutter Street Commune (as of June 19, 1969) comprised fifteen people who ate dinner together every night. All vegetarian. Everyone sits on the floor together eating from wooden bowls with fingers or chopsticks. In the beginning, everyone was expected to pay a share of the rent. But at some point, individual rent was abolished, and a communal treasury was instituted. “Now people pay what they can or desire to.” Aside from vegetarianism, the commune strictly forbids cigarettes, and this is the first of many pleas to stop smoking. The major project of the commune is operating the Free Print Shop. which will print anything free that will be given away for free. The economic vision of the article, which reads like a prototypical Digger manifesto, is that “money for food and rent is an artificial need, like cigarette smoking, imposed on the people by the usurpers of our freedom.” The article goes on to criticize cottage industry, which was popular among hippies, as “going backward to rudimentary non-greedy capitalism.” The commune’s daily activities consist of running the print shop, publishing *Kaliflower*, baking their own bread, maintaining a vegetable garden in the backyard along with a compost pile, and

²²⁶ Irving Rosenthal to Daniel Haber, 28 January 1968, Box 10, Folder 7, Irving Rosenthal Papers.

²²⁷ Once Ritual Criticism became a standard practice at the Sutter Street Commune. Periodically the commune would call for a criticism of *Kaliflower* itself, with subsequent issues providing verbatim transcripts.

planning art projects.²²⁸

The Cockettes

The first formal opportunity for Hibiscus's theatrical vision to blossom came on New Year's Eve, 1969, when he and Ralph invited a group of acquaintances to dinner at the Sutter Street Commune. Many of the assembled guests were living in communes that were receiving *Kaliflower* and had met Hibiscus as he cavorted in homemade drag through the streets of the Haight and in Golden Gate Park. Irving was away on a month-long trip to Colorado, and Ralph, who had been entrusted with the key to Irving's "Drag Room," opened the door to the group of would-be performers. Dressed in the splendor of Irving's drag, the group posed for a series of photographs by David Parkhurst, one of the Sutter Street photographers. Afterwards, the group drove to the Palace Theater and attended the midnight showing of Nocturnal Dream Shows. It was New Year's Eve, 1969. The impromptu ensemble performed a cancan on stage as they danced to the Rolling Stones' "Honky Tonk Women."²²⁹ Aside from playing the role of Key Master who opened the magical vault of Irving's treasured trinkets and glittering garb, Ralph was also the one who came up with the name "Cockettes," a reflection of his everlasting genius for ironic wordplay.²³⁰

The story of the Cockettes is important here because they represented the first incarnation of Hibiscus's vision. 1970 was the year of the Cockettes as they burst onto

²²⁸ "Silver Wigs."

²²⁹ Fayette Hauser, *The Cockettes: Acid Drag & Sexual Anarchy* (Port Townsend, WA: Process Media, 2020).

²³⁰ The ironic wordplay of course was the implied reference to the Radio City Rockettes but with a queer twist. Ralph Sauer told this story in an interview for David Weissman, Bill Weber, and Richard Koldewyn, *The Cockettes* (Strand Releasing Home Video, 2002).

the stage of the Palace Theater, the 1930s Art Deco movie house that straddled the boundary between Chinatown and North Beach. Their reputation for raunchy, gender bending, campy, outrageous drag performance brought the queer aesthetic that Jack Smith and Irving Rosenthal had bequeathed to Hibiscus and through Hibiscus to the flock of angelic urchins that swarmed around his whirling Dervish ball of energy. In the documentary film *The Cockettes*, Jilala recounted the flowering of Hibiscus:

I saw him blossom more and more. He wanted to be Isidora. He said, "I am Isidora and you are the Isidorables. All of you around me will learn to dance in public and be free."²³¹

Within a few months of that first impromptu appearance at the Palace Theater, the Cockettes were performing regularly. Their first show with a script was "Gone with the Showboat to Oklahoma," directed by Hibiscus in April 1970.²³² By mid-year, they were putting together new shows on a monthly basis. Their first appearance in the underground press was an exposé in *The Organ* published in Berkeley in July.²³³

From the first whiff of the Cockettes in the early months of 1970, they would provide instant news copy for the underground press. *Rolling Stone* published its first article highlighting the Cockettes in July. Here's a quote from the article that illustrates the revolutionary feeling the Cockettes engendered:

The idea is to liberate. ... The idea is to have a relationship with someone out there [in the audience]. To listen to someone, feel them, give something to them, then to have them start to respond, to give

²³¹ Weissman, Weber, and Koldewyn, *The Cockettes*.

²³² Windsor, Autobiography.

²³³ An advertisement for the July 1970 issue of *The Organ* included the following articles: "The Cockettes of San Francisco"; "Allen Ginsberg Tells All"; and "S. Clay Wilson's 'Suds Smut.'" The stated purpose of *The Organ* was: "A continuing chronicle of the erotic and the avant-garde." The advertisement appeared in the *Los Angeles Free Press*, July 10, 1970, 35.

back. That is art, because it's open, human, not some abstract concept like The Theatre, or Politics, or even Gay Liberation.²³⁴

The article quotes Rumi, one of the original Cockettes, who had been involved with the Gay Liberation Front in Berkeley the previous year but now saw their protest tactics as passé. He commented, "I think I'm performing gay liberation through my art."²³⁵

Visions of Free Theatre

The first mention of "Angels of Light Free Theatre" appeared in a full-page notice that sought "musicians for orchestra, actors, dancers, costumes, set designers, starlets."²³⁶ Above the notice was the statuary scene from *Les Enfants du Paradis* ("Children of Paradise"), one of Hibiscus's favorite films, which he would regularly reference as he created his own version of "paradis." At the bottom of the announcement was an appended instruction for readers to "put glamour glossies in the Bamboo Tube." Each Kaliflower commune had a plywood board for hanging the current issue from a pair of clothespins. At the bottom of each "Kaliflower Board" (as they were known) was a bamboo tube, which was how communes would submit ads and notices to be published in the next issue.²³⁷

Curiously, this full-page notice for the Angels of Light Free Theater appeared in the same issue of *Kaliflower* that announced the Cockettes to the world. The cover of pink see-through onion paper revealed one of the glossy photos that David Parkhurst

²³⁴ John Lombardi, "The Cockettes: Every Little Movement Has a Meaning All Its Own," *Rolling Stone*, July 9, 1970.

²³⁵ Rumi's comment, it could be argued, is another example of Digger life-acting.

²³⁶ "The Angels of Light Free Theatre Seek ...", *Kaliflower* 1, no. 38 (January 8, 1970).

²³⁷ The CHS collection has an original Kaliflower Board. The Digger Archives has a replica constructed by Ben Kinmont for his second performance of the Digger Project in Italy in 2022.

had shot of Hibiscus and his gathering of friends playing dress-up with Irving's wardrobe before they descended on the Palace Theater for their first impromptu performance.²³⁸

As if he knew that the Cockettes would never adopt the ideal of Digger Free, Hibiscus included the notice seeking musicians, actors, dancers, and set designers for a Free theater that he envisioned, even though the vision had not yet materialized. That would come later in the year. In December a full-page of *Kaliflower* announced the performance of "Childern [sic] of Paradise" by "Angels of Light Free Theatre" at the Japanese Tea Gardens on December 5, 1970.²³⁹

Cockettes Schism

From the outset, the internal contradictions posed by the conflicting impulse to stay pure and perform free shows would lead to a schism among the Cockettes that ultimately produced the Angels of Light as an actual theatre troupe rather than just in Hibiscus's designs for *Kaliflower* pages. Recall that the night the Cockettes first performed, they had gathered at the Sutter Street Commune where Ralph unlocked Irving's prop room with its collection of exquisite drag. When Irving returned from his month-long trip to Colorado, he was confronted by Ralph's betrayal and the raid on his

²³⁸ "Tonight | The Cockettes Perform 'Rue de Can'," *Kaliflower* 1, no. 38 (January 8, 1970). Recently, David Parkhurst resurrected the original negatives from the New Year's Eve photo shoot. There has been much debate about the original attendees pictured. Of those present, only two are still alive: Fayette and Scrumbly. Rumi passed in April 2024. (Rumi insisted that he was one of those in the photographs of that evening's dress-up affair although there are others who dispute the claim.) One of David's photos, with individuals identified, is depicted in Figure 15, "Queer Transformation."

²³⁹ "Childern [sic] of Paradise | Angels of Light Free Theatre," *Kaliflower* 2, no. 32 (December 3, 1970). This is the first notice in *Kaliflower* of an actual performance by the Angels of Light, not just Hibiscus's poetic visions of free theater.

locked cabinet of curiosities. Irving would never forgive this transgression. The Cockettes would always remain an aborted fetus in his judgement.²⁴⁰ This fundamental disapproval would eventually be a factor in Hibiscus's split from the Cockettes. Over the next year, internal contradictions would also arise among the Cockettes themselves. Tahara writes about the movement to dilute Hibiscus's influence, which resulted in the first show to be directed by someone else.²⁴¹ It all came to a head in a public spat carried out in the pages of the *Berkeley Barb* in December 1971 after the Cockettes had returned from their disastrous New York tour. "Cockettes Crumble" was the opening salvo in a three-week long back and forth with jibes, accusations, and true to the name of Max Scherr's underground paper, barbs from all sides.²⁴² Hibiscus was reported to have accused Sebastian of ripping off the name and the reputation that Hibiscus had created; an anonymous groupie accused Hibiscus of bitterness after being summarily dismissed by the troupe; Sebastian fired back accusing the original reporter of yellow journalism. Back and forth. The only breath of sanity was the final word that the Angels of Light offered in a short response:

Dear Berkeley Barb: Media coverage does not help the Free Community no more than it helped the Haight Ashbury blossom. We are trying to do a beautiful Free Theatre for the people. It is entirely free, anyone can

²⁴⁰ For example, here is one of Irving's comments reviewing the Angels show "Peking on Acid" in 1972: "How can the Cockettes and the Angels of Light ever be mentioned in the same breath again? The Angels at last squeezed out of their godawful Busby Berkeley plaster casts, a wide swarm of exotic butterflies slowly strolling back and forth through world myth and history, sipping from the glorious bouquets of other cultures the nectar they need to refresh us back at home."

²⁴¹ Windsor, *Autobiography*, 90. Tahara gives an account of how the Cockettes convinced Hibiscus to relinquish his role as director and bring in Michael Kalman to direct "Hollywood Babylon."

²⁴² "Cockettes Crumble," *Berkeley Barb*, 10 December 1971.

be part of the shows. There are no donations and we try our best to serve the audience free food. We do not want to hassle publicity—we strive to show people a glimpse of Paradise here on Earth and make people high on singing and dancing. Love, The Angels of Light²⁴³

There are two points of interest about this public statement from the Angels of Light. First, the Angels (who at this point had been living and performing together for one year) clearly identified themselves as part of a community they termed the “Free Community,” which encompassed the group of communes that had been receiving *Kaliflower* for the previous eighteen months. *Kaliflower* had conjured this self-aware community committed to the Digger Free philosophy of no buying and no selling.²⁴⁴ The Angels pointedly mentioned the free food they served at all their shows. Free food was the original Digger signature and remained so five years later. The other interesting thing is the mention of the dangers of media coverage and the example of Haight-Ashbury. This refers to the intense media scrutiny that took place during the Summer of Love, which drew thousands (some say hundreds of thousands) of young people to San

²⁴³ “Glimpsing Paradise,” *Berkeley Barb*, 31 December 1971.

²⁴⁴ The 1978 *Kaliflower* publication of “Deep Tried Frees” gives a clear indication of how the stricture against buying and selling had been interpreted by the 20th century Digger Movement: “Three hundred thirty years ago, in England in the throes of the Puritan revolution, a mystic named Gerrard Winstanley began issuing manifestoes against the clerical and manorial establishments. He believed that God manifested directly in everyone, that knowledge of Him through Scriptures was second-hand, that the priesthood was superfluous and venal, that since all were equal in Godliness, none should oppress, tyrannize, or reduce others to poverty, that penal, corporal, and capital punishment should be abolished, that private property both tempted the poor to steal and killed them for doing it, that the Earth should be held in common by all who labor it, creating a common treasury from which all could draw according to need (including those incapable of working), that none should give hire or take hire, and that buying and selling should be abandoned, as it had become the art of thieving and oppressing fellow creatures.” [Irving Rosenthal], *Deep Tried Frees*.

Francisco in 1967. The resulting official response was an intense campaign of repression with all city agencies cooperating to stifle if not wipe out the hippies. That the Angels of Light would use that as an argument in their letter shows a remarkable sense of the historical lessons learned.²⁴⁵

Angels Take Wings

I'm getting ahead of the timeline so let's back up a bit. The first Cockettes performance (immediately after their impromptu dress-up party at the Scott Street Commune) was on New Year's Eve 1969. Within two months, the Cockettes started performing regular shows every few weeks at the Palace Theater. These were paid shows and soon gained a wide cult following in the Bay Area. Nevertheless, Hibiscus continued to have dreams of a free theater, which we can see from three notices he included in *Kaliflower* from January and May 1970. These notices are seeking performers, musicians, and a warehouse space for the Angels of Light Free Theater. The search for a warehouse was to also house the Cockettes. On the latter notice, an added comment asked, "what about the admission at the Palace Theatre, Hibiscus?" Pointed criticism was something often added by the editors of *Kaliflower*.²⁴⁶ Soon after this bit of repartee, Hibiscus directed two of the shows he had written and directed for the Cockettes but under the name of the Angels of Light Free Theatre with free

²⁴⁵ Warnings about mass media continually appeared in the pages of *Kaliflower*. This reflected the view that the media were a major cause of the implosion of the Haight-Ashbury in 1967. Deep Tried Frees recounted, "As early as August of 1967, the 'Mutants Commune,' a long poetic essay about American materialism corrected by Haight-Ashbury culture, including free, had appeared in the *Berkeley Barb*. It spoke of the new communal culture as having lasted only from September of 1966 to April of 1967, when it was done in by media, tourism, commercialism, hard drugs, and violence." [Irving Rosenthal], *Deep Tried Frees*.

²⁴⁶ See *Kaliflower*, January 8, 1970; January 29, 1970; May 21, 1970.

admission.²⁴⁷ The cast consisted of Cockettes who had no objection to performing for free, but not most of the future grouping that would live and work together under the name Angels of Light.

The first authentic Angels of Light performance that included Jilala and Tahara and Beaver and many future members of the troupe was a spectacular event on Christmas Eve 1970 at Grace Cathedral, the magnificent French Gothic church, seat of the Episcopal Diocese of California. The Free Print Shop printed a poster that announced the performance:

The Miracle of No(h) Penny Opera
The Angels of Light Free Theatre
presents
'The Blue Angels'
at
Grace Cathedral Christmas Eve
Midnight Mass
begins at 10:45 P.M.²⁴⁸

The poster design featured a photo of a bearded Hibiscus dressed in high drag ensconced in Jilala's "psychomagnetic wave drawings." Another figure resembled a Japanese courtesan in a Noh performance. The drawing was black on white with at least two differently colored backgrounds — a deep blue and a solid black. Minuscule gold stars reflected the glitter that liberally adorned the Angels' costumes. Pam Tent, a

²⁴⁷ There are two legal-size (8-1/2" x 14") broadsides that announced these first faux-Angels shows: "The Fairytale Extravaganza" for July 11, 1970, and "Tropical Heat Wave Hot Voo Doo" for August 2, 1970, both shows taking place at the Committee Theater (836 Montgomery, SF). Original copies of these posters are in the Digger Archives collection.

²⁴⁸ "The Miracle of No(h) Penny Opera," (San Francisco: Free Print Shop (CHS Catalog No. 160), (ca.) December 24, 1970), Broadside. https://diggers.org/fps_catalog_annot.htm. For a scan, see Figure 19, "Angels Emerge."

member of the Cockettes and the author of the most definitive account of their journey, described the event:

Hibiscus staged a Christmas Eve pageant on the steps of Grace Cathedral, a Gothic-style landmark church in affluent Nob Hill. Officially the first Angels of Light show, it was more of a "happening" and included friend and fellow Kitchen Slut Ralph as well as Beaver and Rodney. Near midnight, Hibiscus turned up with a bevy of children in multicolored face paint and tinsel halos. He appeared barefoot in a multilayered gown accented with feathered angel wings and a three-foot-high star headdress covered with glitter that looked like an ornament you would place at the top of a Christmas tree. Harlow was attired in a tight red dress trimmed in ermine—she looked a little like Santa's whore—while Miguel, barefoot with glittered beard and hair and cloaked in a striped floor-length caftan, passed for one of the three wise men. In addition, a couple of people showed up wearing nun's habits, and Dusty Dawn brought the Christ child (baby Ocean), whom Hibiscus carried in his arms for the evening's proceedings. The spectacle on the cathedral steps was supposed to be a reenactment of the birth of Christ, with Ocean Michael Moon center stage.²⁴⁹

Two underground newspapers reported on the Christmas Eve guerrilla theatrical performance at Grace Cathedral. The *San Francisco Good Times* reporter did not realize that the appearance was under the aegis of the Angels of Light and reported the event as a Cockettes performance:

The Cockettes may have permanently changed the face of Christmas for the grey burghers of San Francisco. The Christmas Eve Mass at ultra-establishment Grace Cathedral was complemented by an appearance of the Cockettes and friends doing their own outrageous, flashy, beautiful and loving Yuletide celebration. The entourage included men, women and children dressed in psychedelic versions of Mary, Joseph, Jesus, the

²⁴⁹ Pam Tent, *Midnight at the Palace: My Life as a Fabulous Cockette* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Alyson Publications, 2004), 108.

wise men, shepherds and angels. The costumes were the glittering, opulent creations we've come to expect from the Cockettes. Faces glowed with gold silver and colored makeup; hair sparkled with metallic glitter; fantastic robes, beads, jewels and medallions adorned the celebrants. The angels wore huge wings made of white feathers glued to cardboard.²⁵⁰

The other underground press account appeared in *Gay Sunshine*. As opposed to the *Good Times* article, this account almost got the name of the troupe right:

Every Christmas at Grace Cathedral, located in the Pacific Heights area of San Francisco, there is a traditional midnight mass. This year there was a complete mind-fuck when the congregation turned around to find The Angel of Light. The performing troupe consisted of forty children dressed in home-made angel wings and phallic halos (biblical drag?) and the Cockettes. The Cockettes are a Gay theatrical collective located in the Haight of San Francisco. They have been doing paid shows and free performances for the past year, such as the one that took place at Grace Cathedral on Christmas Eve. The many costumes used in the shows are re-cycled rags and clothes retrieved from junk stores and from donations. Hibiscus of the Cockettes produced the street theatre re-enactment of the birth of Christ.

When we arrived at the church, the troupe and an entourage of onlookers were assembled on the cathedral steps, while the performers were caroling. Soon we moved into the main chamber of the church. When we entered, communion rites were being performed. Several Gay couples walked hand in hand to the altar. Heretofore, the people sitting in the pulpit area had no knowledge of our presence. Our exhibition nicely set the stage for what Hibiscus had planned. Tahara, one of the Cockettes, lit some incense to further create the atmosphere we wanted. Suddenly there appeared a rear guard in the main archway. About twenty San Francisco pigs positioned themselves in attack formation. Out of nowhere a pig appeared next to Tahara, and demanded that the

²⁵⁰ "Goosing Grace," *San Francisco Good Times*, January 8, 1971.

incense be extinguished; when Tahara explained that it could not be put out after it was lit, the pig confiscated our theatrical sacrament and poured water over it.

As soon as the scheduled mass concluded we were informed that we were to leave the church immediately. FAR OUT. On Xmas Eve the parishoners had us thrown out of a church. We walked back out to the steps of the church and began our celebration of Christ's birth. We continued our theatre in the spirit in which we believed the occasion should be felt. Soon thereafter, we all went in different directions; tripping down the street in our angelic drag, spreading the mood throughout the eve . . . / by Sister Cocaine²⁵¹

Although there had been three titular Angels of Light performances earlier in 1970, the Christmas Eve 1970 pageant at Grace Cathedral marked the first reporting of an Angels show in the underground press. Both *Good Times* and *Gay Sunshine* reported the event as a Cockettes performance because many, but not all, of the performers were Cockettes—there was a natural fluidity between the two groups. As the poster for the event makes clear, however, it was always conceived and promoted as Angels of Light.²⁵² One of the Cockettes who had jumped camp and would remain a core Angel of Light was Tahara. As the *Gay Sunshine* account details, Grace Cathedral was a splash for him personally. Not only was his encounter with a policeman recounted, but his photo in disputation with the officer made the cover of the gay publication. After Grace Cathedral, the schism within the Cockettes was complete.²⁵³ The Angels of Light now

²⁵¹ Sister Cocaine, "Vatican Rags at Grace Cathedral," *Gay Sunshine*, January 1971.

²⁵² As mentioned above, for a depiction of the Free Print Shop broadside announcing the Grace Cathedral performance, see Figure 19, "Angels Emerge."

²⁵³ As I have noted, there were three earlier shows produced under the imprimatur of Angels of Light Free Theater: "The Fairytale Extravaganza," July 11, 1970 (Committee Theatre, 836 Montgomery); "Tropical Heat Wave Hot Voo Doo," August 2, 1970 (Committee Theatre,

took the stage.

Evangelist for Free

In addition to the internal contradictions among the Cockettes, there was one external force that was instrumental in bringing about the schism between those who wanted to do paid versus free shows. This was Jilala. When Irving exiled Jilala for the second time in mid-1970 from the Sutter Street Commune, Hibiscus brought him to the Cockettes Commune at 946 Haight Street and asked if there was a room available for a fellow Kaliflower expatriate. Scumbly, ever the compassionate and undoubtedly the most together of the Cockettes, allowed Jilala to move onto the back porch. From there, according to Tahara, Jilala became a force to be reckoned with, constantly comparing the Cockettes communal household to the Sutter Street Commune and preaching free theater.²⁵⁴ The irony of course is that Jilala had just been exiled from the very commune for which he preached its message. At one point, he posted a manifesto in his inimical “psychomagnetic wave drawing” style on the kitchen wall. The original calligraphic

836 Montgomery); “Childern [sic] of Paradise,” December 5, 1970 (Japanese Tea Gardens). Nevertheless, Grace Cathedral was always considered the beginning point in the Angels’s public career. There is one account, however, which adds a wrinkle to this chronology. Jilala, in a history he wrote in 1978 and revised in 1989, tells about a Cockettes performance that was scheduled along with Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band at the Berkeley Community Theater on November 13, 1970. Captain Beefheart backed out of the arrangement after getting an untoward sexual advance by one of the Cockettes. The troupe then decided to perform *Pearls Over Shanghai* impromptu in Chinatown’s Ross Alley, dressed in their costumes and with their elaborate sets as backdrops. Jilala includes this in his Angels of Light history, presumably because he participated in the pageant. [James Tressler], *The Angels of Light (Illuminated, February 28, 1978, condensed, revised, October 1989)* (San Francisco: Free Press, 1990). Pam Tent gives an account of the Ross Alley performance, including a note on the discomfiting reaction of the Chinatown residents, but does not include any reference to the Angels of Light as participants. Tent, *Midnight at the Palace: My Life as a Fabulous Cockette*.

²⁵⁴ Windsor, Autobiography.

manifesto, except for its storied reputation, has been lost to time. But in a later issue of *Kaliflower*, Jilala reproduced his prophetic message:

The
Invisible
invocation of
Transcendental
Powers
can only
Become visible
on a Freeeee
stage!!!
All else
is pulling dead
rabbits out
of hats.²⁵⁵

Jilala's manifesto prompted a response similar to Martin Luther's 95 Theses, which launched the Protestant Reformation. The Cockette house on Haight Street (at Divisadero) was soon abandoned by those who continued performing at the Palace Theatre. Those who were left became the core group of the resurrected Angels of Light along with Hibiscus — Jilala, Tahara, and Sandy.²⁵⁶ Whereas Hibiscus was the wild whirling dervish of the phenomena that manifested as the Angels of Light, Jilala became the ideologue whose calligraphic oracular messages in the pages of *Kaliflower* would engender a deep devotion to Free Theatre.²⁵⁷ Jilala later explained, "The theatre

²⁵⁵ *Kaliflower*, January 27, 1972, 3

²⁵⁶ Windsor, *Autobiography*, 115.

²⁵⁷ Jilala's "psychomagnetic wave" designs with messages prophesying free theater can be found in the following issues of *Kaliflower*: March 18, 1971, 12; April 22, 1971, 4, 5; July 8, 1971, 8; September 2, 1971, 9; September 9, 1971, 7; September 30, 1971, 13; October 21, 1971, 9; January 13, 1972 (illustration only, no text), 19; January 20, 1972, 13, 14; January 27, 1972, 1, 2, 3, 25 (announcement); February 10, 1972, 11.

that grew out of our communal life embodied our dreams, our fantasies and wishes. We were so moved by the Cockette's Joie de vivre that we wanted our own version, our own leap for the aesthetic brass ring."²⁵⁸

Angels Evolving

Over the course of the three-plus years (165 weekly issues) of *Kaliflower*, from 1969 to 1972, the twin influences of Digger Free and Queer Aesthetic took root in the intercommunal network that at the end of its publication numbered over 300 communes.²⁵⁹ The Angels of Light comprised individuals from several of the communal households, but the primary location is where Beaver Bauer, Rodney Price, and Brian Mulhern lived. The main Angels's commune changed location over the years, as will be seen in the final chapter of this study with the Free Food Family meeting notes tracking the changing addresses of several troupe members.

Aside from its value as propagator of communal practice, *Kaliflower* was an important feedback mechanism for the Angels of Light. In this early period (1970-1974), their audiences were primarily other communes. The articles in *Kaliflower* that

²⁵⁸ James Tressler, "On the Angels of Light," *White Crane*, Fall, 2008, 22.

²⁵⁹ The source for the number of 300 communes that were receiving KF at the end of its publication in 1972 was always from personal memory. I was the person in charge of the "routing," i.e., organizing the weekly hand distribution (calling communes to get commitments for volunteers, organizing the culling, collation, and binding on Thursday morning, sending out the individual route deliverers, and making sure that routing packets got returned). Recently, however, this personal recollection has been validated. See "Memories [...] Precious Memories," *Kaliflower* 4, no. 6 (June 15, 1972). (The author of the article was the person responsible for taking on the project of, and the naming of, *Kaliflower* shortly after moving into the Sutter Street Commune in 1969. After mentioning that the first issue of *Kaliflower* went to seven other communes, he wrote, "For every commune we knew of three years ago, we know of forty-five now." Knowing the author's penchant for preciseness, that would be 315 communes in 1972.)

inevitably followed an Angels performance were filled with exuberant but also critical reviews. The feedback function was one of the most important that *Kaliflower* filled.

The first show that took place after the 1970 Christmas Eve pageant at Grace Cathedral was announced in the March 21, 1971 issue of *Kaliflower*: "Sweet Hearts Kome to Free Kabaret" at the Committee Theatre in North Beach.²⁶⁰ The following week's issue of *Kaliflower* published three reviews of this first truly communal Angels performance. Two of these were letters to the editor. The first was quite positive:

Sunday night's Cabaret (and intercommunal cruise) at the Committee theater sure was a pleasant alternative to the usual San Francisco night life — and showed enormous potential if and as it evolves onto and into newer and more disorganized and spontaneous forms of entertainment for we communards — heaven knows it sure was a treat to see so many beauties out in the world — ones that would generally stay home rather than get involved in the "money hungry pleasure syndrome. ... Then what to our wondering eyes did appear across the smoke-filled room but troupes of gorgeous communists laden with loads of sumptuous organic taste treats."²⁶¹

The second letter to the editor denounced the cigarette smoking at the Cabaret — a practice that *Kaliflower* had been condemning from the beginning, but which was still common not just in mainstream society but in the counterculture. Another contribution in the same issue of *Kaliflower* was titled "What the Boys in the Backroom Will Have" and offered the first of many constructive criticisms that would appear over the next year:

The Free Cabaret opened to a packed house Sunday night at the Committee Theater. Now let us pray:

²⁶⁰ "Sweet Hearts Kome to Free Kabaret," *Kaliflower* 2, no. 47 (March 18, 1971).

²⁶¹ Letters to the Editor, *Kaliflower*, March 25, 1971.

- That no mass media publicity be encouraged — including Good Times and Gay Sunshine — no offense intended.
- That the jazz musicians be recycled, and an original band compose tuneful music for the show.
- That no further smoking of cigarettes be allowed.
- That a new home for the Cabaret be found, free of the karma of money and tobacco.
- That tea be served.
- That short sets alternate with long intermissions, so the clientele can ramble from table to table, and the performers can favor their lovers by having a tea at their table.²⁶²

The value of *Kaliflower* feedback for the Angels of Light in the process of their evolutionary journey would be proved with the realization of all of these suggestions over the following year. An alternative venue was found for future shows at 330 Grove Street, a large warehouse structure just blocks from City Hall, that housed numerous New Left, Black Liberation, and queer arts collectives.²⁶³ Smoking would be banned from Angels shows and free vegetarian food would become a staple offering and an Angels trademark at all performances.

As for avoiding publicity, the Angels of Light never sought nor received the kind of exposure that the Cockettes had. Blurbs did, however, appear in the underground

²⁶² "What the Boys in the Backroom Will Have," *Kaliflower* 2, no. 48 (March 25, 1971). The handwriting, and most assuredly the authorship, was Irving's.

²⁶³ 330 Grove Street was the location of the Pride Foundation starting in 1976. This is where Gilbert Baker and Lynn Segerblom (a member of the Angels of Light) created the first LGBT Rainbow flag in 1978. See footnote 270270.

press, primarily before Hibiscus left San Francisco in 1972, and after the Kaliflower intercommunal network collapsed. The first performance at 330 Grove was announced in the *Berkeley Barb* along with a photo of Hibiscus in his flowered grass headdress and makeup. The short blurb is noteworthy because it is evidence that Hibiscus had left the Cockettes behind at this point:

A free cabaret is being opened this weekend at 330 Grove, by Hibiscus, Raliff and Harlow, all former Cockettes, plus other local entertainers. The show, "Earthquake, A Midsummer Night's Scream" will begin at 10pm Saturday and Sunday, preceded by a free dinner. The show will be presented on the top floor in the newly-named Blue Angel Cabaret. Hibiscus and company are interested in getting together an ongoing free cabaret show. If you want to participate, call Hibiscus at 964-3388.

²⁶⁴

Two other early mentions of the Angels of Light in the underground press were in articles about protest demonstrations at which the Angels performed. The first was in support of the Living Theater, whose members had been arrested in Brazil, and the second was to entertain at an event the night before the large November 6, 1971, antiwar march in San Francisco.²⁶⁵

The following year saw the Angels perform "Peking on Acid" at the Kaliflower Intercommunal Carnival, which took place on a baseball field in a tucked-away public park. This was the first performance of the troupe without Hibiscus, who had left San Francisco shortly after a review in *Kaliflower* of a previous show that had criticized him for upstaging the other actors.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ "A free cabaret ...", *Berkeley Barb*, August 6, 1971.

²⁶⁵ "Living Poorly," *Berkeley Barb*, August 6, 1971; "Gays to March," *Berkeley Barb*, October 29, 1971.

²⁶⁶ "On the Road to Oregon Looking Back," *Kaliflower* 3, no. 40 (February 3, 1972).

A homegrown orchestra, as “Boys in the Backroom” had suggested, played an eclectic assortment of instruments accompanying the actors on an outdoor stage constructed on the baseball diamond. The Angels’s performance of “Peking on Acid” was a series of extravagant vignettes punctuated by exactly the “long intermissions” that the writer of “Backroom” had suggested. The issue of *Kaliflower* that appeared a few days after the Intercommunal Carnival contained a profuse review by the same writer, one year later. The review noted the highlights of “Peking on Acid” and pointed out the improvements in the Angels’s theatrical mode. The writer also offered advice for the future of the troupe:

The Angels of Light played to communal brothers, sisters, and friends, and there has hardly ever been assembled a calmer, more appreciative, and less paranoid, audience. And it was not captive. It was sitting on the grass and could come and go freely any time it wanted, and so it consisted mainly of those spectators whom the Angels had spellbound. It was daytime, and the power of the Angels' performance dispelled forever the idea that theatrical magic happens only at night, in a blacked-out auditorium. The baseball diamond turned into a great Greek amphitheater.

No justice can be done to the sets, costumes and make-up by describing them. Considering the humble scope of our intercommunal culture, they were titanic in conception and galactic in execution. The courtesan was a walking Brazilian jungle. Our gasps were answered by still more spectacular sets and still more spectacular poses. Sets and costumes are hard to preserve intact, outside of a repertory theater warehouse, but some attempt should be made to pickle PEKING ON ACID, at least by color photograph or watercolor sketch—for unborn fans of the future.

The reviewer also noted the homegrown orchestra, which provided “perfect musical accompaniment.” When it came to the content of the Angels show, the reviewer wrote,

The Depression musical has been the stock in trade of the so-called “Cockette—Angel-of-Light phenomenon,” and it was offed somewhere

between Poets' Theatre and Upper Douglass Playground. For what opened at the Carnival was the whole world of theater, East and West, past and present. How can the Cockettes and the Angels of Light ever be mentioned in the same breath again? The Angels at last squeezed out of their godawful Busby Berkeley plaster casts, a wide swarm of exotic butterflies slowly strolling back and forth through world myth and history, sipping from the glorious bouquets of other cultures the nectar they need to refresh us back at home.

As for one of the main criticisms that had been leveled against the Angels, mainly Hibiscus's stereotypical depiction of women in his exaggerated drag:

The Angels have made peace with women. The bitter misogyny of all their past shows is gone. In PEKING ON ACID a gifted female impersonator successfully portrayed feminine elegance and beauty. Now they are theater for everyone instead of just half of us. A few months ago this reviewer thought he had had it with what passes for drag these days. It was nice to see this ancient art redeemed.

As for the future of the troupe,

There is a rumor afloat that the Angels are planning a trip to Amsterdam and possible European tour. Nothing would be more detrimental at this time. They would be cutting themselves off from the community they come from and play for, and just before their last amazing spurt of growth has had a chance to ossify. They should wait a couple of years before thinking of foreign travel, at least as a troupe. Their "ticket" should invest his capital in a warehouse theater, lighting equipment, and so forth. And in the meantime, if the Angels want to tour, we know of a dozen West Coast communes they could visit, and in particular we know of a mountain top in Oregon with what could be called a challenging backdrop.²⁶⁷

This would be the last review of an Angels of Light performance before *Kaliflower*

²⁶⁷ "Peking Review," *Kaliflower* 4, no. 3 (May 25, 1972).

ceased publication four weeks later.²⁶⁸ The troupe would continue for another twelve years, amassing increasing publicity among the local theatrical world.²⁶⁹ Like the Cockettes, the Angels of Light (many of whom had crossed over from the Cockettes under the spell of Free) would be a continuing influence in the LGBTQ+ community. For example, one version of the origin story of the Rainbow Flag credits the inspiration to Lynn Segerblom, who was performing with the Angels in 1978 when she had the idea of creating the first rainbow flags for the Gay Parade that year.²⁷⁰ The audience for the Angels of Light would expand beyond the confines of the Kaliflower intercommunal network, but their roots in Digger Do fused with a queer communal sensibility would survive the waning of the Sixties.

In his memoir, finished just months before his death, Walter Fitzwater wrote the following that encapsulates the spirit of the Angels of Light:

I am thrilled to do theatre with The Angels of Light because they are so different from any other theatre or dance group I have been with. It's funny to get away with dressing up like no one else, captivating the public's eye. It makes me feel like flying my flag! The songs are not the greatest renditions at the performances but are originals. I was mesmerized at the beginning of the shows. The actors' cool outward energies said, "It was no one's business how we did it or if anyone liked

²⁶⁸ The last issue of *Kaliflower* was June 25, 1972. Discussion of the abrupt end of the three-year run will be taken up in Chapter 5 of this history.

²⁶⁹ The troupe earned numerous awards and became a fixture in the local theater circuit. For example, by 1983, they were being included in the local Bay Area Theater Critics Circle awards shows. "Theater Critics Circle Pays Tribute to Social Commentary," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 10, 1983.

²⁷⁰ Lynn Segerblom, "The Woman Behind the Rainbow Flag: Lynn Segerblom, James McNamara and Gilbert Baker Co-created the LGBT Symbol," *Los Angeles Blade*, March 2, 2018.

it!" Being stoned and half-drunk had a lot to do with it. It was not a solution, but it was a revolution!

Hence comes the word, revolution, the fundamental rebellion we created as free commune members. I believe that Nietzsche said, "Out of chaos comes order." I don't know how many in the group have read this author's work. I would never say I do because I don't want to look "over-knowledgeable." But here is the formula, the performances are put together with input, and everyone contributes their ideas of what they want to see so that illusive, negative thinking doesn't destroy creativity.

When new people join our theatre group and begin to be part of it, they think we should ask for money at the front door. And to me, it's wrong. The basic rule in Free Theatre is that everyone can get involved, including people from the audience who can join the show. We encourage participation. The assumption that we must make the audience exchange money for this is not my philosophy. ... The performance is a privileged gift—you, the audience, receive the best performances, while we always contribute the most. Usually, most audiences get more than they expect. There is no price to pay for the Magic we serve; it's irreplaceable!²⁷¹

Jilala, the ideologue of Free Theatre, foresaw the formula when he posted his manifesto on the kitchen wall of the Cockettes communal house: "The Invisible invocation of Transcendental Powers can only Become visible on a Freeeee stage!!! All else is pulling dead rabbits out of hats."²⁷²

²⁷¹ Fitzwater, *Memoirs From An Angel: Angels of Light*.

²⁷² See footnote 255.

free news

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city hall steps
1000s - 2000s

free

THE DIGGER PAPERS

HOW DO YOU WANT TO LIVE?

SEAL OF THE CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
1847-1856
1856-1869
1869-1893
1893-1906
1906-1934
1934-1942
1942-1946
1946-1950
1950-1956
1956-1960
1960-1966
1966-1970
1970-1976
1976-1980
1980-1986
1986-1990
1990-1996
1996-2000
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2006-2010
2010-2016
2016-2020
2020-2026
2026-2030
2030-2036
2036-2040
2040-2046
2046-2050
2050-2056
2056-2060
2060-2066
2066-2070
2070-2076
2076-2080
2080-2086
2086-2090
2090-2096
2096-2100

TRIP WITHOUT A TICKET

property of the possessed

COLE & CARL STREETS

WEDNESDAY, MAY 12, 1988

Poetry Bust

KEEP A FREE FRAME OF REFERENCE AT 1711 Haight St OR WHEREVER FREE STORE GALORE

GENTLENESS

in the

TO YOURS

plb

no vice

DIGGERS WELCOME

BREAD FREE FOREVER

Figure 12. Digger Inheritance



Figure 13. Spreading of Free



Figure 14. Irving Rosenthal's Queer Aesthetic



Figure 15. Queer Transformation

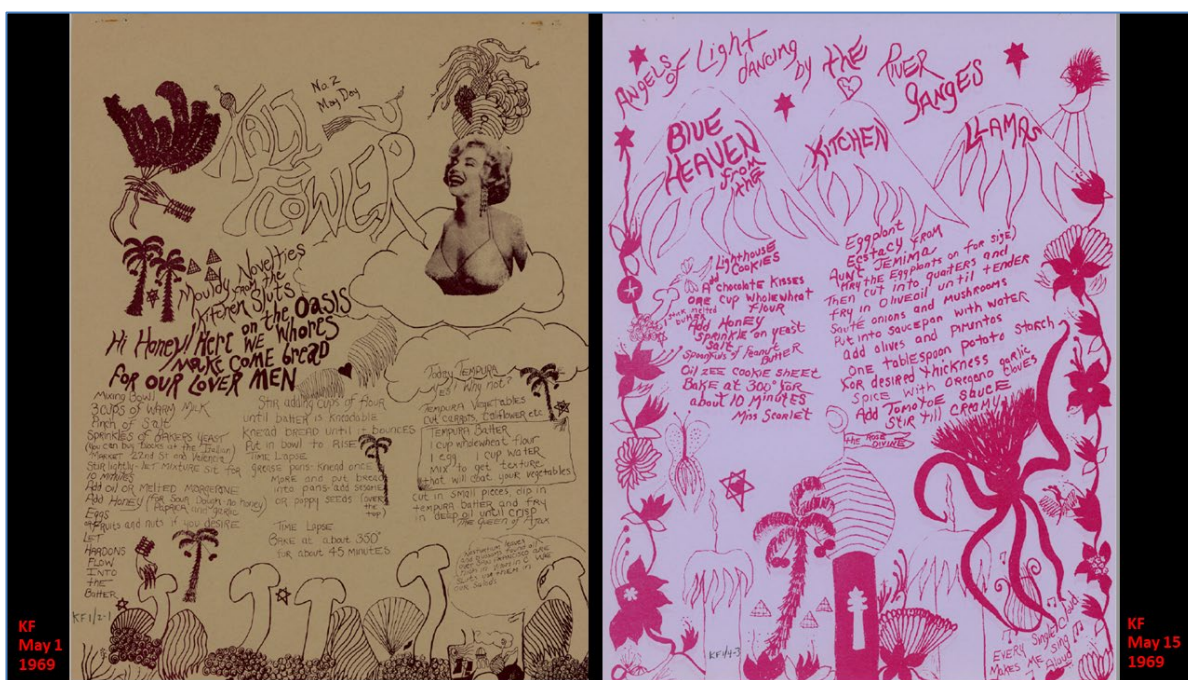


Figure 16. The Kitchen Sluts and Angels Dancing



Figure 17. Cockettes and Angels Together



Figure 18. Cockettes in Irving's Drag



Figure 19. Angels Emerge



Figure 20. Hibiscus Chooses Free

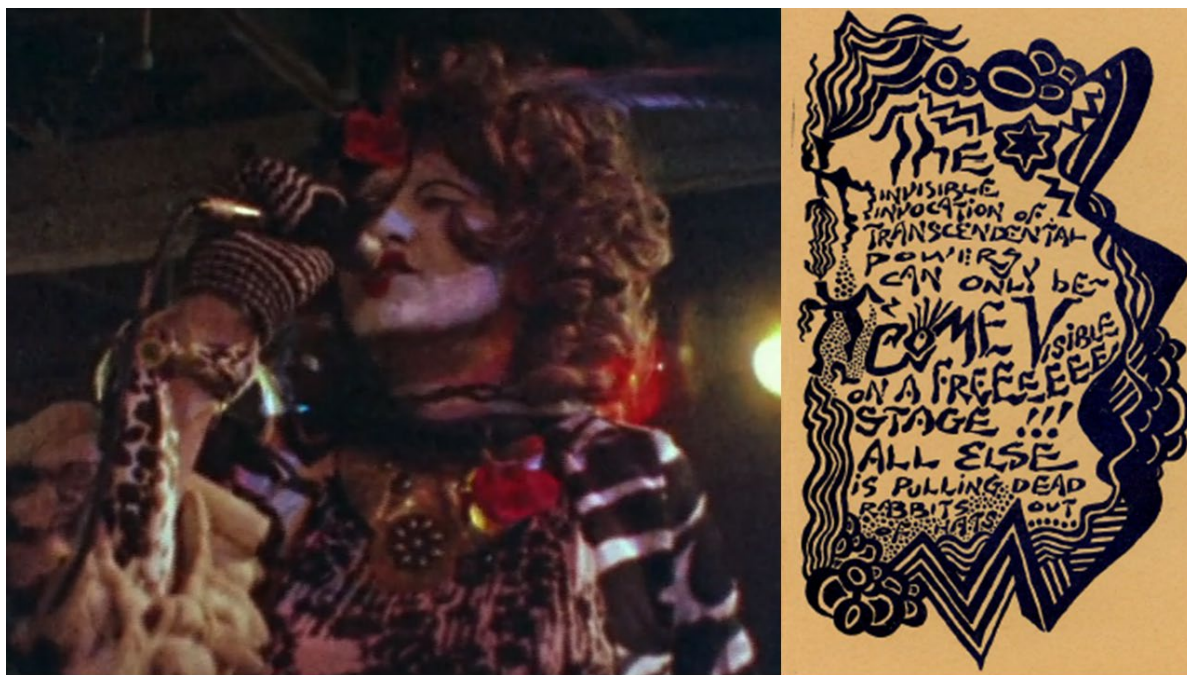


Figure 21. Jilala's Oracular Declaration

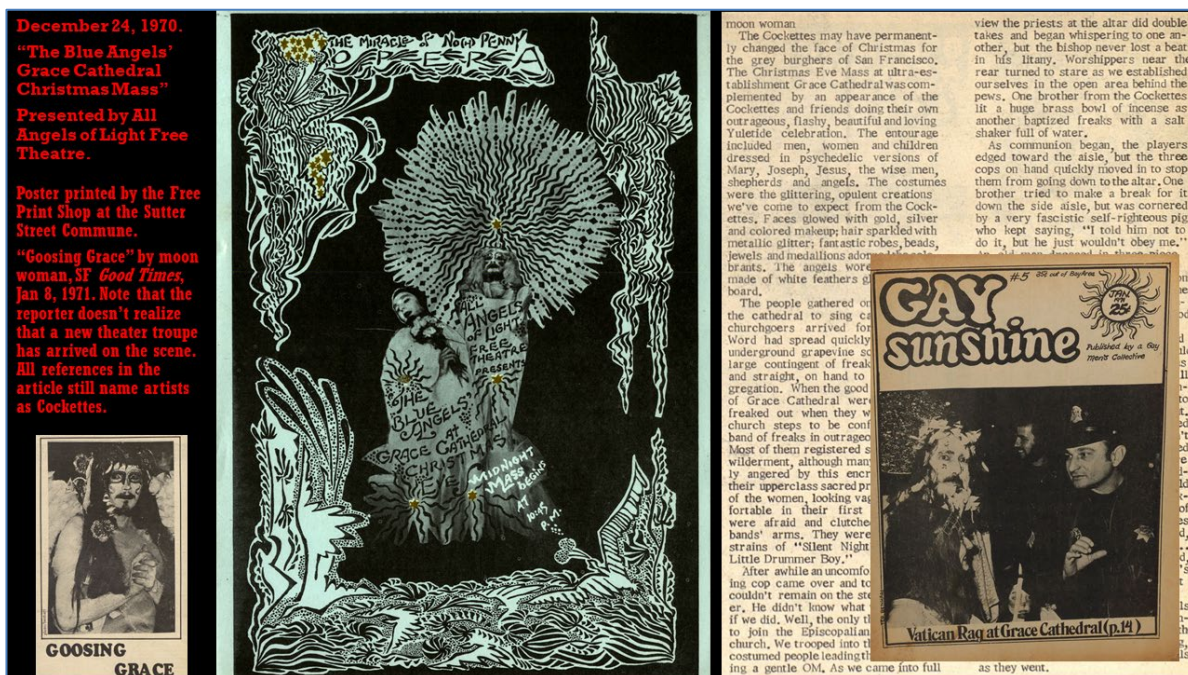


Figure 22. Grace Cathedral



January 29-30, 1972. "Myth Thing" — Poet's Theatre, 430 Mason St.
 The show had several alternative names, among which were "The Greek Show"; "The Freek Show"; and, "Hermes' Hermits Meet Homer's Homos" but the one that was generally used was "Myth Thing." The two-panel notice for the show appeared as a half-page format in KF (1/27/72). Poster by Free Print Shop.

Figure 23. "Myth Thing" at Poet's Theatre, 1972



Myth Thing (aka, The Greek Show), Poet's Theatre, January 29-30, 1972. Photos by Miriam Bobkoff.

Figure 24. "Myth Thing" (aka, The Greek Show)

- 1970
 - Jul 11. "The Fairytale Extravaganza" — Committee Theatre, 836 Montgomery St. (Free version of the Cockettes show the previous month.)
 - Aug 2. "Tropical Heatwave Hot Voodoo" — Committee Theatre, 836 Montgomery St. (Free version of the Cockettes show the previous month.)
 - Dec 5. "Children of Paradise" — Japanese Tea Garden, Golden Gate Park.
 - Dec 24. "The Blue Angels' Christmas Eve Mass" — Grace Cathedral.
- 1971
 - Mar 21 (Sunday, 9pm). "Free Kabaret" — Committee Theatre, 622 Broadway.
 - Mar 28 (Sunday, 9pm). Kabaret Morocco De La Flaming Flamingo presenting "Plaster of Paris" — Committee Theater, 622 Broadway.
 - May 2. Polk Gulch Gay-La Street Fair. Polk Street. (Appearing jointly with some of the Cockettes.)
 - Aug 6-7. Angels of Light / Free Theatre / Blue Angel Free Cabaret in "Earthquake: A Midsummer's Night Scream" — 330 Grove Street.
 - Oct 2-4. Cotton Club Cabaret in "Flaming Hot Erotica Exotica" — 330 Grove Street.
 - Oct 30. "Ghoul Diggers of Transylvania, a Halloween Opera" — Castro Street Festival.
 - Nov 5. Gay Pride Dance Party (Nov. 6 Peace March). SF State College. [Lesbians walk out protesting Angels' portrayal of women]
 - Nov 25-28. "Thanksgiving" — Organic Life Mission, 541 Hemlock Street.
 - Dec 24. Christmas Eve Free Cabaret & Children's Show presents "Whatever Happened to Baby Jesus?" — Poet's Theater, 430 Mason.
- 1972
 - Jan 29-30. "Myth Thing" (aka "The Greek Show" aka "Hermes' Hermits Meets Homer's Homos") — Poet's Theatre, 430 Mason Street.
 - May 20. "Peking On Acid" — Intercommunal Carnival, Douglass Playground, San Francisco.
 - [Jun 22. Last issue of *Kaliflower*]
 - Jun 30. Gay Freedom Day Parade. San Francisco. Angels appear on the Hot Moon Commune's float.
 - Sep [n.d.]. Intercommunal Carnival, Wolf Creek, Oregon.
 - Nov 30. "Kai Butsu" — U.C. Extension, SF.
- 1973
 - Apr 15. "Al'ah Mode" — McLaren Amphitheater, SF.
 - May 4. "Allah Mode or Chained to the Subculture" — Little Theatre, Memorial Hall, Stanford University.
 - Jun 24. Angels performing on flatbed truck lead parade to Golden Gate Park for Gay Freedom Day.
 - Aug 9-10. "Deep Frieze: a Free Soup Opera" — U.C. Extension Theatre.
 - Oct 31. "Halloween Show" — U.C. Extension, SF.
 - Nov 9, 10. Picket protest of "Pickup's Tricks." Palace Theatre.
 - Dec 22, 24. "Comets You Are" — Tenderloin YMCA.
- 1974+

Gay Pride Week, Stanford (1974); "Inferno Reason" (1975); "Paris Sights Under the Bourgeois Sea" (1975); "Transcendental Medication" (Assorted Nuts*, 1977); "Atomic Testes" (Assorted Nuts, 1978); "Sci-Clones" (1978); "Holy Cow" (1979, 1980); "Hotel of Follies" (1981); "True Tales of Hollywood Horror" (1983); "Cinderella II: Happily Ever After" (1984). *Assorted Nuts = spin-off of the Angels directed by Tahara.

Figure 25. Angels of Light Chronology

Angels of Light Video Library (as of January 2024)

All footage by Jilala Jet von Jalopy (except "Children of Paradise")

- [Children of Paradise](#) (1970, shot by Joseph)
- [Polk Gulch Gayla](#) (1971)
- [Peking On Acid](#) (1972)
- [Allah Mode](#) (1973)
- [Deep Frieze](#) (1973)
- [Comets You Are](#) (1973)
- [Atomic Testes](#) (offshoot of the Angels) (1978)
- Footage at the [Rathayatra Festival](#) (1972)
- Footage at [Pickup's Tricks Picket Line](#) (1973)
- Angels in [B/W Set Pieces](#) (Indoor Sets)
- Footage [Sequence 23](#) (Early Gay Day Celebrations)
- Footage [Snippets](#) (including "Earthquake" cabaret clips)
- Footage [compilation](#) (one hour, color, with sound)
- Jet's Sets [Four Shorts in Black & White](#) (Indoor Sets)

This listing (with clickable links) available at: https://diggers.org/angels_of_light.htm

Figure 26. Angels of Light Video Library

Chapter Four. Acts in a Rainbow Revolution

Two men from the Vanguard Commune joined Kaliflower, Shire, Christian and other collectives on a day of visiting many of the Haight-Ashbury homes of cooperative living. We were very pleased with the variety of lifestyles assembled peacefully within the communication of Kaliflower. It did us good to see the uniqueness of each system working for itself and joining in at least one whole exchange — Kaliflower. The Shire schools children. The Christians perform cardinal acts of charity. The Gay communes create music and poetry, gardens and acts of common joy and love. Other collectives produced candles, cooking, clothes and just good gentle consciousness. We thank you all for a fine day, a good high and a mellow feeling.²⁷³

Kaliflower as Gay Influencer

By the end of *Kaliflower's* first year of publication, the network of communes in San Francisco that were receiving the weekly hand-delivered issues featured a diverse mix of lifestyles. Gay communes were thriving — in fact, many considered the Sutter Street Commune, publishers of *Kaliflower*, to be a gay commune due to the homoerotic imagery in many of the page designs. As seen in the epigraph above, gay communes, including the Vanguard Commune (publishers of *Vanguard Magazine*), were closely connected to this intercommunal network.

This chapter is an attempt to connect Kaliflower, both the commune and the publication, with the emergence of a radical queer sensibility in San Francisco. Everyone knows about Stonewall and what happened in June of 1969 in New York City. But few know what happened in San Francisco several months earlier. Stonewall has

²⁷³ "Gay Commune Consciousness News," *Kaliflower* 1, no. 52 (April 16, 1970).

become that watershed moment that divides two eras in the history of queer freedom. As well it should be. As we will see, however, a fully articulated notion of gay liberation had been formulated in San Francisco months before Stonewall. And the interesting aspect of this research is how it intersects with the history of Kaliflower.²⁷⁴

Uncovering Group Oral Histories

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a group eventually consisting of thirty friends, many of whom had lived in communes that were part of the Kaliflower network, formed a weekly Zoom meeting to provide mutual support during the pandemic. The weekly sessions developed into a form of group oral history, with individuals sharing their stories of communal living in some cases decades after losing touch with each other. Much of the research for this history of Kaliflower developed out of these zoom talks as a series of interconnected points along an arc of social history.

David Parkhurst, one of the members of the Burrow's Bees Pandemic Zoom group, uncovered and shared with everyone a series of photographs he had taken in San Francisco from 1967 to 1970.²⁷⁵ Several of David's long-lost images include individuals who are part of this chapter's story. David told how he had first arrived in San Francisco at the height of the Summer of Love. He has photos of the

²⁷⁴ While my intent in this chapter is to draw connections that have not previously been made involving *Kaliflower* and some of the actors who played critical roles at the outset of the gay liberation revolution of 1969, it is incumbent to acknowledge previous scholarship in this field. This includes three topics that I bring together in this history: the Committee for Homosexual Freedom, Carl Wittman, and the Stonewall Rebellion (in chronological order as they are introduced in the chapter). I will indicate previous accounts of each of these as they are introduced in the chapter.

²⁷⁵ Burrow's Bees Pandemic Zoom, BUZZ: A Memcon of the Proceedings, 2020-2024, The Digger Archives, San Francisco, CA. (July 23, 2023)

Communication Company, the Diggers, Straight Theater collective, and later the Sutter Street Commune. One of David's photos was of a man who played a catalytic role in the history of Gay Liberation in San Francisco in 1969 — Dunbar Aitkens.²⁷⁶ David told how he ran into Dunbar on Haight Street in March 1969, coincidentally on the exact same corner where they had encountered each other two years previously. On both occasions, Dunbar was handing out leaflets for the current project he was pursuing. In 1969, Dunbar's current project was a free university for communes.

Dunbar Aitkens: Catalyst and Bridge-Builder

The best description of Dunbar Aitkens comes from Irving Rosenthal's memoir for the tenth anniversary issue of *Kaliflower*. Irving wrote:

I saw Dunbar Aitkens on Haight Street handing out mimeographed sheets long before I met him, and I met him long before he moved into the commune. Dunbar was a huge, tall, blackhaired street philosopher, as gentle as a bunny. He was very interested in young men, and had the knack for meeting them easily on the street. He always had some interesting project going to talk to them about. He brought many of them to the commune, both before, during, and after the month he lived with us (March-April 1969), to the point where the word "indunbaration" was coined to describe the phenomenon. At the time he came to live with us he was trying to form a sort of rural commune called the Environmental School, along with Stevie and Teddy, whom he brought into the commune with him. Other Dunbar-recruited members were Art, Carl, Arthur, Sam, and David. Dunbar hotly denied

²⁷⁶ Dunbar Aitkens, one of the intersecting actors in this history, has only been referenced in connection with the gay liberation revolution in underground newspaper articles at the time. He does not appear, for example, in *Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History in America*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons/Thomson/Gale, 2004.

any religious outlook, but I always saw him as a roving guru, making spiritual contact on the street.²⁷⁷

At their chance meeting on Haight Street in 1969, Dunbar told David that he was living in a commune and he should come by to visit. That was the Sutter Street Commune, which had set up and was operating the Free Print Shop, which printed the flyer announcing Dunbar's Free University project and which he was handing out on Haight Street. David accepted Dunbar's offer and moved in after the individual invitation became a communal one. Irving's description of Dunbar's ability to bring young men to the commune who would become core members was incisive.²⁷⁸

Steven Dworkin was another of Dunbar's recruits. In late 1968, Steven attended Dunbar's weekly gatherings for the Environmental School that were held at the All Saints Church on Waller Street. As an aside, this church was one of the locations out of which the Diggers had operated in 1966-67. It was where Walt Reynolds taught the Diggers how to bake whole wheat bread in discarded coffee cans.²⁷⁹ In late 1968, at one of Dunbar's meetings, members of the Sutter Street Commune showed up to check out the Environmental School Free University. This is when Dunbar and Steven met the commune. Dunbar soon decided to accept the commune's invitation to move in, and Steven followed. With a little prompting, Steven soon embarked on a work project — publishing an intercommunal newspaper to stay in contact with other communes in the Bay Area. He named the newspaper *Kaliflower* as a pun on the term Kali Yuga which, in Hindu cosmology, is the end times of destruction.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ Rosenthal, "Back in 1966..."

²⁷⁸ The Digger Archives, "Catalog of Free Print Shop Publications." (Item #15)

²⁷⁹ [Eric Noble], "Digger Bread & The Free Bakery (ies)."

²⁸⁰ Burrow's Bees Pandemic Zoom, BUZZ: A Memcon. A transcript of Steven's

The Founding of a Free Newspaper

The first issue of *Kaliflower* was dated April 24, 1969. It was distributed to seven other communal households. Here is Steven's description of this moment as he looked back three years later:

Kaliflower was born in a very strange place The memories of my first visits to the commune on Sutter St. are long dark hallways & weird people-creatures, huge dinners, uncontrollable hard-ons, gold paint, six-pointed stars, a print shop & busy workers ... an odd mixture of the glamorous & the industrious. In my first days there an intercommunal newspaper was suggested to me as a work project, & coming straight from meetings with various utopian dreamers & schemers, it all clicked. Here were the print shop & flipped-out artists, now all we needed were the communes.

We had a vague sense of their presence, but even at a year old, Sutter St. still wasn't in touch with another San Francisco commune. After a diligent search, I came up with seven other addresses, most of which were only marginally communal. (None of them are still getting KF.) We devised a method of distribution in which paranoid communes would not have to have their addresses printed. We gave each commune a KF board cut out of Redevelopment plywood, with a printed masthead, two clothes-pins to hang their issues with & a bamboo tube to put messages into. Communes would write at the end of their ads "Reply thru the bamboo tube," then we would pick up the answers & deliver them the next week. A bit awkward, but the system was used for quite a while, until there were so many communes that we couldn't produce KF boards fast enough. We had an all day pun session to create a name, finally choosing the image of a flower growing in the Kali Yuga (the present age of fire & destruction in Hindu mythology, which is followed by the Golden Age).

recounting of the founding and naming of *Kaliflower* is included in the June 20, 2020, issue of the BUZZ.

It was very difficult to get people to contribute messages during the first month or two. Most people weren't interested in looking outside their own house, or even their own selves. "Your own thing" was supreme & unquestioned. All we had to offer them were dreams. Perhaps they would start using the word commune, instead of just sharing a flat. Maybe start eating dinner together, & get rid of the paper bags in the refrigerator, each with a person's name on it. And we dropped hints of starry visions, of a network of communes, serving each other, getting to know each other. We had a sense of mission, because we had learned that working together, for each other, not our own selves, was what kept our heads straight (when we could). We knew that if we kept plugging away at our message, that sometime, somewhere, someone would pick up on a similar vision.²⁸¹

The cover of the first issue set the tone for the homoerotic imagery that became one of the hallmarks of *Kaliflower*. Even though the commune was a mix of sexual orientations, it is easy to see how it gained the reputation of being a gay commune, especially with creatures like Hibiscus and Jilala and Ralif dressing up and performing as the Kitchen Sluts while preparing the communal meal every night.²⁸² The homoerotic imagery in the pages of *Kaliflower* only added to this reputation.²⁸³ Over the period of three years of continuous weekly publication, *Kaliflower's* audience grew from a handful to more than 300 communes in the San Francisco Bay Area that received the free

²⁸¹ "Memories [...] Precious Memories."

²⁸² For example, the Wikipedia page for the "Kaliflower Commune" lists "gay liberation" as one of the principles on which the commune was founded. "Kaliflower Commune," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 2023, accessed 2023-10-06, <https://bit.ly/46hUUFr>. Author's personal recollection is that Peter Berg and others of the Diggers believed that the Sutter Street Commune was a gay commune.

²⁸³ Sutter Street Commune, "Mouldy Novelties from the Kitchen Sluts," *Kaliflower* I, no. 2 (May 1, 1969).

newspaper which was hand delivered every Thursday.²⁸⁴ As seen in the epigraph to this chapter, this face-to-face interaction on a weekly basis brought the people delivering *Kaliflower* into contact with a range of lifestyles that included openly Gay communes.

The Homosexual Revolution of 1969

Meanwhile, in the same week as the first issue of *Kaliflower*, an essay appeared in *Vector* calling for gay revolution.²⁸⁵ *Vector* was the publication of S.I.R., the Society for

²⁸⁴ "In recent weeks we have been trying to think of ways to change *Kaliflower*," *Kaliflower* 3, no. 52 (April 27, 1972). Towards the end of the first continuous run of *Kaliflower*, numerous articles struggled with the question of the size of circulation of the newspaper. This article questions whether "several hundred communes" can really comprise a "*Kaliflower* community."

²⁸⁵ Leo E. Laurence, "Gay Revolution," *Vector: a Voice for the Homosexual Community*, April, 1969, 11. Martin Duberman (1994) mentions Laurence as one of several examples of the turn toward militant action by gay activists in the late 1960s. However, Duberman makes no mention of the Committee for Homosexual Freedom nor of Laurence's role in its formation. Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Plume, 1994), 171. Duberman appears to have based his truncated discussion of Laurence on John D'Emilio's 1983 history of gay and lesbian history. D'Emilio mentioned that Laurence "went on to form the Committee for Homosexual Freedom, which tried to adapt New Left perspectives to the struggle for homosexual equality" which is the extent to which he refers to this key player in this chapter. John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 230. Both D'Emilio and Duberman got certain facts about Laurence incorrect. D'Emilio implies that Laurence started writing for the *Berkeley Barb* after getting "radicalized" at the 1968 Democratic convention. In fact, Laurence had been a union organizer and had been writing for the *Barb* in the year prior to the convention. Duberman stated that Laurence and Gale Whittington were lovers. Presumably, Duberman made that determination based on the cover photo in the *Berkeley Barb* that depicted Laurence with his arms around a bare-chested Whittington. More recent scholarship places Laurence in a clearer light. Simon Hall (2018) uses Laurence as one of the bridge icons of the "Spirit of '68" in describing the arc of gay activism from assimilationist (pre-Stonewall 1950s homophile) to liberationist (post-Stonewall gay liberation). Simon Hall, "Gay Liberation and The Spirit of '68," in *Reframing 1968: American Politics, Protest and Identity*, ed. Martin Halliwell and Nick Witham (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018). Jared Leighton (2019) draws on Laurence's connections to the Black Panthers in Oakland to understand the turn to gay militancy. Jared

Individual Rights, one of the half dozen Bay Area homophile organizations at the time. S.I.R. was founded in San Francisco in 1964 after police closed a dozen bars with gay and lesbian customers, and by 1969, S.I.R. had more than a thousand members. In the April 1969 issue of *Vector*, the magazine's new editor, Leo Laurence, wrote a column in which he called for a radical new approach to gay liberation. He criticized gay establishment organizations, including S.I.R., for their cautious attitudes toward radical advocacy, getting waylaid by ego-trips and hypocrisy. He criticized the Tavern Guild for racism, citing its opposition to Citizen's Alert, a project initiated by Reverend Cecil Williams, the Black head minister of Glide Church, to end police harassment and brutality. Laurence ended his essay with a clarion call that rang loud, and which foreshadowed similar language a decade later from Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in San Francisco. Laurence wrote, "Individual homosexuals must open up and honestly accept their own homosexuality. Say you're gay at work, at home, church, wherever you go. Come out from behind a double-life of straight at work and home, but gay at night. I'll admit it's not easy to be honest, but neither was writing this article."²⁸⁶

Leighton, "'All of Us Are Unapprehended Felons': Gay Liberation, the Black Panther Party, and Intercommunal Efforts Against Police Brutality in the Bay Area," *Journal of Social History* 52, no. 3 (2019). Andrew Lester (2020) discusses Laurence's involvement in the Sexual Freedom League as an important contribution to gay pride. Andrew Lester, "'This Was My Utopia': Sexual Experimentation and Masculinity in the 1960s Bay Area Radical Left," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 29, no. 3 (September 2020). Despite these recent accounts that have brought Laurence into sharper focus, they continue to misconstrue some of the facts that D'Emilio and Duberman first engendered: his employment (he was an editor, not a reporter at KGO radio); his relationship to Whittington (they were not lovers); his career with the *Berkeley Barb* (he was writing articles the year prior to the Democratic convention in Chicago); his assumption of the editorship of *Vector* (he was elected by the membership of S.I.R., not appointed).

²⁸⁶ Laurence, "Gay Revolution."

The same day that the April issue of *Vector* hit the newsstands, the *Berkeley Barb* published an article that reported on the *Vector* editorial's revolutionary message. Its lead sentence read, "The largest gay organization in the United States has been challenged to join the revolution 'today not tomorrow.'"²⁸⁷ In the photo accompanying the article appeared Leo Laurence with his arms embracing a young shirtless friend who was unnamed.

Committee for Homosexual Freedom

At this point, things start to move into high gear. The young friend who had appeared shirtless in the *Berkeley Barb* was Gale Whittington, an employee of the States Steamship Company at its headquarters in San Francisco's financial district. Whittington was fired from his job the week after the photo identifying him as gay appeared in the *Barb*. Laurence and Whittington then decided to form a group to protest the firing by holding a daily picket line in front of the States Steamship offices on California Street. They named their group the Committee for Homosexual Freedom (CHF).²⁸⁸ An article in the *Berkeley Barb* the following week reported on the protest: "The

²⁸⁷ "Homo Revolt: 'Don't Hide It,'" *Berkeley Barb*, March 28,, 1969, 5.

²⁸⁸ As with Leo Laurence, early scholarship on the gay liberation movement barely mentioned the Committee for Homosexual Freedom (CHF). Recent research has focused on the militant stance that Laurence and Whittington injected into the group's activism, but often from divergent sources. As mentioned in footnote 285, Lester focuses on sexual liberation, and Leighton on Black liberation, as sources of influence for CHF. Justin Suran (2001) focuses on the connections with the anti-war movement. Emily Hobson (2009) blends all these influences into her narrative of the CHF. See Emily K. Hobson, "Imagining Alliance: Queer Anti-imperialism and Race in California, 1966–1990" (Ph.D., University of Southern California, 2009); Justin David Suran, "Coming Out Against the War: Antimilitarism and the Politicization of Homosexuality in the Era of Vietnam," *American Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (2001). Interestingly, all these accounts mischaracterize Whittington and Laurence as lovers, seemingly replicating the original error of Duberman. An exhaustive inventory of the two dozen actions carried out by the CHF from

homosexual revolution of 1969 started this week in San Francisco as militant homosexuals made war on both gay and straight Establishments.”²⁸⁹ The article also reported that the Board of Directors of S.I.R. had dismissed Leo Laurence as editor of *Vector*, a post he had held for only two months.

The Committee for Homosexual Freedom carried out a series of subsequent protest actions in the spring, summer, and fall of 1969. Aside from the daily picket lines in front of 320 California Street to protest the firing of Whittington, the committee joined or initiated protests all over the Bay Area — holding picket lines at Tower Records in San Francisco to protest the firing of another gay employee; participating in a mock funeral march protesting the shooting of a gay man by two undercover police at a popular Berkeley cruising spot; showing up with pro-gay signs at People’s Park demonstrations; picketing Safeway in solidarity with Cesar Chavez of the Farm Workers Union and in support of its grape boycott; leafletting at a radical conference organized by the Black Panther Party; and protesting police entrapment of gays on the University of California at Berkeley campus. Committee members also showed up at S.I.R. meetings to lobby for more progressive policies.²⁹⁰

April 1969 to March 1970 is found in "LGBT Direct Action Bibliography, Chronology, and Inventory, 1965-1975 by Marc Stein," Outhistory.org, 2024, accessed Nov. 19, 2024, <https://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/direct/>.

²⁸⁹ "Homo Revolt Blasting Off On Two Fronts," *Berkeley Barb*, April 11, 1969, 5.

²⁹⁰ Gale Chester Whittington, *Beyond Normal: The Birth of Gay Pride* (G. Whittington, 2010). Gale included several important photographs from the Committee for Homosexual Freedom’s brief tenure, including the picket lines at the Steamship offices and at Tower Records and at the offices of KGO Radio; picketing Safeway in support of the Grape Boycott; People’s Park rallies; and Gay protests of police entrapment. The *Berkeley Barb* covered the committee’s actions from the very start in April 1969. Later accounts of some of their protests, for example the demonstration at the offices of the San Francisco Examiner later that year, were covered in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Examiner*. For a chronology of CHF actions in 1969 and 1970, see:

One of the more raucous of their protests took place at the offices of the *San Francisco Examiner* on October 31, 1969. The Committee for Homosexual Freedom set up a picket line to protest an article by Robert Patterson, an *Examiner* reporter, that purported to be an exposé of San Francisco gay clubs where “homosexuals gather for their sick, sad revels.”²⁹¹ As the picket line proceeded in front of the *Examiner* building on Fifth Street, with chants of “Say It Loud, We’re Gay and We’re Proud,” suddenly a bag of purple printer’s ink was hurled over the roof onto the protesters. The picketers proceeded to dip their hands into the ink and leave handprints and slogans on the side of the building. At this point, the Tactical Squad was called in and a dozen arrests were made. The *San Francisco Chronicle* report of the protest noted that “the homosexuals ... prefer to be called gay.”²⁹² In subsequent reports of the arrests and follow-up court hearings, the name of the organizing group shifted from the Committee for Homosexual Freedom to the Gay Liberation Front. The reason for this change in nomenclature will next become clear.²⁹³

Remember that the first action of the Committee for Homosexual Freedom took place at the beginning of April 1969, nearly three months before the Stonewall Uprising. Of course, the events that happened in New York City in the early midnight hours of

Stein, “LGBT Direct Action.”

²⁹¹ Robert Patterson, “The Dreary Revels of S.F. ‘Gay’ Clubs,” *San Francisco Examiner*, October 25, 1969.

²⁹² Jerry Carroll, “Homosexual Pickets: Gay Melee at Examiner,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Nov. 1 1969. The photo credit is by Greg Peterson.

²⁹³ See for example, “Crackdown in Court: Bad Day for Gay Group,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Nov. 4 1969. The lead sentence reads, “Fifteen members of the Committee for Homosexual Freedom and/or the Gay Liberation Front who demonstrated Friday in front of the San Francisco Examiner were taken yesterday into three Municipal Courts to face a variety of misdemeanor charges.”

June 28 would become a prime focus for historians of the Gay Liberation movement.²⁹⁴

For a historian of social movements, it's often an exercise in futility to try and pinpoint causality. Did the events in San Francisco three months prior to Stonewall play any part in the events that hot summer night in Greenwich Village three thousand miles away? In reading through the underground press, the only mentions of the Committee for Homosexual Freedom in San Francisco were the articles in the *Berkeley Barb*. I found nothing in the *East Village Other*, for example, one of the network of underground papers that all shared their stories through the Underground Press Syndicate.²⁹⁵

There are, however, two tantalizing bits of evidence of a connection between the events in San Francisco in April 1969 and those in Greenwich Village in June. Leo Laurence reported on the Stonewall Uprising in the July 4, 1969, issue of the *Berkeley Barb*. In his story, he reported talking with J. Marks, an eyewitness to the second night's events at the Stonewall Inn. Laurence quoted Marks as saying, "The gay community in New York City has been inspired by your homosexual liberation stories in the BARB."

²⁹⁶ The second whiff of causality is from Gale Whittington's memoir in which he states

²⁹⁴ Historical scholarship around the Stonewall Uprising is extensive. Stein's documentary history (2019) reviews the historiography and delineates the evolution of interpretive lenses through which that signal event has been interpreted (as well as providing a compendium of primary sources related to its understanding). Marc Stein, *The Stonewall Riots: A Documentary History* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).

²⁹⁵ Both the *Berkeley Barb* and the *East Village Other* were founding members of the Underground Press Syndicate. See "Underground Press Syndicate Members Hold First Meeting," *Other Scenes* 1, no. 4 (April 1967). What is more surprising than the lack of mention in EVO of the homosexual uprising in San Francisco is that there is no mention of Stonewall in their own backyard until the following year.

²⁹⁶ Leo E. Laurence, "Gays Hit NY Cops," *Berkeley Barb*, July 4, 1969. Laurence's report is the first mention of the Stonewall Uprising in the JSTOR Independent Voices database of the underground press. Marc Stein included many of Laurence's *Berkeley Barb* articles in his

that “several” Stonewall activists contacted the San Francisco group to say they took inspiration from the militant CHF activities that spring. “They said if we could do it here, they could stand up for their rights there.”²⁹⁷ One of the outcomes of the Stonewall Uprising in June was that a group of activists in New York City came together and formed the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), which had a more pronounced revolutionary ring to it than Committee for Homosexual Freedom.²⁹⁸ Over the next few months both CHF and GLF were used interchangeably until finally GLF became the name of choice.

The Free Print Shop Connection

At this point, some of the intersecting connections in this story start to resolve. One of those connections is a poster that the Sutter Street Commune printed in its Free Print Shop for the Committee for Homosexual Freedom for the picket line at States Steamship.²⁹⁹ The poster depicts an erect phallus bordered by two stylized peacocks

compendium of gay liberation documents. Stein also mentions the contention of some “CHF leaders” that their protests “inspired the uprising in New York.” Stein, *The Stonewall Riots: A Documentary History*, 9. Interestingly, I have never seen the connection made with Laurence’s activities as a union organizer nor with his early reporting in the *Barb* of activities in the Haight-Ashbury and the Hippie movement. See, for example, “Broadcast Union Fingers Cal Game,” *Berkeley Barb*, October 6, 1967. In this report of a broadcasting labor action, Laurence is identified as a union picket captain. See also the following in which Laurence reported on the Digger event known as the Death of Hippie (more formally named “Death of Hippie, Birth of Free Man”): Leo E. Laurence, ““Death of Hip”; Mixed Emotions,” *Berkeley Barb*, October 17, 1967.

²⁹⁷ Whittington, *Beyond Normal*, 299.

²⁹⁸ Jim Fouratt, one of the founding members of the Gay Liberation Front, has written his account of the Stonewall Rebellion (his term) and subsequent events in numerous Facebook postings. For example, he wrote in response to Marc Segal, “Thank you for being a founding member of the Gay Liberation Front movement that third night of the Rebellion at that meeting room at Alternative U.” Jim Fouratt, “Today in response to a post by Cody Patterson...” Facebook, 19 Feb, 2017.

²⁹⁹ The Digger Archives, “Catalog of Free Print Shop Publications.” (Item #49)

printed in a horizontal split fountain of purple and green and a vertical split fountain of orange, red, and yellow. The bold lettering in psychedelic poster style reads:

HOMOSEXUAL
FREEDOM
GAY
STRIKE
PICKET MON THRU FRI
PICKET 12 TILL 1
320 CALIFORNIA ST
COMMITTEE FOR HOMOSEXUAL FREEDOM
COME WITH US

This poster is particularly interesting because it represents a crossover between the queer and hippie communities. The homoerotic imagery combined with the psychedelic lettering and design is emblematic of the mix between these two subcultures in San Francisco. The importance of this cultural synthesis can be summed up in remarks by the filmmaker John Waters at the Cockettes 50th anniversary celebration in 2020. Waters talked about the first time he attended one of the Cockettes shows at the Palace Theater. He said,

I was so amazed at the audience which was as shocking as the show. Hippie gay guys, finally! It was so great to see them, you know. And drag queens with beards reading Lenin.³⁰⁰

I have always wondered what the connection was between the Sutter Street Commune, the Free Print Shop, and the Committee for Homosexual Freedom. The artist for the "Homosexual Freedom" poster signed their work, so someone had brought the

³⁰⁰ "John Waters' Comments at the 50th Anniversary (of the Cockettes)," 2020, <https://bit.ly/3F6yefl>.

design to the commune to print.³⁰¹ Who was the conduit between the Free Print Shop and CHF?

In researching this chapter, I discovered that Gale Whittington published a memoir in 2010. It contains a day-by-day account of his firing and subsequent actions by the Committee for Homosexual Freedom. After he was fired from his job when his shirtless photo appeared in the *Berkeley Barb*, Gale and Leo Laurence went to complain to Max Scherr, the publisher of the *Barb*. Scherr had used the photo without Gale's or Leo's permission. Instead of apologizing, Scherr roused the two to action, suggesting they protest the firing. That's when Leo and Gale decided to form the Committee for Homosexual Freedom. At their first organizing meeting, seven people showed up besides the two founders. One of these new members was Hibiscus who was still living at the Sutter Street Commune. Gale describes Hibiscus as "a devout believer in the insightful power of LSD." According to Whittington, Hibiscus was a regular participant in the committee's protests, at one point defusing a group of teenagers bent on attacking

³⁰¹ The reason for this conclusion may not be obvious, but the Sutter Street Commune, in following the precepts of the Diggers, stood firmly on the principle of anonymity for all their creative work. None of the articles in *Kaliflower* written by members of the commune were ever signed. See, for example, Emmett Grogan's explanation of anonymity in his fictionalized autobiography: "He picked up where Tumble left off, telling the crowd about the importance of anonymity to persons who seriously attempted to effect relevant changes in any social order and tried to achieve at least a token independence from the economic system, with the ultimate goal of course being autonomy. An individual and collective autonomy, a spiritual and material autonomy that would eventually lead to the long, hard struggle which would have to be fought to establish a post-competitive, comparative, classless society where all power would be decentralized and given to the people through a form of democratic socialism." Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 399. In another excerpt, Grogan stated, "Emmett and Billy wanted to maintain their anonymity in the hope of achieving the kind of autonomy Gregory Corso talks about in his poem, 'Power.'" Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 239.

the group by tearing off the placard from his protest sign and leaving just the wooden picket to defend himself. The teens got back in their cars and sped off.³⁰²

Was Hibiscus the connection between the Committee for Homosexual Freedom and the Free Print Shop's printing of the crossover queer hippie poster? We can only speculate. No one from the commune that I have asked remembers this poster. But that's not unusual given the amount of printing that was happening and the weekly schedule for publishing *Kaliflower*.³⁰³ And yet, the poster is a key piece of evidence of the interconnectedness of the communal movement and the emerging homosexual movement.

Carl Wittman and the Gay Manifesto

The next person whose story intersects with this history is Carl Wittman, who was living in San Francisco when the Committee for Homosexual Freedom started picketing States Steamship. Carl had been a campus organizer for SDS, Students for a Democratic Society, before coming out as gay and coming out to the West Coast. Within the first week of the picketing, Carl showed up to join in. He soon announced to the group that he was writing a manifesto of gay liberation and wanted to share it with everyone.³⁰⁴ An article in the *Berkeley Barb* two weeks into the picketing reported on the

³⁰² Whittington, *Beyond Normal*, 118.

³⁰³ The weekly schedule for publishing *Kaliflower* was documented in a "half issue" (actually a single sheet) of *Kaliflower* at the end of volume one. This single page announced a series of workshops at the Free Print Shop for people interested in helping take over the production of the weekly newspaper. The schedule of workshops corresponded to the actual weekly schedule for the production of *Kaliflower* as follows: "Saturday — shape / Sunday — artwork / Monday — layout / Sunday-Monday — editing / Tuesday — photography / Wednesday — printing / Thursday — distribution." So much for the stereotype of the lazy hippie. "Semen-ars for Volume II Number 1," *Kaliflower* 1, no. 52-1/2 (April 23, 1970).

³⁰⁴ Whittington, *Beyond Normal*, 122.

group's plans to increase pressure on the Steamship line. It is also the first article that quotes Carl Wittman, who said, "It's a question now of a fight for survival, not just a fight for our rights. The CHF is a mutual protection society."³⁰⁵ In the same issue of the *Barb*, one of the event notices announced that the CHF was holding weekly meetings at 260 Valencia Street in San Francisco's Mission district. Gale Whittington in his memoir names many of the early members of the radical group. I've mentioned Hibiscus but others included Pat Brown, a "self-proclaimed Trotskyite hippie," Charles Thorpe, Stephen Matthews, Morgan Pinney, Sheeza Mann, Darwin Dias, Lendon Sadler, and Konstantin Berlandt. Thorpe was a student and Pinney a faculty member at San Francisco State. Carl was able to read a draft version of his manifesto to the group at one of its meetings. Whittington recalled Carl's introduction: "The whole purpose of this Manifesto is to lay out, to make crystal clear to the people and the power structure of this country — as well as the world — what we, as gay human beings, expect and demand. As you will see, it also explains that true liberation has to come from within the hearts and psyches of gay people themselves."³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ "Gay Strike Turns Grim," *Berkeley Barb*, April 25, 1969.

³⁰⁶ Whittington, *Beyond Normal*, 131. Wittman has come into focus with recent scholarship on the gay liberation movement, although with different emphases depending on the phase of his life journey. With access to Wittman's personal journals, Ian Lekus is able to chart Wittman's transformation from a New Left activist to a gay liberationist. Ian Keith Lekus, "Queer and Present Dangers: Homosexuality and American Antiwar Activism During the Vietnam Era" (Ph.D., Duke University, 2003). Wittman's later involvement in gay country communes is provided in: Sasha Archibald, "On Wimmin's Land," *Places Journal*, February, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.22269/210216>; Heather Burmeister, "Women's Lands in Southern Oregon: Jean Mountaingrove and Bethroot Gwynn Tell Their Stories," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 115, no. 1 (Spring 2014); D. E. Mungello, "Carl Wittman's Place in Liberation History," *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* 23, no. 6 (2016). None of the sources speak directly to the possible connections between Wittman and *Kaliflower* in respect to his mention of "gay

Dunbar Aitkens Redux

At this point, Dunbar Aitkens reemerges on the arc of this history. Recall that Dunbar had lived briefly at the Sutter Street Commune just as *Kaliflower* began publication. Dunbar, as Irving said, “always had some interesting project going.” After he left the commune, we can pick up traces of his activities in the summer and fall of 1969 through notices he placed in the Bay Area underground newspapers. His first project was a Free Book Commune that he started on Waller Street. They collected and gave away books to all comers. An article in the *San Francisco Good Times* described the range of books they were giving away, “from Dostoevsky to Chairman Mao.”³⁰⁷ Within a month, Dunbar had started putting up notices for meetings at his commune to discuss a journal of the arts, science and crafts by and for homosexuals.³⁰⁸ Finally, in late November 1969, Dunbar announced a weekend-long Gay Symposium and Party at Sherwood Forest, the informal name for the Methodist student center across from the Berkeley campus. The notice, in the events listings of the *Berkeley Tribe*, listed the Gay Symposium sponsors as *Free Particle*, CHF and Gay Liberation Theater. *Free Particle* was Dunbar’s journal “by and for homosexuals.” CHF of course was the Committee for Homosexual Freedom. Gay Liberation Theater was a collective, including Gale Whittington, that was performing street theater on the Berkeley campus.³⁰⁹ In the same

communes” as a model for gay liberation. Curiously, in Stein’s documentary history of the Stonewall Uprising, the replication of Wittman’s “Gay Manifesto” elides the sentence about “gay communes” which I consider a critical piece in this history. Stein, *The Stonewall Riots: A Documentary History*, 196.

³⁰⁷ [Richard Gaikowski], “d gaik’s short bits,” *San Francisco Good Times*, 7 Aug 1969.

³⁰⁸ “Events Listing for September 28,” *Berkeley Tribe*, 26 Sep 1969.

³⁰⁹ “Events Listing Continuum,” *Berkeley Tribe*, November 27, 1969.

issue of the *Berkeley Tribe*, an article mentioned that some of the topics to be included at the symposium included "Gay communes."³¹⁰ A notice in *Kaliflower* the same week announced that the "All-Gay Three Day Symposium ... will contain such flaming items as a discussion group on communes and their relevance to gay liberation."³¹¹ This first Gay Symposium was where the Sutter Street Commune (acting as the Free Print Shop) distributed Edward Marshall's book *Transit Glory*. This was one of two Beat poetry books that Irving had printed in New York in 1967 at his Carp & Whitefish press and which presented a dilemma for Irving when he converted to the Digger Free philosophy. Ultimately, the poet and writer Richard Brautigan had convinced Irving to give away both books for free.³¹² The commune had distributed the Whelan book, *Invention of the Letter*, during a Free City poetry reading at Glide Church the year before. The Marshall book consisted of a set of thirteen single cards, each 6" tall by 3" wide with drawings by William Heine on one side and a poem or inscription by Marshall on the reverse. The cards fit inside a slightly larger envelope with an ingenious drawstring that, when pulled, would eject the contents. On the back of the envelope, the label FREE was stamped by to signify the book's liberation from the world of commerce.³¹³ The All-

³¹⁰ "Gay Lib Weekend," *Berkeley Tribe*, November 27, 1969.

³¹¹ "Gay Lib Weekend," *Kaliflower* 1, no. 32 (November 27, 1969).

³¹² Irving credited Richard Brautigan for his influence on the question of free distribution of the Marshall and Whalen books in several places. Perhaps the most revealing is in Irving Rosenthal, "A Biography of Philip Whalen's Winning His Way (Part 1)," *San Francisco Call*, February 17, 2003. Irving wrote: "During a May [1968] conversation with Richard Brautigan in Golden Gate Park, where he was handing out copies of his pretty little *Plant This Book*, he suggested that a book could be given out all at once to its appropriate target audience."

³¹³ [Irving Rosenthal], *Deep Tried Frees*. Despite the Free Print Shop's stamp freeing the Marshall book from the sphere of commerce, *Transit Glory* is much sought after by collectors today and fetches hundreds of dollars in the rare book market. For example, as of October 2023, Abebooks.com has a listing from Derringer Books (Avon, CT) for a used copy of *Transit Glory*

Gay Symposium was the perfect venue for Irving to give away the Marshall book as a tribute to the poet whom Irving had outed in his queer novel *Sheeper*.³¹⁴

Attendance at the first All-Gay Symposium was over 800 people. Success breeds success. A month later, in December 1969, a second All-Gay gathering took place. This time, all three of our actors came together to pull off the event. Carl Wittman coordinated a one-day conference sandwiched in between the four-day symposium organized by Dunbar Aitkens of *Free Particle*. In turn, *Free Particle* is mentioned as an offshoot of the Committee for Homosexual Freedom. Carl Wittman is quoted saying, "The symposiums are the first stage in getting our shit together as a gay radical community. They are valuable as a means of turning people on to Gay Lib, especially from the campus community."³¹⁵ So sayeth the ex-SDS organizer.

As if to bring this first phase of the homosexual revolution to a resounding close, Wittman's gay manifesto was published on December 26, 1969, the same week as the second All-Gay Symposium. After its first appearance in print in the *Berkeley Tribe*, Carl's essay was reprinted in numerous underground newspapers, anthologies, magazines and standalone pamphlets. The *Tribe* published Carl's essay with a title, "Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Perspective."³¹⁶ The word America was spelled with a K, as was common in the radical 1960s, to associate the United States with repressive

with a price of \$400 even though the description mentions that one of the cards is missing.

³¹⁴ "Because Ed Marshall went home with a sadist, who put a dog collar on him, stripped and said, 'Fido, suck this!' Because Ed Marshall smacked and slobbered with great canine gusto, and emitted yelps and growls of pleasure thus degrading himself something awful, and him a poet and divinity student too." Irving Rosenthal, *Sheeper* (N.Y.: Grove Press, Inc., 1968), 293.

³¹⁵ Leo E. Laurence, "Homogenous Homosexuals," *Berkeley Tribe*, December 19, 1969.

³¹⁶ Carl Wittman, "Refugees From Amerika: a gay perspective," *Berkeley Tribe* 1, no. 25 (26 Dec 1969).

regimes. In future reprintings, the essay would be called simply “The Gay Manifesto.”³¹⁷ It has been described as “the bible of gay liberation” by Michael Denny, the co-founder of the gay literary magazine, *Christopher Street*.³¹⁸ In the context of the connections between Kaliflower and the history of the gay liberation movement, the highlight of Wittman’s essay is the crux of his proposal: “To be a free territory, we must govern ourselves, set up our own institutions, defend ourselves, and use our own energies to improve our lives. The emergence of gay liberation communes, and our own paper is a good start.” In that one sentence we see echoes of the Digger Free City project, the Kaliflower intercommunal project, and the queer aesthetic and radical program that emerged in the spring of 1969 in San Francisco and burst forth on the national stage in New York a few months later. Was Wittman specifically referencing the Kaliflower communes? We may never know the answer to that intriguing question. The culture which Kaliflower, both the commune and the newspaper, was attempting to build, however, certainly fits into Wittman’s vision for the queer community.

Echoes of the Rainbow Revolution

The publication of Carl Wittman’s “Gay Manifesto” might be considered the end of this story, but of course there is never an ending to any story even if reverberations are all that remain. Echoes of the Homosexual Revolution of 1969 would continue to reverberate for months, years, and decades. In the following year, a sample of these

³¹⁷ See, for example, Carl Wittman, “A Gay Manifesto,” *The Activist*, no. 26 (Summer 1970).

³¹⁸ Michael Denny, *On Christopher Street: Life, Sex, and Death After Stonewall* (University of Chicago Press, 2023), 76.

effects includes the page distributed with *Kaliflower* titled "Gay Commune Consciousness News."³¹⁹ In April 1970, *Free Particle* hosted "Toward the Counter Culture ... a day-long set of cultural/intellectual/social occurrences" at Sherwood Forest, which had become the center of Gay Liberation on the UC Berkeley campus. The Free Print Shop printed the poster for the event.³²⁰ Photos depict Dunbar Aitkens lounging on the grass with small discussion groups. Several of the photos depict Tahara, who was performing with the Cockettes and would become one of the core members of the Angels of Light Free Theater Commune later that year.³²¹ In the same month as this symposium, the first and only issue of *Free Particle* appeared.³²² The publication ran sixty pages and contained a wide range of topics. One of the most interesting pieces is a script for a street theater skit that the Gay Liberation Theater collective performed in Sproul Plaza in October 1969.³²³ Street theater in the Sixties was so often improvisational that it is rare to find full scripts. That this was also associated with the emerging gay liberation movement makes it all the more valuable. Subsequent notices in *Kaliflower* announced a Gay Coffee House and plans for another issue of *Free Particle*, but it never happened.³²⁴ By that point, Dunbar was off to other pursuits.³²⁵

³¹⁹ "Gay Commune Consciousness News."

³²⁰ The Digger Archives, "Catalog of Free Print Shop Publications." (Item #133)

³²¹ "Diana Davies' Berkeley Gay Liberation Photographs (at NYPL Digital Collections)," 1969-1970, <https://bit.ly/48uilwv>.

³²² Dunbar Aitkens and Martin Langer, eds., *Free Particle: A Journal of Crafts, Sciences & Arts By and For Homosexuals* (Berkeley, CA: 1970).

³²³ Aitkens and Langer, *Free Particle*, 28.

³²⁴ "Free Particle, the journal of crafts ...", *Kaliflower* 2, no. 18 (August 27, 1970). Earlier in 1970, Dunbar had been banned from the U.C. Berkeley campus for "necking" in public with another man. After protests by the Gay Liberation Front, the ban was lifted. "Gay Lovers Fight for Right to Neck in Public," *The Rag*, March 15, 1970, 9.

³²⁵ Dunbar Aitkens, "In April, 1970, on a hitch-hiking trip ..." in *Kaliflower* (New Series 2):

Wittman was off to Oregon to live in a country commune and put his literary skills in the service of *RFD* magazine.³²⁶ Whittington never got his job back and eventually left San Francisco for Colorado, but not before further rabble rousing as a gay activist. Gale appeared in a TV news clip being interviewed during a sit-in at the mayor's office protesting San Francisco police brutality against gays. David Weissman and Bill Weber used the news clip of Whittington in their documentary film *The Cockettes*, without knowing his role in the story of gay liberation.³²⁷ In his memoir, Whittington proudly mentioned his appearance in *The Cockettes*, not realizing that his cameo appearance was a filmmaker's accidental discovery of stock film footage.³²⁸ With this history, I hope to have reconnected the intersecting lives and roles that Leo Laurence, Gale Whittington, Dunbar Aitkens, and Carl Wittman played in our collective history, interweaved with the emerging gay communal consciousness that Kaliflower represented.

The Intracommunal Infusion 67-77 ([Free Print Shop], 1977).

³²⁶ "OutHistory's Profiles of Ten LGBT Activists for Social Justice: Carl Wittman," 2013, accessed 2023-10-06, <https://bit.ly/3LyCCqR>.

³²⁷ Weissman, Weber, and Koldewyn, *The Cockettes*.

³²⁸ Whittington, *Beyond Normal*, 298. David Weissman related the information about the accidental discovery of the footage he used in *The Cockettes*. Email, November 15, 2024.



Figure 27. Newly Discovered Photo Archive

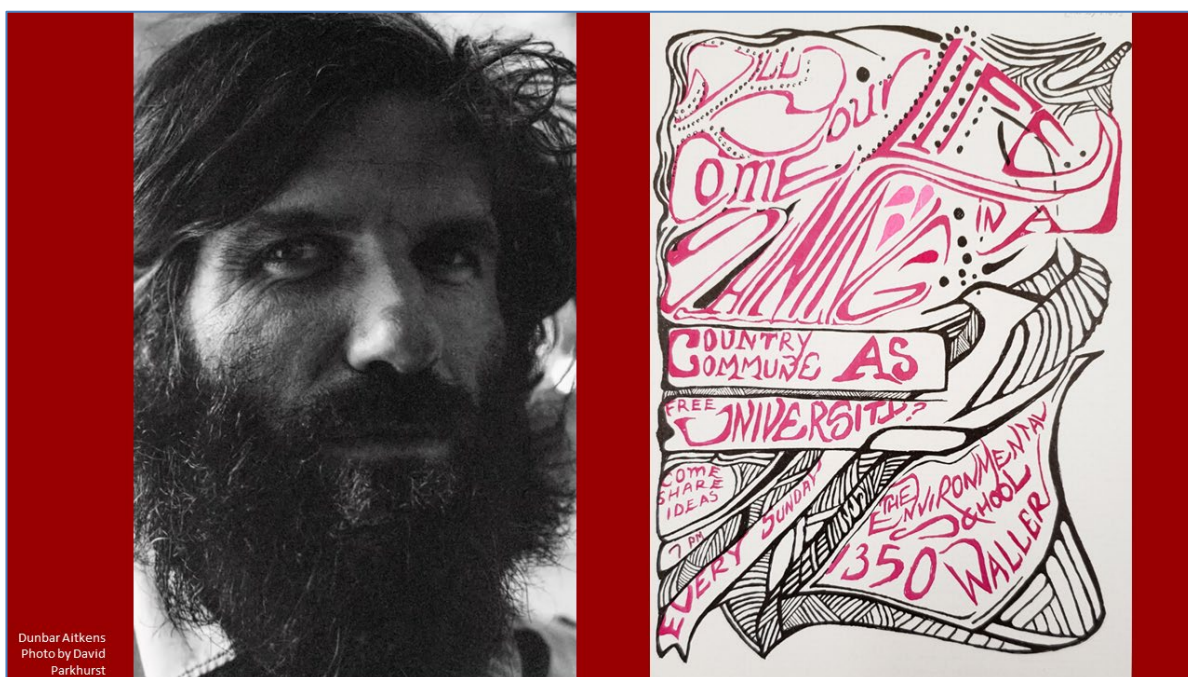


Figure 28. Dunbar Aitkens

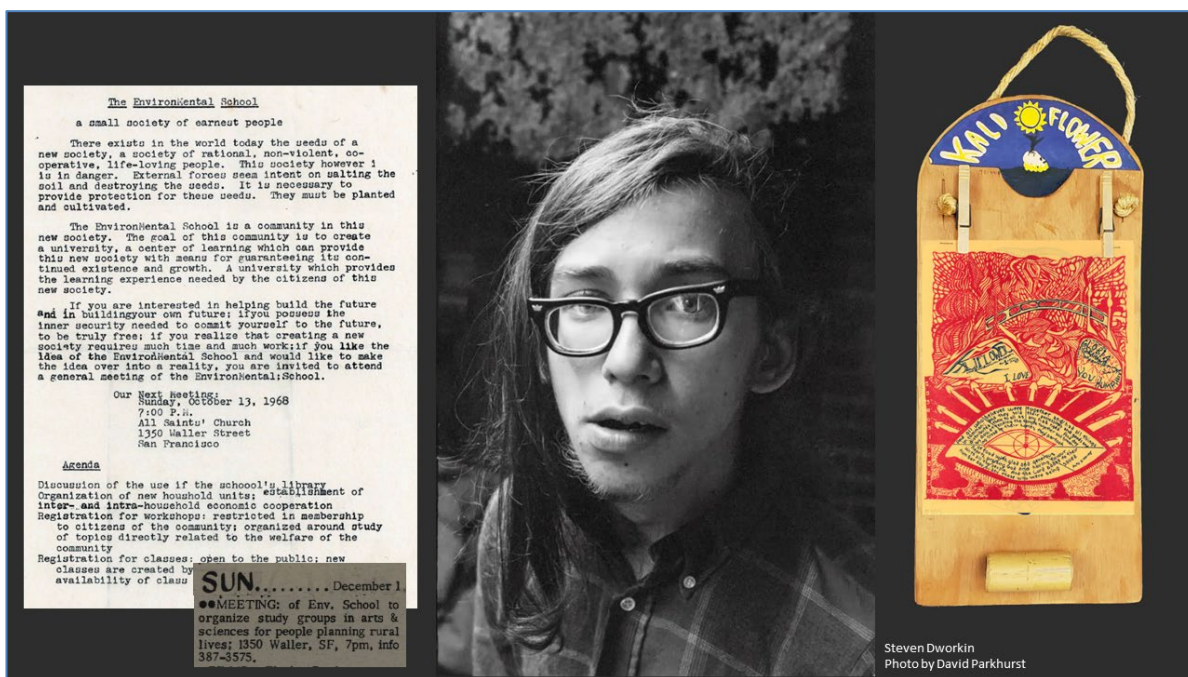


Figure 29. Steven Dworkin and Kaliflower Vision



Figure 30. Gay Revolution, April 1969



Figure 31. Committee for Homosexual Freedom, April 1969

The first meeting of the Committee for Homosexual Freedom (CHF) took place at Gale's place. Seven people (in addition to Gale and Leo) showed up, one of whom was:

"Hibiscus, a devout believer in the insightful power of LSD, floats through the door, looking more like a Jesus disciple of yore than the hippie he tells us he is."

Hibiscus, photo by David Parkhurst, 1969

CHF Poster printed by the Free Print Shop at Sutter Street Commune, April 1969.

BEYOND NORMAL
The Birth of Gay Pride

Figure 32. Gay Picket and Free Print Shop

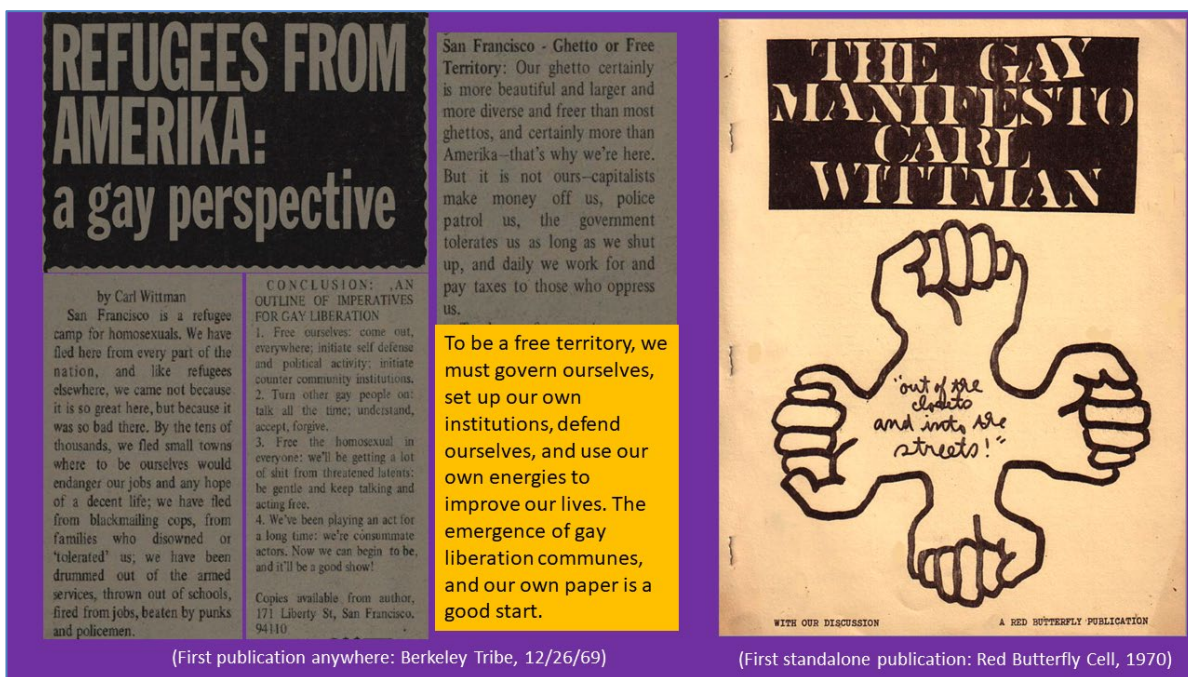


Figure 33. The Gay Manifesto

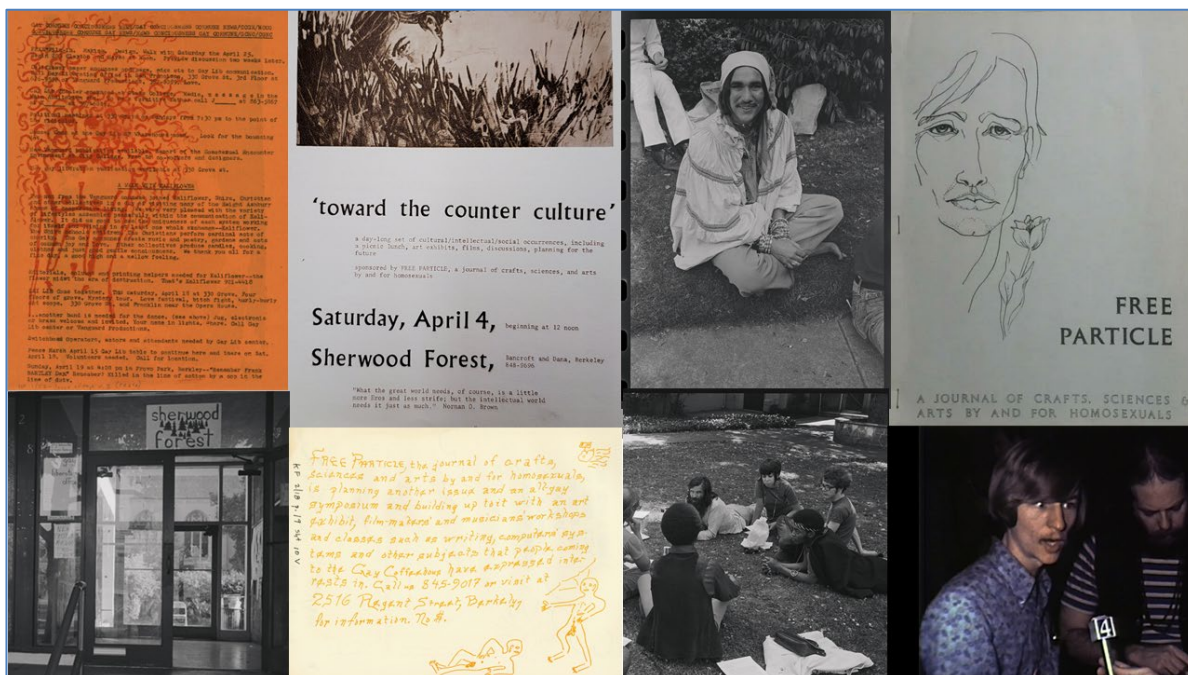


Figure 34. Gay Reverberations, 1970

Chapter Five. Exodus: Rise & Fall of Free ... Food ... Conspiracy

Q: Where'd you grow up?

A: In the Western Addition.

Q: I lived in the Western Addition in 1971 in a large commune.

A: What's a commune?

Q: A group of people who share everything; we slept together in one room.

A: Sounds like county jail.

—Conversation with a cast member of *The Last Black Man in San Francisco*, Roxie Theater, Aug 8, 2019

When *Kaliflower* ended publication in June 1972, after 165 weekly issues, more than 300 communes were receiving the hand-delivered newspaper every Thursday. Over the span of three-plus years of publishing, the pages of *Kaliflower* had spawned a communal culture unique to the San Francisco Bay Area. As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the final articles before *Kaliflower* ceased publication looked back and noted: "For every commune we knew of three years ago, we know of forty-five now. Now it is quite ordinary to come across communal bedrooms, daily meetings, common treasuries, communes which have been together for a year or longer. There are important free intercommunal services & dreamily high intercommunal events at which no one smokes cigarettes."³²⁹ *Kaliflower* had, through its pages, conjured and nurtured a thriving intercommunal culture. What were the elements of this social experiment?

Kaliflower Philosophy

From the outset, *Kaliflower* staked out a moral stance on numerous issues. We

³²⁹ "Memories [...] Precious Memories."

have already seen that one of the first articles extolled the virtues of a communal treasury, vegetarianism, shared meals, giving up cigarettes, devotion to work projects and to the principle of Digger Free, rejection of all forms of capitalism, the adoption of healthy lifestyles (vegetable gardens, composting, baking bread) and experimentation with group marriage.³³⁰

Over the next three years, articles in *Kaliflower* covered a wide range of interests, topics, and philosophies. The following are three broad areas that outline the unique message and mission that *Kaliflower* developed in this period.

Gift Economy (as an alternative to capitalism). The Kaliflower economic model was the notion of Free that the Diggers had first proposed in 1966 and developed over the next two years. Digger Free suffused the pages of *Kaliflower* with the Free Ads section of the newspaper offering all types of goods and services without monetary consideration. Eventually, there were communes engaged in all manner of the Free economy, similar to the final Digger vision of a "Post-Competitive, Comparative Game of Free City." Free stores continued to pop up regularly. People were encouraged to drop out of "straight" jobs and devote their time to the work of creating an alternative free society. In order to get money, which was still necessary to live in the confines of the larger capitalist world, articles would extol the virtue of applying for welfare — seen as a form of guaranteed annual income. Articles criticizing all forms of capitalism within the communal culture inevitably led to conflict with those who advocated the virtues of small business (such as the Briarpatch Network or the White Panthers). Gay bars would become a particular target of the anti-capitalist ethic.³³¹

³³⁰ "Silver Wigs."

³³¹ See, for example, "Lousy Dreams," v1/n4/p1 (05/15/69); "Brothers! The alternative to

Ecological Imperative (as an alternative to exploitation). Ecology was one of the key tenets of the Sixties Counterculture, and it came to represent an almost mystical theme. After the Civil Rights and antiwar movements had crystallized a growing critique of American society, the ecology movement was one of the heirs to this disenchantment. *Kaliflower* is a prime example of how an ecological consciousness infused communal lifestyles, attitudes and practices, both practical and spiritual. The pages of *Kaliflower* were filled with articles about composting, gardening, protecting the environment, natural pesticides, and planetary awareness (such as the ubiquitous solstice and equinox celebrations). Garbage Yoga was the ubiquitous name coined to designate the honored practice of re-using the throw-offs of the surplus society. While the general diaspora out of the Haight-Ashbury to country communes after 1968 represented the first wave of the back-to-the-land movement, the *Kaliflower* network was unique in that it represented a back-to-the-land movement in an urban environment. Other aspects of the ecological imperative included vegetarianism, anti-cigarette smoking, and a holistic approach to the healing arts. Home birthing was practiced and propagated, with how-to articles written by homegrown midwives. Cleanliness and health were of special concern, especially crucial in communal

the American death machine big business ...," v1/n48/p5 (03/19/70); "Free Money Give-Away," v2/n6/p2 (06/04/70); "Separating the Wheat from the Government," v2/n39/p2 (01/21/71); "Play Dough (II of the Welfare Series)," v2/n40/p2 (01/28/71); "Dole Drums," v3/n3/p3 (05/20/71); "Lessons from the Little Lenin Library," v3/n5/p2 (06/03/71); "Free Transportation," v3/n6/p9 (06/10/71); "Dole Drums Roll Taps," v3/n9/p6 (07/01/71); "Throwing it All Open," v3/n21/p8 (09/23/71); "Paying Rent by Faith," v3/n24/p5 (10/14/71); "Free Food," v3/n25/p5 (10/21/71); "Duck's Dream," v3/n25/p6 (10/21/71); "From Riches to Rags," v3/n26/p1 (10/28/71); "Free Is (cartoon)," v3/n37/p1 (01/13/72); "On Free," v3/n37/p2 (01/13/72); "How to Get Anything You Want Absolutely FREE," v3/n44/p1 (03/02/72).

situations. The series of *Kaliflower* articles that taught about “asshole consciousness” became a continuing source of practical hygienic tips. Overall, the sense of Life as Art encompassed the *Kaliflower* message.³³²

Communalism (as an alternative to isolated families). From the outset, *Kaliflower* articles referenced intentional communities both past and present. The Sutter Street Commune adopted, somewhat facetiously, the informal name Friends of Perfection to reflect the influence of the 19th-century Oneida Commune and its spiritual leader, John Humphrey Noyes, who preached that perfectionism, or freedom from sin, was the state of grace in which they existed.³³³ *Kaliflower* reprinted whole tracts from Oneida with

³³² See, for example, "Smoking Gurus," v1/n13/p2 (07/17/69); "Compost," v1/n29/p2 (11/06/69); "Look Aloft," v1/n30/p2 (11/13/69); "Pet lovers: wean your dogs & cats ...," v1/n45/p4 (02/26/70); "Victory garden has begun to sprout ...," v2/n3/p2 (05/14/70); "A Beginning: The New Agriculture," v2/n4/p2 (05/21/70); "Ecology Cop-out," v2/n5/p10 (05/28/70); "Apples at Morningstar," v2/n5/p13 (05/28/70); "Let's Tear It Up and Plant a Garden," v2/n5/p14 (05/28/70); "[We] are looking for a home in the country ...," v2/n14/p4 (07/30/70); "Asshole Consciousness — Part I," v2/n25/p3 (10/15/70); "Medical Notice: Sterile Home Delivery Pack," v1/n1/p9 (05/06/71); "Car-Ma," v3/n5/p4 (06/03/71); "Delivering the Goods (home birthing)," v3/n5/p5 (06/03/71); "Kitty Litter," v3/n7/p13 (06/17/71); "Against the Tars," v3/n15/p1 (08/12/71); "Compost," v3/n19/p9 (09/09/71); "Eco-Logic Cooking," v3/n29/p7 (11/18/71); "Free Garbage!," v3/n37/p7 (01/13/72); "Bronchitis," v3/n37/p10 (01/13/72); "Free energy in the form of methane gas ...," v3/n38/p3 (01/20/72); "Smashing Glass With Glass," v3/n45/p4 (03/09/72); "The Return of Our Lady of the Rubble," v3/n45/p6 (03/09/72); "Complementary Proteins," v3/n46/p6 (03/16/72); "Transfers," v3/n52/p7 (04/27/72).

³³³ An interesting side note about the name “Friends of Perfection.” In 1998, I visited the California Historical Society (CHS) where the Scott Street Commune had donated a complete set of *Kaliflower* in 1973. For many years, researchers whom I had referred to CHS reported back that the CHS librarians had no idea what *Kaliflower* was. When I visited CHS in 1998, the librarian Patricia Keats expressed bafflement over the question of where the collection had ended up. When I remembered Friends of Perfection as the name we sometimes used, Lynn immediately recognized it and was able to locate the collection, in the unopened steamer trunk that I had packed twenty-five years earlier.

reference to group marriage, Bible Communism, and the rituals that Oneida developed to perfect its communalist ideal. Among these were mutual criticism and the third person rituals that became mainstays of the Sutter Street Commune, and through the pages of *Kaliflower*, other communes that adopted these practices. The ideal of perfectionism went beyond the confines of the walls of the commune. The vision of a community of communes mutually supporting the whole, devoted to Free, with a sense of their revolutionary mission carried over to a range of practices and approaches, including the all-important taboo against mass media publicity. Numerous editorials warned about the dangers of talking with reporters. Whereas the Diggers had coined the slogan "Do Your Own Thing," which was inspired by Gregory Corso's poem *POWER*, *Kaliflower's* slogan "Against the Stars" shifted the focus to a group identity that shunned mass culture, which awarded individual egos. The importance of joy in fostering community was found in the periodic *Kaliflower* picnics that carried on the tradition of communal celebrations that began with the Artists Liberation Front Free Fairs in 1966.³³⁴

³³⁴ See, for example, "Silver Wigs," v1/n4/p3 (05/15/69); "Kali-Flower Man Meets Some People You Know," v1/n10/p5 (06/26/69); "A Forest of Quaking Aspen," v1/n11/p2 (07/03/69); "Oneida Commune Parable," v1/n12/p1 (07/10/69); "Extra! Extra! Extra!," v1/n15-1/2/p1 (08/05/69); "*Kaliflower* Criticized! Frivolous!," v1/n22/p4 (09/21/69); "In our home we have meetings once a week.," v1/n41/p5 (01/28/70); "Black Magic (warning about mass media)," v1/n41/p7 (01/28/70); "Needed: ," v1/n43/p4 (02/12/70); "KF was invited to a meeting of the terrible, squalling infant Earth People's Park ...," v1/n49/p2 (03/26/70); "Last week one of our communes gave out *Kaliflower's* telephone number to the Census Bureau ...," v2/n8/p3 (06/18/70); "Keeping Out of Print," v3/n1/p2 (05/06/71); "Communal Archaeology," v3/n1/p1 (05/06/71); "Jacking Up Masters," v3/n2/p3 (05/13/71); "The Birth of Free Love (with extract from Oneida Commune)," v3/n2/p4 (05/13/71); "Complex Marriage Relocated," v3/n2/p5 (05/13/71); "Ritual Magic," v3/n3/p1 (05/20/71); "Finer Arts I," v3/n4/p3 (05/27/71); "From History of American Socialisms," v3/n4/p2 (05/27/71); "Circular, February 10 1859 (Oneida extract),"

Introducing the Food Conspiracy

The history of the Free Food Family encompasses all three of these broad themes. As the final act in the intercommunal network that coalesced around *Kaliflower*, the Free Food Family is a vehicle to understand the unique character of this communal culture.

This story begins with the invention of “food conspiracies.” Just as with “commune” itself, the term “food conspiracy” has faded from memory. The idea was a short-lived innovation of counterculture camaraderie. Households would ban together to order their produce and dry goods to save money and make healthier choices. The

v3/n5/p8 (06/03/71); "First Intercommunal *Kaliflower* Criticism," v3/n5/p12 (06/03/71); "Finer Arts II: Slipping the Yogurt Culture into the Counter Culture," v3/n6/p2 (06/10/71); "Once again summer is here and our commune finds itself with a crasher problem.," v3/n6/p1 (06/10/71); "Willingness," v3/n6/p4 (06/10/71); "Fucking Upward," v3/n7/p1 (06/17/71); "A Gift of Tongue," v3/n7/p2 (06/17/71); "The Edibility Gap," v3/n7/p9 (06/17/71); "The Matter with Mass," v3/n8/p2 (06/24/71); "Body and Soul," v3/n8/p1 (06/24/71); "Against the Stars," v3/n9/p1 (07/01/71); "Struggling With Words," v3/n9/p7 (07/01/71); "Womens Lib in the 1850s (Oneida Extract)," v3/n9/p9 (07/01/71); "Against the Bars," v3/n10/p2 (07/08/71); "The Care and Feeding of Crazies," v3/n10/p3 (07/08/71); "Bags," v3/n10/p1 (07/08/71); "Virgin's Liberation Front," v3/n11/p1 (07/15/71); "How Not to Become the People We Don't Want to Be," v3/n12/p3 (07/22/71); "The Meddle Way," v3/n13/p1 (07/29/71); "Free City," v3/n14/p9 (08/05/71); "Making It," v3/n15/p2 (08/12/71); "Mutual Criticism (Oneida Extract)," v3/n15/p7 (08/12/71); "Little Hassles," v3/n16/p3 (08/19/71); "Bible Communism (Oneida Extract)," v3/n16/p5 (08/19/71); "Interrogation of a Businessman by the Interior Police," v3/n17/p7 (08/26/71); "To fill our days with activity that makes us joyous ...," v3/n18/p1 (09/02/71); "The Berkeley Opera," v3/n20/p11 (09/16/71); "How to Have a Special Love Affair in a Commune," v3/n20/p3 (09/16/71); "Sitting Bull," v3/n22/p1 (09/30/71); "Sitting Bull's Sequel," v3/n23/p3 (10/07/71); "How We Got a Gym into Our Telephone Booth," v3/n25/p1 (10/21/71); "Sexcesspool Snorkling," v3/n26/p1 (10/28/71); "The Dragon of Last Resort," v3/n28/p3 (11/11/71); "Taking the Mean Out Of Meaning Well," v3/n28/p4 (11/11/71); "Capitalist Communes," v3/n31/p2 (12/02/71); "After the Walls Came Down," v3/n37/p9 (01/13/72); "Karamal Yoga," v3/n39/p1 (01/27/72); "On the Road to Oregon Looking Back," v3/n40/p3 (02/03/72); "Ideas for Your Next Communal Meeting," v3/n46/p2 (03/16/72); "Peking Review," v4/n3/p5 (05/25/72); "Slipping the Final Culture Out Under the Closing Door of the Public Culture," v4/n7/p2 (06/22/72).

first food conspiracy started in Berkeley in 1969. Soon, food conspiracies popped up wherever underground newspapers thrived and spread the counterculture news of the moment.³³⁵

In 1971, the Free Food Conspiracy was born out of the network of Kaliflower communes. The Free Food Conspiracy (which eventually adopted the name Free Food Family) operated on the principle “to each according to need, from each according to ability.” All the communes that were involved pooled all their food budgets (mostly the food stamps that individual members received from the government) into a common treasury. One of the communes then handled the business of coordinating the food purchases and deliveries. Food conspiracies were responsible in part for one of the major outcomes of the counterculture — the shift in America’s diet toward organic produce, whole grains and nutritional awareness. The Free Food Conspiracy eventually ended, like food conspiracies in general, but left a high tide mark in the history of social innovation.

Digger Legacy

To follow a “breadcrumbs theory of history,” we need to seek out the origins of ideas and follow their path through their subsequent and inevitable adoption and evolution. The story of the Free Food Family begins with the San Francisco Diggers and the evolution of the first “Free Feeds” in the Panhandle during the last week of September 1966 as a response to the occupation of San Francisco by the National Guard after the killing of a Black teenager by the police and the subsequent uprising that took

³³⁵ The search for “food conspiracy” in the JSTOR underground newspaper archive results in 281 hits from 1969 to 1978. See “Independent Voices,” ([Saline, Michigan] : Reveal Digital, 2013). <https://www.jstor.org/site/reveal-digital/independent-voices/>.

place in the Fillmore and Hunter's Point neighborhoods.³³⁶ Free food became one of the cardinal mediums for social action, not just in the Haight-Ashbury, but throughout the emerging Sixties counterculture. Free food was an example of what the Diggers termed "collective social consciousness and community action."³³⁷ The weekly notice in the *Berkeley Barb* advertising Digger stew every day at 4pm always ended with the tag line "bring your bowl and spoon."³³⁸

The daily Digger free feeds in the Panhandle continued throughout 1967, but at some point, Emmett Grogan shifted gears and began delivering free produce directly to communal households. He called this the Free Food Home Delivery Service and it became an important catalyst for future developments on this timeline.³³⁹ In the first set of "Free City" broadsheets, distributed by the Diggers in October 1967, was the following notice:

FREE FOOD
 LION MEAT
 SOUL VEGETABLES
 BLUE CHIP DAIRY GOODS
 EVERYMORNING DELIVERED TO
 YOUR COMMUNE.
 FRESH FISH
 RIPE FRUIT
 SOLID GREENS
 EVERYEVENING FEED THE BROTHERS
 AND SISTERS IN YOUR HOUSE.
 IT'S FREE BECAUSE IT'S YOURS

³³⁶ See Chapter Two for a history of the Diggers.

³³⁷ Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 245.

³³⁸ See, for example, "Free Food: Diggers; Golden Gate Panhandle, Oak at Ashbury, SF 4 pm, bring your bowl and spoon," *Berkeley Barb*, November 4, 1966, Scenedrome, 12.

³³⁹ Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 440.

GIVE YOUR ADDRESS AND THE NUMBER OF
PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNE TO THE BEHIND
THE COUNTER COUSIN AT THE PSYCHEDELIC
SHOP.³⁴⁰

It was shortly after this announcement when Irving Rosenthal arrived in San Francisco with the intent of starting a commune. The story of how Irving connected with the Diggers and how the Sutter Street Commune got pulled into the Digger/Free City orbit has been told in a previous chapter.³⁴¹ Soon after the commune moved into the orbit of Digger/Free City, in the first weeks of 1968, Mel “Mutt” Fisher, one of the early members of the new commune, took an active role in driving the flatbed truck that the Diggers used to pick up and deliver the fruits and vegetables that they scrounged at the Produce Market. The Digger Free Food Home Delivery Service was the inspiration not only for the Sutter Street Commune. David Hilliard, the Chief of Staff of the Black Panther Party, credits the Diggers with inspiring their Free Breakfast Program. In his autobiography, he recounts when Emmett Grogan first dropped off crates of Produce Market discards in front of the Panthers headquarters in Oakland under the doubtful gaze of Bobby Seale. The boxes of Free fruits and vegetables on the sidewalk, however, attracted and became an immediate hit with the surrounding neighborhood.³⁴² It is likely that the Digger free food network in 1967 and 1968 was the inspiration for the first food conspiracies a year later.³⁴³

³⁴⁰ “Free Food Is Good Soup.”

³⁴¹ See “Passing of the Dharma” in Chapter Two. Irving wrote about his path in locating the Diggers, and their influence on the Sutter Street Commune in Rosenthal, “Back in 1966...”; [Irving Rosenthal], *Deep Tried Frees*.

³⁴² Hilliard and Cole, *This Side of Glory*, 158, 211, 181.

³⁴³ This chapter provides the evidence for my conclusion that the Digger Free Food Home Delivery Service was a catalytic cause of the first food conspiracy. Interestingly, a recent

Food Conspiracy Origins

In the second issue of *Kaliflower* (May 1, 1969), one of the inside pages proposed an idea that had never been tried in the burgeoning communal scene. The page read,

Let's get together and buy our food in quantity as close to the source as possible (farms, wholesale). So that we can do this indicate how much of the foods listed your commune could buy, so that we have an idea of the quantities needed and can get some prices. We will get the healthiest foods available. Also put down if you know of any cheap sources of non-perishable foods.

[Following this heading, the rest of the page listed a smorgasbord of items that would be candidates for this buying cooperative venture:]
Brown Rice, Whole wheat berries, Whole rye, Barley, Cracked wheat, Bulgur wheat, Buckwheat, Cornmeal, Wheat germ, Millet, Oats, Apple cider, Fruit juices, Dried fruit / raisins / dates / figs, Honey, Raw sugar, Molasses, Maple syrup, Paprika, Black pepper, Sea salt, Vegetable oil, Olive oil, Peanut oil, Sprouts, Seeds — poppy / caraway / sesame, Vinegar, Yoghurt, Detergent, Flours: whole wheat / soy / barley / buckwheat / potato / rye / brown rice, Split peas, Soybeans, Garbanzos, Lima beans, Mung beans, Kidney beans, Lentils, Yeast, Coffee (un-ground), Tea, Nuts, Peanut butter, Soy sauce, Carob powder, Cheese, Dried milk, Soy grits, Soy-lecithin.³⁴⁴

Aside from the evidence that this page provides about the origins of the Food Conspiracy, this listing is remarkable as an “archaeological remnant” in excavating

account of the San Francisco People's Food System insinuates the Diggers in the lead-up to the first food conspiracy in Berkeley, although the account only mentions Digger free food and not their later innovation of home delivery to communes. See Shanta Nimbark Sacharoff, *Other Avenues Are Possible: Legacy of the People's Food System of the San Francisco Bay Area* (PM Press, 2016), 29.

³⁴⁴ "Let's Get Together and Buy Our Food in Quantity," *Kaliflower* 1, no. 2 (May 1, 1969).

counterculture diets at this early stage of development. Consider how many of these food items have made their way into American groceries today and it becomes clear that changing mainstream food habits owe much to the Sixties Counterculture. Another item that is noticeable due to its absence, but which became a major staple in the Kaliflower network over the next three years, is TOFU. The homemade production of tofu and tempeh became a Sutter Street Commune specialty.³⁴⁵

After this May 1, 1969, page in *Kaliflower*, the first mention of a “food conspiracy” in underground newspapers anywhere in the country is an article in the *Berkeley Barb* seven months later that announced:

The neighborhood Food Conspiracy is a group of neighbors who every week, in someone’s driveway or other distribution place, buy fresh picked organic fruits and vegetables, cheese, grains and flours, beans, dried fruits, tea, vegetable oils, etc., at prices much lower than any store.³⁴⁶

This article lays out the specifics of how the food conspiracy operates. It is

³⁴⁵ It is interesting to track the introduction of tofu into the counterculture. Early articles in the underground press focused on the importance of tofu in Japanese culinary tradition. See John Wilcock, “Eastern Eating: Price Wars & a Mythical Frog,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, April 9, 1965; Helen Heick, “Eat and Enjoy,” *San Francisco Express Times*, November 27, 1968. Recipes for tofu began appearing in the underground press in 1970. See, for example, “In Mother Gerd’s Kitchen,” *The Rag* (Austin, TX), June 15, 1970. In the first two years of *Kaliflower*, soy beans and soy flour are regularly mentioned in recipes, and both are included in the above listing of bulk foods for a food conspiracy. Mention of tofu, however, doesn’t appear in *Kaliflower* until 1971 in volume three. Paula Downing, one of the core members of the Kaliflower Commune during this period, recalled that Jerry Walker (who will be discussed further on) was instrumental in developing connections with two of the oldest tofu factories in San Francisco. See Azumaya and Quong Hop, Paula Downing, interview. The first full account of tofu reported in the *San Francisco Chronicle* did not appear until 1977. Fred Loetterle, “Ton You To Tofu,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (published as *San Francisco Examiner*), April 17 1977.

³⁴⁶ “Pie in the Sky,” *Berkeley Tribe*, December 19, 1969.

decentralized by neighborhood and at this point there are at least eighteen block-level groups that are spread throughout Berkeley. They come together once a week to compile their lists of produce, and then distribution takes place every Saturday. There are also separate ordering and pickup times for cheese and dry goods. Everyone is expected to volunteer for the rotating jobs. The level of organization and the number of block-level groups would indicate that the Berkeley food conspiracy had been operating for several months.³⁴⁷

During the following year, 1970, reports of food conspiracies proliferated wherever counterculture outposts thrived. In the June 1, 1970, issue of Chicago's underground newspaper, *The Seed*, was a "Free City Directory" listing of dozens of services, one of which mentioned the concept of food conspiracy:

FREE CITY FOOD happens Sundays in Lincoln Park. Contact Steve or Rita at Free City Exchange if you want to help. Or start a food conspiracy with your neighbors to buy food in quantity to save money. Eat together.³⁴⁸

There are a couple of interesting aspects about this notice. First, the adoption of the idea of Free City that the Diggers had first announced three years earlier demonstrates how ideas spread through the counterculture, but on a time delayed

³⁴⁷ The only account that I have found of the start of the first food conspiracy in Berkeley is in Lois Wickstrom, *The food conspiracy cookbook; how to start a neighborhood buying club and eat cheaply. Drawings by Sara Raffetto* (San Francisco: 101 Productions; [distributed by Scribner, New York], 1974), 3. Wickstrom, who it is obvious from her account was one of the original participants, states, "The first food conspiracy started in Berkeley, California, two months after the People's Park struggle." She goes on to tell how in July 1969, three residents originally came up with the idea and publicized it locally.

³⁴⁸ "Free City Directory," *The Seed* (Chicago, IL), June 1, 1970.

basis.³⁴⁹ Likewise, it is interesting to note the confluence of Free Food and the Food Conspiracy in the same announcement, again leading to speculation on the connection between Digger Free Food and food conspiracies.

Four months after the first mention of the Food Conspiracy in the *Berkeley Tribe*, an article appeared in *Kaliflower* in April 1970. It was signed “jerry walker, memphis commune” and it was the first announcement of what would become the San Francisco branch of the Food Conspiracy:

Coming from the deep South, I never paid much attention to food prices until I made the migration to California. Hell, I could eat a month on what it takes for a week here. It didn't take long for me to get onto the FOOD CONSPIRACY idea that is happening in Berkeley right now. The Conspiracy is a collective food buying plan. By buying for a lot of people at wholesale prices we can easily save 30% a week over what we now pay.

Before explaining the process, I would urge each commune to send at least one representative to the San Francisco Common Market organizational meeting at the Basta Ya, 260 Valencia Monday, April 6 [1970] at 8:00 P.M. There will be speakers from Berkeley and SF to discuss the plan in detail.³⁵⁰

Jerry goes on to give a detailed description of how the Berkeley food conspiracy

³⁴⁹ When I enrolled in Antioch College the first week of July 1967, a week after graduating from high school, the next three months seemed like a Summer of Love that the national media was reporting taking place in San Francisco. Later, I heard from Judy Berg that the original Diggers considered the summer of 1966 to be the true Summer of Love, not the following year, which brought an influx of tourists and trippers with the resulting police repression. Perhaps the spread of the Sixties Counterculture was like the ripples after a stone is thrown into a pond. Chicago's Free City blossomed two years after the 1968 Summer Solstice event brought an end to San Francisco's Free City.

³⁵⁰ "Coming from the deep South, ...", *Kaliflower* 1, no. 50 (April 2, 1970).

works and stresses that “tasks are rotated so that no one should have to do everything.” The following week, a notice in *San Francisco Good Times* reported on the meeting that Jerry had organized to form a San Francisco version of the food conspiracy:

If anyone had dropped in during the middle of the meeting when some 75 people were bouncing ideas off the walls right and left, they might have assumed a meeting of madmen was taking place. But the beautiful thing about it was that immediately everyone agreed that cheaper food was not the main issue. Food is our common denominator, but the people working with and for one another toward a common goal of self-help was the most important issue.³⁵¹

The three initial groups that formed in San Francisco were the Mission District, Haight-Fillmore, and Potrero Hill. The article mentions that the members of the Good Earth Commune, “who have already been doing a similar thing,” would be among those involved in the “Haight-Fillmore Conspiracy.”³⁵² Two weeks later, in another update on the San Francisco Food Conspiracy — this one with Jerry’s byline — the Haight-Fillmore group is not mentioned. Instead, the third group was from the Richmond neighborhood. It is possible that the Good Earth Commune wanted to continue on their own. Jerry reported, “Everything is coming together at an alarming rate. There is some kind of meeting almost every night” with a continued feeling of commitment and “people working together.”³⁵³ He also reported a few snags along the way. Some people joined thinking the Food Conspiracy was a cheap alternative to the

³⁵¹ “Food,” *San Francisco Good Times*, April 9, 1970.

³⁵² Ibid. The Good Earth Commune undertook numerous enterprises that it publicized in the early issues of *Kaliflower*. It is interesting to speculate whether they were responsible for that anonymous single page that proposed “Let’s get together and buy our food in quantity” (see fn. 344).

³⁵³ Jerry Walker, “Eat,” *San Francisco Good Times*, April 23, 1970.

supermarket but not realizing the work involved. Also, the logistics of ordering, buying, and distributing the produce seemed occasionally overwhelming. Dry goods and cheese were to be added to the products available, and a fishing co-op was forming. At this point, Jerry had not moved into the Sutter Street Commune yet, and he gives his contact information c/o the Haight-Ashbury Switchboard.

In the coming months and over the next couple of years, food conspiracies were widely adopted throughout the counterculture and very quickly drew mass media publicity. Starting in 1970, articles appeared in the “aboveground” press all over the United States that explained the concept of food conspiracies, often accompanied by reference to their first appearance in Berkeley in 1969. An article in the *San Francisco Examiner* in 1970 explained the beginnings of food conspiracies:

They took root among the radical community around the campus. The original intention was to bring people and living groups together to buy fresh, organically grown produce in volume. They were called conspiracies because an anonymous writer put it in a conspiracy publication last spring: “We can and must learn to take care of our own basic needs . . . We don’t have to depend on the Superfoodmanufacturer Monster to give us poor quality foods at prices we can’t afford . . . We do not have to remain separate and apart from our fellow humans to exist.”³⁵⁴

Three months later, in March 1971, a syndicated article by Susan Berman appeared in numerous newspapers, one of which explained:

So far there has been no spectacular trial to call attention to one of the most successful conspiracies of our time. It is called the Great Food Conspiracy, and it started functioning over two years ago. Some say it

³⁵⁴ Dexter Waugh, “Food Conspiracies Take Root and Grow,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 28, 1970.

was first spotted in New York's East Village while others hold that Berkeley's flower children were the originators. But its origin is a moot point because the idea is spreading in all directions, at once.³⁵⁵

By this point, some of the idealism in the initial burst of energy, as Jerry Walker had noted in reporting on the organizing meetings for the SF Food Conspiracy, had been diluted by its adoption beyond the confines of the counterculture. Berman stated, "Conspirators aren't rhetoric-breathing revolutionaries; they are families of all types and ages. They have two gripes in common: They are tired of buying spinach frozen in green square, drenched in preservatives, while at the same time paying prices for it that they cannot afford."

Rise of the Free Food Conspiracy

If the diffusion of food conspiracies across the map diluted some of the radical idealism that was responsible for the initial surge of energy, the opposite was true in the Kaliflower network. With the alternative economics of Digger Free operating as the foundation of the Kaliflower intercommunal network, the concept of food conspiracy was in for a radical makeover. In the October 21, 1971, issue of *Kaliflower* were two articles. The first talked about a new communal food conspiracy that was three months old and involved ten communes. The author of the article extolled the benefits of the communal food conspiracy and suggested that every neighborhood should have one for all the local communes in that neighborhood.³⁵⁶

In the same issue of *Kaliflower*, a second article fleshed out the idea for a new

³⁵⁵ Susan Berman, "Food Conspiracies Spread in West," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, March 21, 1971.

³⁵⁶ "Free Food," *Kaliflower* 3, no. 25 (April 2, 1971).

kind of food conspiracy — the Free Food Conspiracy. “Duck’s Dream” is a cartoon in which we find the protagonist pondering a dilemma: “There’s got to be an alternative to the food conspiracy. ... Food conspiracies have almost become a middle class respectable trip.” Duck dreams of a food conspiracy that operates on the principle of “what a commune puts into the food conspiracy (whether energy or money) should be completely divorced from what a commune gets out of it.” Duck’s dream continues: the Pig Stye Commune would run the food conspiracy as a Karma Yoga service; the Chipmunk Commune would run a free granary with the flour distributed to the other communes; another commune would maintain a warehouse to store dry goods, produce, and government surplus for the whole conspiracy; finally, a compassionate dairy would be run by the Cow Commune.³⁵⁷ Three months later, *Kaliflower* ran a photo of two communards unloading crates of fruits and vegetables out of their van. The caption read, “‘Free Food Doesn’t Grow on Trees, You Know!’ [Another home delivery by the Free Food Conspiracy.]”³⁵⁸

In the Burrow’s Bees Pandemic Zoom group that started meeting at the outset of the Covid pandemic, our memories of the Free Food Conspiracy were rather vague. We couldn’t agree on when it began or ended. We remembered that at some point, the name changed to Free Food Family. We remembered that Hunga Dunga was the main

³⁵⁷ “Duck’s Dream,” *Kaliflower* 3, no. 25 (April 2, 1971).

³⁵⁸ “Free Food Doesn’t Grow on Trees, You Know!,” *Kaliflower* 3, no. 39 (January 27, 1972). Neither the photographer nor the communards pictured was credited, in alignment with the *Kaliflower* practice of artistic anonymity. The two food deliverers were Little Richard and Mike from the Hunga Dunga Commune. The photographer was Miriam Bobkoff, one of the members of the Kaliflower Commune, who bequeathed her photograph collection to the Digger Archives. See “Miriam Bobkoff Gallery of Kaliflower Intercommunal Network Photographs, 1971-74,” The Digger Archives, 2016, https://www.diggers.org/bobkoff_gallery.htm.

commune doing the coordination, which included collecting everyone's food stamps, turning them into cash, coordinating the food buying, and then distributing the products to each of the communes in the conspiracy, not according to what they contributed but rather according to what they needed. We remembered that at some point the Scott Street Commune dropped out of the Free Food Family and there was much speculation on that point. Then Mike Marnell sent me copies of meeting notes that he had kept from the Free Food Family.³⁵⁹ It turned out to be an amazing trove that has added to our understanding of that period.

The Free Food Family kept detailed notes of their meetings. This practice was a carry-over from the Kaliflower Commune, which took minutes of their daily meetings. Among the set of documents that Mike Marnell provided there were notes from six meetings from May 1972 to April 1973. At the outset of each set of meeting notes is a listing of attendees and their communal affiliation. A careful compilation of the names of attendees and the communes they represented results in a count of twenty-seven communes that attended at least one of the meetings. This represents nearly 10% of the 300+ communes that were receiving *Kaliflower* at the end of its publication run (June 1972). The full listing of the communes is in Figure 45.³⁶⁰ A compilation of the members who attended the meetings is undoubtedly incomplete since it is doubtful that everyone was noted in the minutes. We can also assume that not all members of any one commune attended the meetings. Thus, we can only speculate on the total number of people who lived in the communes that were part of the Free Food Family. A total of

³⁵⁹ Mike was one of the two Hunga Dunga communards pictured in Miriam Bobkoff's photo that was published in *Kaliflower*. See fn. 358.

³⁶⁰ See Figure 45, "List of Free Food Conspiracy/Family Communes."

ninety-nine individuals appeared as attendees of the Free Food Family meetings.³⁶¹

The Free Food Conspiracy had begun operating in 1971, as evidenced by numerous announcements in *Kaliflower*. The meeting notes that Mike Marnell had collected only began in May 1972. The last set of notes is from an April 1973 meeting. It was at a July 2, 1972, meeting that the intercommunal project became fully committed to the principle that "Duck's Dream" had laid out in the *Kaliflower* cartoon. At this meeting, Lizzard from Hunga Dunga explained the new basis of the intercommunal project: "contribution of all food stamps to common pool to supply all food needs." From this point on, the association was called the Free Food Family, with the adoption of the stalwart principle of communism, "From each according to [their] ability, to each according to [their] needs."³⁶² Of course, this idea was also reflected in the Biblical quote from Acts that was printed on the cover of the first issue of *Kaliflower*: "they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all as any had need."³⁶³ The flavor of Digger Free shared both the Marxian and the Apostolic visions. Finally, here in 1972, the dream of an intercommunal version of "all things in common" was coming true.

³⁶¹ See Figure 46, "Commune Members in the Free Food Family."

³⁶² Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (New York: International Publishers, 1938 (Revised, 1966)), 10. The quoted excerpt has been edited to replace the gendered pronouns. The full quotation is: "In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of individuals under division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour, from a mere means of life, has itself become the prime necessity of life; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be fully left behind and society inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!"

³⁶³ "And all who believed were together and had all things in common," *Kaliflower* 1, no. 1 (April 24, 1969).

One of the more detailed sets of notes for the Free Food Family was for a meeting on November 12, 1972. The notes run to 32 pages. More than 50 people attended the meeting. There was an agenda, a facilitator, and two notetakers. Dairy products was a hot issue. So were foods that people wanted but were not yet being supplied. There was also discussion of visionary ideas for future actions. Paula Ajay (Downing) talked about expanding the group and getting more communes into the family. Paula made another suggestion that is quite prescient given her subsequent decades-long career as the manager of the Sonoma County Farmer's Market: "Maybe we can think about people putting energy into finding sources of food that we could find ourselves—maybe finding small farmers." The meeting notes demonstrated a level of commitment and energy and enthusiasm that was quite palpable.³⁶⁴ Beaver Bauer, one of the core members of the Angels of Light, recalled:

And the Free Food Family — what I do remember — I believe we were mostly living at Clayton Street then. I just remember all that food coming in. I was pregnant and remember being so happy to have all this tofu and those rock cashews. You know, we ate boxes of them. And they were so good. And it was so sweet to see someone show up and come up the stairs to your home and bring this beautiful food. It really was wonderful, unique, and I think something that's so beyond people's concept right now. It was so beautiful. Incredible, bountiful rich healthy food. And we liked the dairy I'll confess it. We wanted that butter. We wanted that sour cream and we wanted that cheese. But it was a very rare moment.³⁶⁵

Another member of the Free Food Family, Anna Isakson (who lived at the

³⁶⁴ Free Food Family Archive, 2022, Lily Marnell (curator). "Meeting of the Free Food Family at Scott Street Commune," November 12, 1972.

³⁶⁵ Burrow's Bees Pandemic Zoom, BUZZ: A Memcon. December 25, 2021, edition.

Sanchez Street Commune), recalled:

It just changed my life because I couldn't even imagine what it would be like not to have your name on your food. And we started to have that around Kaliflower because there was some kind of movement, you know, don't put your name on your food, share your food, that was a big thing. But when it was the Free Food Family, then we would go and pick up food from the Farmers Market. We picked up tofu from the different markets. And we went into each other's homes. So, when you go into other people's homes, you could pick up food. You know, you wanted an apple, there's an apple. Nobody had to ask if there was any food. There was something so liberating to me about that. It just changed me forever how I thought about food.³⁶⁶

Collapse of the Free Food Family

Three weeks after that November 1972 meeting of the Free Food Family which, at least in the meeting notes, sounded positive and future gazing, Scott Street delivered a bombshell in a hand-written letter to Hunga Dunga:

We have decided to withdraw from the Free Food Family. We are compelled to, by the impatience of our desire for change. Our dreams are biting us. Our withdrawal will, hopefully, allow other families in the Free Food Family to work at their own pace and us at ours.

We do not mean by this act to exclude anyone who sincerely thinks he or she or they can work with us and dream with us painlessly. You are welcome to come over for queries or constructive discussions (as opposed to arguments). / Love, Scott Street³⁶⁷

How to explain this total rupture? Did Scott Street really drop out because, as some of the survivors remember, Irving decided that dairy products needed to be

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Free Food Family Archive. "We have decided to withdraw from the Free Food Family," December 4, 1972.

banished and the Free Food Family go 100% vegan? That's been the consensus up to now. If so, there wasn't any suggestion of that in the big meeting three weeks earlier.³⁶⁸

This rupture in the Kaliflower intercommunal network would be not only fatal for the Free Food Family but a contributing factor in the breakup of the Scott Street (Kaliflower) Commune itself. The next chapter will go into some of the other factors that contributed to that event in the subsequent months. Joseph Johnston, one of the core members of Scott Street and one of the people who had set up the banking operations for the Free Food Family, recalled:

The high point of all our cooperation, communal cooperation, was the Free Food Family. And it was unfortunate that that schism happened. ... I remember Irving really wanted the commune not to eat any dairy products, Irving and a couple other people and I think Paula didn't want to give up dairy, and she left shortly after we left [the Free Food Family].³⁶⁹

In 1978, writing in a special issue of *Kaliflower* titled *Deep Tried Frees*, Irving offered his explanation for the breakup of the Free Food Family:

The Free Food Family ... lasted about a year. It failed because it satisfied neither those communes eager to communalize further, nor those communes unwilling to sacrifice imported cheese and health-food extravagances for a common diet. Simply put, most participating communes actually liked where they were at and felt no need to commit themselves more deeply. The Free Food Family actually was a

³⁶⁸ At the November 12, 1972, meeting, one of the members of the Scott Street (Kaliflower) Commune wanted to discuss getting fewer dairy products, but otherwise there was discussion of which types of cheese to order, which commune would store the bulk quantity, and on what days the deliveries would happen.

³⁶⁹ Burrow's Bees Pandemic Zoom, BUZZ: A Memcon. December 25, 2021.

kind of watershed, in that it brought us to the absolute outside limit of intercommunal cooperation in 1972.³⁷⁰

End of the Food Conspiracy

If we still have questions about what happened that caused the breakup of the Free Food Family, the picture with food conspiracies in general is a bit clearer.

One of the tools I like to use for understanding historical trends is what I call Term Frequency Graphs. Take a newspaper database and run a text search for a specific keyword or phrase. Then count the number of hits by year and graph it. On the following page, a graph depicts the number of newspaper hits for the term “food conspiracy” in the *New York Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the Independent Voices database of underground newspapers. Very few articles appeared in the aboveground press. But in the underground press, the term “food conspiracy” first appears in 1969 and immediately jumps in usage, then trails off slowly until the mid-1970s, when it almost disappears.

³⁷⁰ [Irving Rosenthal], *Deep Tried Frees*. Deep Tried Frees was distributed at the first Haight Street Fair, and on the same day it was distributed at Emmett Grogan’s wake at the Grand Piano on Haight Street.

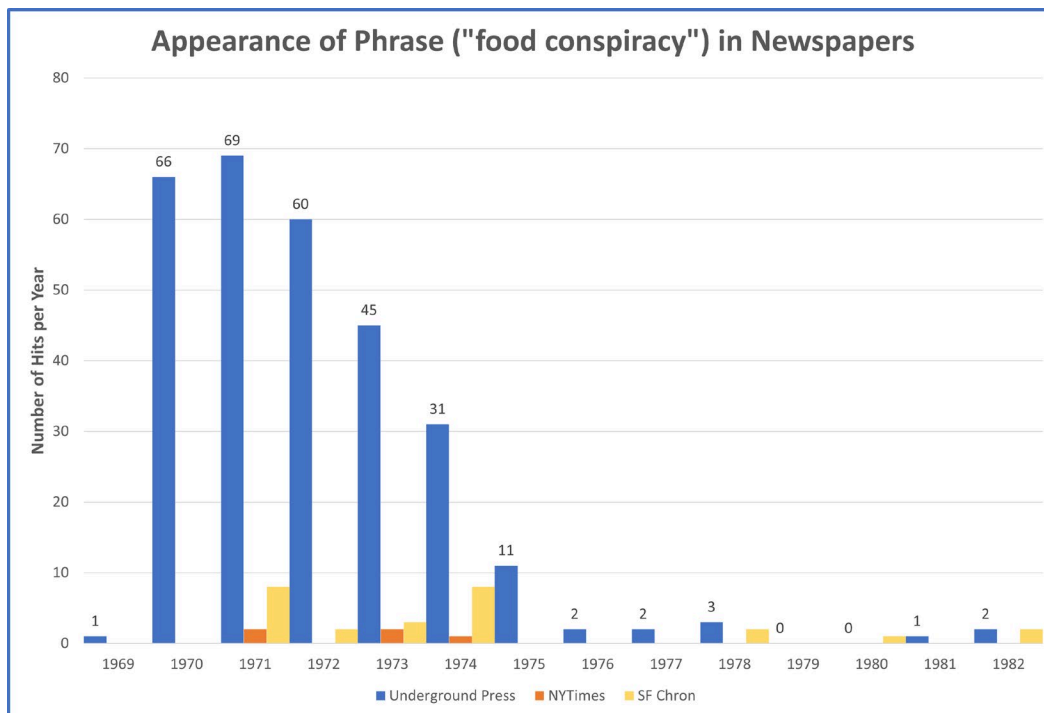


Figure 35. Frequency of "food conspiracy" appearing in newspapers, 1969-1982

What I conclude from this graph is that food conspiracies were very popular almost immediately after they were introduced. We see food conspiracies all over the country — wherever the counterculture flourished. But they quickly disappear after five years. What could explain this pattern? Whatever happened to food conspiracies?

One answer can be found in a *San Francisco Chronicle* article from January 1974 that reported on a new type of food store in Noe Valley:

A group of Noe Valley residents, in an effort to beat today's stiff food prices, has opened its own grocery store — but don't expect it to resemble the corner market or the local Safeway. The store's backers are hoping the community will run the show in exchange for low food prices.

"It began," said Jerry Walker, one of the store's founders, "as an outgrowth of the Noe Valley food conspiracy. It seemed that we never

got the food conspiracy to work for anybody but 'hippies.' We wanted it to work for the whole community. ...

Walker and his friends have moved the concept indoors and out to the public. The store, geared to operate without profit, offers food at cost plus 15 per cent; a markup that is much slimmer than that of the supermarket chains and even smaller than that of the mom-and-pop corner groceries.

Noe Valley shoppers, Walker says, will be expected to volunteer their help — such as an hour or two a month to baby-sit the checkout counter, a half day to help round up the produce — although it is not mandatory. The customers themselves will eliminate some of the other normal overhead by bringing their own bags, containers and egg cartons, and by weighing out their own purchases.

Walker was tired. "This is like doing a food conspiracy every day," he said, as someone in the back room got ready to drive off to pick up the cheese supply. "The problems are 100 times more monumental."

The move, however, was made without much deliberation. "It took a lot of soul searching for some of us," Walker admitted. "We were going from the hidden to the upfront, from underground to ties with the establishment. "We had spent a whole career as dropouts avoiding a lot of organizations that we were now thinking about dealing with (health department, code inspectors, etc.).

"But when our people eventually made the connections, we found few problems." Walker also felt that there were a lot of drawbacks to the food conspiracy. Specifically, he said that it was always difficult to get everyone's food order together, that some items were seasonal and that there was no place to store them. "The store eliminates every bit of that without eliminating the concept of the food conspiracy," he said. "We

can now go directly to the source — the farms, for instance, instead of going to the produce market."³⁷¹

The person interviewed in this article was Jerry Walker, the same who wrote the letter to *Kaliflower* in 1969 announcing the first food conspiracy in San Francisco. Jerry later joined the Scott Street Commune in 1970 and was one of the core members until he left in 1973. Paula later recalled that it was Jerry who was on a first-name basis with many of the growers at the Farmers Market. He knew the special health food stores like Oh's and Giusto's where the commune purchased whole grains and other hard-to-find specialty food items. Jerry knew the owners of the two tofu factories in San Francisco where the commune would buy five-gallon containers of fresh tofu. His transition to food store manager was a natural one, although the commune did not approve of anything involving small business.

The Noe Valley store that Jerry founded was the second cooperative food store in San Francisco. The first was Seeds of Life on Twenty-Fourth Street. When the Scott Street Commune moved to the Mission District in 1974 (thus becoming the Shotwell Street Commune), Seeds of Life was already operating two blocks away.³⁷² The

³⁷¹ David Kleinberg, "A Community Concept of Food," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 16, 1974.

³⁷² The commune had originally occupied three flats at 1869, 1871, and 1873 Sutter Street until the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency bought the property and made plans to demolish the Victorian. The commune refused to leave unless the Agency found a suitable location for everyone together. That was the three-story Victorian at 1209 Scott Street, with the use of the basement next door for the Free Print Shop. Eventually, the commune occupied the top two floors of 1211 Scott as well when their occupants relocated. In 1974, the Agency redeemed the original tenant certificates for the commune members who were living at Sutter Street when the property was condemned. These payments, along with a gift from a benefactor, allowed the commune to purchase a warehouse and adjacent two-story Victorian house with block-long garden on Shotwell Street in the Mission district.

surprising thing was that it looked like one of the food conspiracy distribution locations, with bulk grains and beans in large bins and scoops for individuals to measure out the quantity they needed. One of the differences between a food conspiracy and the Seeds of Life was that anyone could walk into Seeds of Life off the street. The other difference was transactional. The customer paid in cash, just as in any other retail store. That said, one point of interest is that all the shoppers “will be expected to volunteer their help,” according to Jerry. Remember the first articles about the Berkeley food conspiracy. That was one of their principles, too. That is still a principle for at least one of the legacy cooperative food stores mentioned at the end of this chapter.

People’s Food System

After the food conspiracies gave way to cooperative food stores like Seeds of Life, Noe Valley Food Store, the Rainbow Grocery, and others, there was a further evolution. This was called the People’s Food System, and it involved a large trucking and warehouse operation. This part of the history has been told elsewhere.³⁷³ However, there is one final connection with Kaliflower to share. “Out of the Pantry” was the Shotwell Street (Kaliflower) Commune’s answer to storefront food stores and systemwide warehouses. Published as “KF NS 1’ (*Kaliflower* New Series 1) with a date of April 19, 1975, and signed simply, “Shopwell Street” (a pun on the commune’s new location), it read:

³⁷³ See the following authoritative accounts: Wickstrom, *The food conspiracy cookbook; how to start a neighborhood buying club and eat cheaply*. Drawings by Sara Raffetto. Nimbark Sacharoff, *Other Avenues Are Possible: Legacy of the People’s Food System of the San Francisco Bay Area*. Curl, *History of Collectivity in the San Francisco Bay Area*.

We've been asked several times why we don't buy our food through the People's Food System... To us on the outside, the People's Food System seems to have opted to appeal to more customers, instead of to create a radical alternative. It has shifted emphasis away from neighborhood conspiracies, towards public stores and central warehouses, which seem to be more impersonal and more ordinary forms.³⁷⁴

Thus, the long slide from the Free Food Family's apex of intercommunalism to withdrawal behind the walls of pure idealism was complete.

Food Conspiracy Legacy

There are lingering and long-lasting examples of the Great Food Conspiracy. In Brooklyn, New York, the Park Slope Food Coop is wildly successful. As of 2018, the coop had 17,000 members and it has been running since 1973. Even fifty years later, they retain the requirement that all their members volunteer to work at least one shift (2 hours and 45 minutes) every four weeks.³⁷⁵ In Tuscon, Arizona, the Food Conspiracy Co-Op made news at the beginning of 2024 after a major renovation and expansion. The co-op is owned by 3,000 members, and its origins reached back to the first flush of food conspiracies:

Before there were natural grocery store chains, Tuscon had the Food Conspiracy Co-op. Started in 1971 as a buying club by local residents in a small storefront on Fourth Avenue, the co-op has expanded to more than three adjacent storefronts over the years.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ "Out of the Pantry (KF NS 1)," (San Francisco: Free Print Shop, April 19, 1975), Folder. https://diggers.org/fps_catalog_annot.htm.

³⁷⁵ "History of the Park Slope Food Co-op," New York Magazine, 2018, accessed August 28, 2024, <https://bit.ly/3T8YFZf>. The Park Slope Food Coop's website: <https://www.foodcoop.com/>.

³⁷⁶ Gabriella Rico, "Natural grocery store marks big expansion," *The Arizona Star*, January 28, 2024, D1.

Looking at the timeline of this history starting with Digger free food, the first food conspiracies, the Free Food Conspiracy, the Free Food Family, the People's Food System and the food coop storefronts, it seems that the Park Slope Food Coop and the Tuscon Food Conspiracy Co-op represent some kind of Darwinian survival of the fittest and the inevitable appropriation of revolutionary impulses by the capitalist marketplace. The term-frequency graph that shows the meteoric rise and fall in the appearance in print of the term "food conspiracy" could easily be a metaphor for the Sixties Counterculture.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁷ It's important to remember that food conspiracies were not the first to discover health foods, whole foods, bulk foods, direct food buying. Perhaps we were first in terms of communal food buying (both in the strict sense of communes but also neighborhood groups) but here are some of the antecedents that we came to depend on. One of the places that Paula mentioned was Giusto's. I researched in various databases. Strangely, they are not listed at the time as "Giusto's," but their website (today) mentions that they started as a small health food store on Polk Street in 1940. They were known for organic stone ground flours LONG before the organic movement became popular. Another whole grains / health food store that we frequented was O H S Fine Foods (California Direct Importing) 2651 Mission Street. Oh's, it turns out, started up in this location in the early 1900s. "Plus Ça Change, Plus C'est la Même Chose" — Down Another Rabbit Hole in Search of the Past. What? Free? Farmers' Market? Four years prior to 1947 would be ... 1943, the middle of WWII? What's the story here? And note —the Farmer's Market is still thriving today, 75 years later.

It was at about this time that Emmett began his "Free Food Home Delivery Service" and left the daily, Panhandle, 4:00 P.M., free feeding of the street folks for the women to cook and men like Tumble, Butcher, Brooks and Slim Minnaux to deliver. Emmett's idea was exactly as he announced it in the *Free City News*, a service that took over the daily newspaper role of the Communication Company, incorporating the same machinery and people. Free City News was an enlightened, efficient and graphically superior news agency operated solely by members of the Free City Collective, which meant practically anyone who wanted to work and wasn't kidding.

The announcement that Emmett published in the *Free City News* was only a beginning, but it really started things off right and in a hurry. It read:

FREE FOOD
LION MEAT SOUL VEGETABLES BLUE CHIP DAIRY GOODS
Every morning Delivered to your Commune.
FRESH FISH RIPE FRUIT SOLID GREENS
Every evening Feed the Brothers and Sisters in your House.
IT'S FREE BECAUSE IT'S YOURS
Give Your Address and the Number of People in the Commune to the Behind the Counter Cousin at the Psychedelic Shop.
... MUST BE DONE NOW ...

FREE FOOD
LION MEAT SOUL VEGETABLES BLUE CHIP DAIRY GOODS
EVERY MORNING DELIVERED TO YOUR COMMUNE.
FRESH FISH RIPE FRUIT SOLID GREENS
EVERY EVENING FEED THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN YOUR HOUSE.
IT'S FREE BECAUSE IT'S YOURS
GIVE YOUR ADDRESS AND THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNE TO THE BEHIND THE COUNTER COUSIN AT THE PSYCHEDELIC SHOP.
... MUST BE DONE NOW ...

free news
investigate
city hall steps
now forever

After a year of daily Free Feeds in the Panhandle, the Diggers start up the "Free Food Home Delivery Service" — for communes only. Here's the first announcement in Free City News, late 1967.

Excerpt from Ringolevio. Free City sheets from diggers.org

IT'S FREE BECAUSE IT'S YOURS
GIVE YOUR ADDRESS AND THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNE TO THE BEHIND THE COUNTER COUSIN AT THE PSYCHEDELIC SHOP.

Photo of the Free Food Home Delivery Service by Chuck Gould, 1968.

Figure 36. Digger Free Food Home Delivery Service

RAP SHEET

SAN FRANCISCO:
FREE FOOD
4pm OAK/ASHBURY EVERYDAY
HAPPENING HOUSE SUPPERS
409 CLAYTON-CALL 5521178
CLIDE CHURCH THURSDAYS
330 ELLIS-CALL 7716300
FREE FOOD WAREHOUSE c/o
VIRI TOMOVON 1994 FELL
FREE BREAD THURS/SATS 621-
ALL SAINTS 1350 Waller 1862
FREE FOOD CANNING CLICK
INFO: *A10197 or 3873575
FREE FOOD HOME DELIVERY
MEAT/GRASS LEAVE ADDRESS
WITH COUNTER CLERK AT PSYCH
SHOP OR AT 3873575--COMMUNES
ONLY
FREE STORES *MOL COLE 7319939
*1099 McALLISTER 9279861
FREE SCHOOL *SHIRE SCHOOL
3345-17 St 8638368
FREE LEGAL AID
CALL 4311714
FREE MEDICAL TRING
CALL 4311714
FREE HOTEL (in progress)
TO AID & ASSIST CALL 3873575
FREE PUPPET SHOW
CALL LINDON 8638162
FREE FUN & RECREATION
ALL SAINTS 1350 WALLER
NON-FRI 9 to 5 SAT 9 to 12
FREE MOVIES
ALL SAINTS 1350 WALLER
FRI WYES 8 to 12
FREE ACTION
(from crash pads, sweep-ins, etc)
THE DIRTY DOZEN c/o COMMUNITY OFFICE 8639718
(mailbox) = (mailing address for outoftowners)

NEW YORK:
COMMUNICATION CO. ORGY871
FREE STORE @ 2288432
UNIVERSITY OF THE STREETS
2540239
WARKIN c/o HOWARD CHAN
RON LANE 6639290
2804350--RM, 800 JOURNALISM
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
GROUP IMAGE 82/82 2nd AVE.
4759389
PEACEEYE BOOKSTORE 3-8pm
(mailbox) 383 E. 10St.
4759390
THIRD WORLD FILM CLICK
2 EAST 2nd St 4759745
WHAT BOB PASS 30 E 39 St
0072288 (community
after midnight radio)
JAWA KENEDY 6611600
TENNESSEE 8677777

BERLIN:
COMMUNE 1
BERLIN 12 KUNHELMANN
c/o FRANK K. KAISER
FREDERICK STRASSE 34A
COMMUNE 2
BERLIN KUNFUUSTEN DAMM
SCHLOTTERER 140
STUDENTS COUNCIL
FREE UNIVERSITY
ERWIN MEYER
1 WERLIS 35
GARTSTRASSE 20 DAYLEN,
BERLIN
ANDREI VOIROBENSKY
N. KRASNOSEKROTA 45845
MOSCOW:
HAPPENERS c/o
JEAN JACQUES LEBEL
12 RUE DE L'HOTEL COBERT
RONALD BOORSHOP
SCHERIE
(mailbox) ... DAME
AMSTERDAM:
SIGMA c/o MATTHYS
87/89 KLOVENIERSBURGMAL
TEL. 64521
HILTBROOK:
ASHRAM 6779943
COLORADO CHIST TOWN INFO c/o
HANA STUDIO 1255 S. PEARL, DENVER
LOS ANGELES:
WARREN BEATTY
2754282

The first listing of Free Services put out by the Diggers, operating in late 1967 as the Free City Collective.

This was one of the dozen sheets stapled together and distributed as "Free City #1" in October 1967.

Note the listing for "Free Food Home Delivery ... COMMUNES ONLY." This is the activity Irving attempted to enroll in for the Sutter Street commune.

Free City News was the prototype for the Free Ads in Kalflower — a plain text version of what became an illustrated art form.

Rhine Lapiner needs a sewing machine for her own and friends' use. Also needs rug. She'll trade a series of modern dance lessons starting March first. Call 863-3514.

I'd need to n.y. last week of may. i haven't any money. i don't think i could help pay expense. john sutter street commune

Many other interesting listings here, e.g., "Free School Shire School", free stores all over the country, Warren Beatty (??)

Figure 37. For "Communes Only"

Figure 38. "Let's Get Together and Buy Our Food in Quantity..."

First Food Conspiracy (Anywhere)

"The work of the food conspiracy is shared by all of us. The jobs are rotated to different people every month or so."

Dec. 19 - 26, 1969

BERKELEY TRIBE

PAGE 3

ie in the City

The neighborhood Food Conspiracy is a group of neighbors who every week, in someone's driveway or back yard, bring their own bags or boxes (preferably something reusable please, not paper bags) and you fill and weigh your own order and then the cashier checks yours. If you buy more you are taking your neighbor's groceries. If you buy less we all lose money.

Each member, that is, each adult in a house, pays a \$2 membership fee. This is for operating capital, mimeograph, scales, blackboards, and so on.

The food conspiracy is divided into small neighborhood groups of perhaps six families or houses. Each of these groups should have someone who attends the Thursday night meetings, takes notes, and relays information to and from the people in his group. Give out information sheets to new members, collects membership fees, keeps an up-to-date membership list for his neighborhood, gives out and collects food sheets and task sheets, and sells scrip. This job should rotate.

Produce is bought every week. Your neighborhood rep has order sheets. Give out order sheets to your neighborhood rep by 6pm Thursday. He then makes a master list of orders and the individual orders to the Thursday night meeting.

You buy produce Saturday morning, from 10:12 at the distribution place which is

someone's driveway or back yard. You get your order sheet back when you get your groceries. Bring your own bags or boxes (preferably something reusable please, not paper bags) and you fill and weigh your own order and then the cashier checks yours. If you buy more you are taking your neighbor's groceries. If you buy less we all lose money.

Cheese is bought every week. Take your order to your neighborhood rep by 6pm Monday. You buy it at the produce distribution place on Saturday from 10-12.

Drygoods are bought about every month. Your neighborhood rep has order sheets. When it is time you give your order to your neighborhood rep and buy scrip, from him or at the produce distribution place on Saturday, in an amount equal to your order. When the drygoods go on sale the following Saturday you buy what you ordered with the scrip. No drygoods orders are accepted without the purchase of scrip and no dry goods can be bought with cash.

Your neighborhood rep has when you get your drygoods. Bring your own containers and you fill and weigh your own order and then the cashier checks your order. It is very important to buy exactly what you order or you buy more or less than you need. If you are taking your neighbor's

groceries. Prices on food lists are not necessarily what you pay, but are what prices were last time. They change constantly and the prevailing prices posted at the food distribution places.

The work of the food conspiracy is shared by all of us. The jobs are rotated to different people every month or so. The neighborhood's GROCERIES. If you sheets describing the various jobs and every one is expected to sign up for at least one of them.

HOW CAN YOU JOIN?

There are some five Food Conspiracies on South side of UC campus. They are in the process of reorganization. Here's a list of neighborhood groups in the two Grove Neighborhood Food Conspiracies, which will operate as separate co-ops with separate Thursday night meetings. Contact the group nearest your home.

NORTH OF FRANCISCO, AND NORTHSIDE:

Grove and Francisco
John King - 841-7985
Grove and Vine
Lesley Garfield - 525-7110
Walnut and Vine
Yvonne Duggan - 524-6998
Mcgee and Lincoln
Dick and Beth Bagwell - 548-7985
Grove and Lincoln
Linda Williams and Paul Fitzgerald - 848-2489
Arch-Leonice
John and Mary Ann Norris - 841-9006

Doug and Sharon
Tubb - 549-3232
Acton and Hopkins
Sylvia Gray - 843-8158
Richmond
Louise Katz - 237-4799

SOUTH OF FRANCISCO,
NEAR UNIVERSITY AVE:
Delaware and Grant
Peggy Budd - 848-6457
Berkley Way and Bonita
Anita Frankel - 843-6518

SOUTHSIDE CONSPIRACIES:
Gouldsboro - Grove and Alston
Philly Gordon - 848-7293

Shattuck and Dwight
Steve Adams - 845-9036
Parker and Shattuck
Steve Ross - 849-2621
Dana and Dwight
Julie Silverman - 848-1855

Piedmont-College from Parker to Ashby
Sonja and Bob Beebe through
Gall Burke 845-2496
Fulton-Russell
Judith Busch - 848-0937
North Oakland
Megan Kinsbaum - 654-6495
San Francisco-Portero Hill and
Bernal Heights
Gordon Kinsbaum - 285-8485

"Coming from the deep South, I never paid much attention to food prices until I made the migration to California. ... It didn't take long for me to get onto the FOOD CONSPIRACY idea that is happening in Berkeley right now. ..."

"Before explaining the process, I would urge each commune to send at least one representative to the San Francisco Common Market organizational meeting at the Basta Ya, 260 Valencia Monday, April 6 [1970] at 8:00 P.M."

From "Jerry Walker, Memphis Commune" (Kaliflower, vol. 1, no. 50, April 2, 1970)

Kaliflower, vol. 1, no. 50, p. 3, Apr 2 1970

Jerry walker, memphis commune

Coming from the deep South, I never paid much attention to food prices until I made the migration to California. Well, I could eat a month on what it takes for a week here. It didn't take long for me to get onto the FOOD CONSPIRACY idea that is happening in Berkeley right now. The Conspiracy is a collective food buying plan. By buying for a lot of people at wholesale prices we can easily save 30% a week over what we now pay.

Before explaining the process, I would urge each commune to send at least one representative to the San Francisco Common Market organizational meeting at the Basta Ya, 260 Valencia Monday, April 6 at 8:00 P.M. There will be speakers from Berkeley and SF to discuss the plan in detail.

Basically the co-op works in this manner. Forty to fifty members form a neighborhood. Each neighborhood works independently within the conspiracy for themselves. On a Thursday night each household makes out their weekly order and it is taken by a representative to the weekly meeting. All orders are combined and on Saturday the order is picked up from the various wholesalers and taken by a central distribution point where each household comes and gets their individual order. The logistics are worked out within each neighborhood with the individual households contributing as much help as needed. Tasks are rotated so that no one should have to do everything.

Each month dry goods are ordered, but on a slightly different procedure. Since a large amount of money is involved the order is paid for in advance, whereas the "kitty" provides for the produce. The kitty is started by an initial membership fee, usually \$2.00. This provides enough money to buy some necessary items for the distribution process and the money for the first order of produce.

Organic foods are purchased whenever possible and all food is carefully selected. Almost all weekly staples are available. A supply of fresh fish for a very low price has been located. It is possible that a supply of homemade bread will soon become available through the free bakery in Oakland. For business organic beef and chicken is available. Cheese is currently domestic and imported, but a source of organic cheese and raw milk is being checked out.

A great amount of energy is being generated by the Food Conspiracy. It is no matter as simple as a trip to the store each week. It involves co-operative work with your brothers, care and help. If you are interested, be sure to attend the meeting Monday night at the Basta Ya.

FOOD

THE FOOD CONSPIRACY IN SAN FRANCISCO

At 8 p.m. Monday, April 6, there will be a meeting at Basta Ya, 260 Valencia, SF, to discuss the workings of the Food Conspiracy and to form local food cells. Members of the Berkeley Conspiracy and Gordon Larkin of SF will be there to give full details of how we can save an average of 30% on our basic food bill by collective buying at wholesale prices. It will cost a minimum of \$2 per participating adult to join. Basically this is how the collective works. The membership fee is used to cover initial operating costs such as money is given to the individual which he later uses to pay for his order at the place of distribution. All neighborhoods combine their lists and a master list is placed with various wholesalers, the master order is subdivided among the neighborhoods and then the procedure is the same as for produce, each neighborhood being responsible for distribution within itself.

Organic foods are purchased whenever possible and a close check is kept on all food purchased, selecting the best and most natural. Sources are available for cheese, vegetables, dry goods, grains, organic chickens and eggs, organic beef

THE WORK OF A COMMIE-ORIENTED CONSPIRACY. WHY ITS LIKE SOME LOATHSOME DISEASE/MY JOB---DESTROY

Jerry at the Intercommunal Carnival, May 1972

Figure 40. Invitation for Kaliflower Communes

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CHEAP EATS

At 8 p.m. Monday, April 6, there will be a meeting at Basta Ya, 260 Valencia, SF, to discuss the workings of the Food Conspiracy and to form local food cells. Members of the Berkeley Conspiracy and Gordon Larkin of SF will be there to give full details of how we can save an average of 30% on our basic food bill by collective buying at wholesale prices. It will cost a minimum of \$2 per participating adult to join. Basically this is how the collective works. The membership fee is used to cover initial operating costs such as money is given to the individual which he later uses to pay for his order at the place of distribution. All neighborhoods combine their lists and a master list is placed with various wholesalers, the master order is subdivided among the neighborhoods and then the procedure is the same as for produce, each neighborhood being responsible for distribution within itself.

Organic foods are purchased whenever possible and a close check is kept on all food purchased, selecting the best and most natural. Sources are available for cheese, vegetables, dry goods, grains, organic chickens and eggs, organic beef

GOOD TIMES / VOLUME III NO. 14, APRIL 2, 1970

FOOD

The Food Conspiracy in San Francisco are off on a Friday start Monday night at the Basta Ya. If anyone had dropped in during the middle of the meeting when some 75 people were buzzing ideas off the walls and left they might have assumed a meeting of madmen was taking place. But the beautiful thing about a was that immediately everyone agreed that cheaper food was not the main issue. Food is our common denominator, but the people working with and for one another toward a common goal of self-help was the most important issue.

After a general discussion of how the Conspiracy works, given by the good Berkeley people, the group broke up into districts and began the process of getting themselves together. Groups from the Mission District, the Haight-Ashbury area and "Arroyo Hill" were set-up as beginners. The Good Earth Commune, who have already been doing a similar thing, and the Fell restaurant people are among those forming the Haight-Ashbury Conspiracy. The Mission District had the largest representative group present and they, like the Portrero Hill group, have set up meetings this week to organize themselves. All in all, over 300 people were represented. Next week representatives of each group will meet to coordinate with each other.

From now on, each district will have their own meetings. Individuals wishing to participate should contact Jerry Walker at 021-3788, or leave your name, address, phone number and district with the Haight Switchboard, SF-0575.

Meanwhile, the Common Market needs a central "office". Something like the Peoples Office in Berkeley, a place to co-ordinate energies with other groups, an office for the people. If anyone knows of a good spot, let us know.

GOOD TIMES / VOLUME III NO. 17, APRIL 25, 1970 / 9

by Jerry

It seems that the Food Conspiracy here in SF is either three weeks or three years old. Since the first articles in GT's and the one hectic first meeting everything is coming together at an alarming rate. There is some kind of meeting almost every night with different groups, meetings with groups waiting to form and meetings with groups offering help. Everyone is willing to do whatever they can to keep the energy flowing. Some Straight groups have offered their own brand of help. All we need is cohesion and time.

The three functioning groups are the Mission Group, the Portrero Hill Group and the Richmond Group at the present. There has been the only order so far, but dry goods and cheese will be added very soon. A good source for eggs and poultry is being sought; the local suppliers are not much cheaper than Safeway. If we can get these of a refrigerated truck, milk can be added as a supplier

fusion within the Groups; the logistics are at times seemingly just too complicated, but everything works out with a little effort. This is a good thing in many ways. It gets people working together and channel their energy toward Brotherhood. There are a few who drop in for the cheap eats but wind up in the streets again when they find out it is easier to go to Safeway.

Several members are working to form a SF based fishing Co-op and want to meet with others who would like to see the same formed. If you are interested, leave a message at the Haight switchboard - 087-3575. Tell them to put the message in the Common Market box.

Meanwhile, for information on the Food Conspiracy here you can call me at 021-3788 or better yet call the Haight Switchboard and leave a message. I ain't home much any more.

EAT

of raw milk is known. The State Dept. of Agriculture regulations require the cold truck. There is still some internal con-

Figure 41. The SF Food Conspiracy (organized by Jerry Walker) 1970

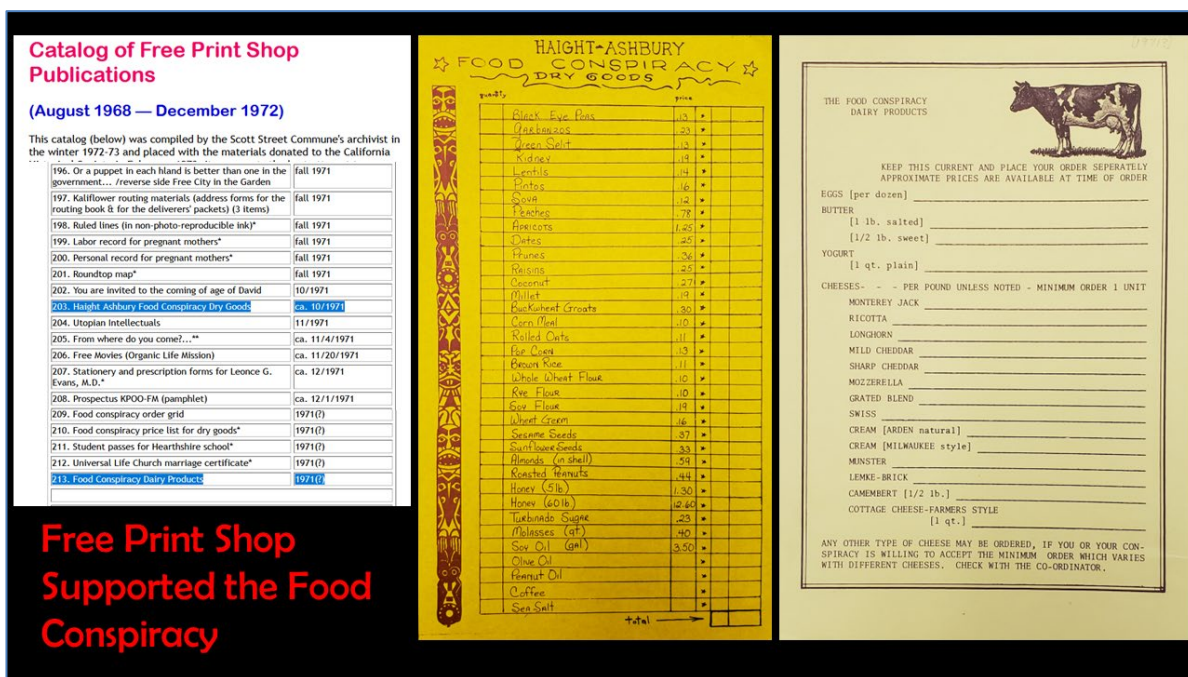


Figure 42. Food Conspiracy Order Forms (printed by Free Print Shop)



Figure 43. Hunga Dunga Organizes the Free Food Conspiracy, 1972

Mike's Treasure Trove Reveal #2

Participants in
FFC/F Meetings,
1971-1973

(and the commune
they were
representing)

1. Al (Flo Airwaves)	28. Geoff (Kaliflower)	55. Lulu (23rd St)	81. Robbie (Valencia St)
2. Alan (1202 Arguello)	29. Geoff Brown (23rd St)	56. Madeline (Fell St)	82. Robin (15th St)
3. Alex (Kaliflower)	30. Giles (Flo Airwaves)	57. Madeline (Winfield)	83. Rodney (Broderick)
4. Alvoye (Hunga Dunga)	31. Ginnie (Winfield)	58. Mark (Anderson St)	84. Sam (Kaliflower)
5. Anna (Sanchez St)	32. Gregory (Clayton St)	59. Michael (1202 Arguello)	85. Sandra (Kaliflower)
6. Art (Kaliflower)	33. Hag (Flo Airwaves)	60. Michael (Valencia St)	86. Sham Sheil (Broderick)
7. Baird (Hunga Dunga)	34. Harvey (Sanchez St)	61. Michael (Winfield)	87. Steve (Kaliflower)
8. Beaver (Broderick)	35. Heavenly (Haight St)	62. Mikey (Hunga Dunga)	88. Steven (Broderick)
9. Beaver (Clayton St)	36. Irving (Kaliflower)	63. Mutt (Kaliflower)	89. Susan (Kaliflower)
10. Beaver (49 Potomac)	37. Jack (Valencia St)	64. Omar (1202 Arguello)	90. Tahara (49 Potomac)
11. Ben (Broderick)	38. Jan (Jan's house)	65. Owen (Medical Opera)	91. Tea (Hancock St)
12. Bill (Fell St)	39. Jasmine (Broderick)	66. Paula (Kaliflower)	92. Timmy (Flo Airwaves)
13. Bill (Valencia St)	40. Jenny (49 Potomac)	67. Peggy (Valencia St)	93. Tony (Fell St)
14. Bob (15th St)	41. Jessica (Oak St)	68. Philip (Hunga Dunga)	94. Toufik (Kaliflower)
15. Bruce (15th St)	42. Jim (Broderick)	69. Sylvia (Hunga Dunga)	95. Vicki (Kaliflower)
16. Capp (Flo Airwaves)	43. Joe (Kaliflower)	70. Ralph (Broderick)	96. Vicky (23rd St)
17. Chadra (Clayton St)	44. Joel (Fell St)	71. Ralph (49 Potomac)	97. Walter (Valencia St)
18. Chuck (15th St)	45. John (Fell St)	72. Raymond (Broderick)	98. Warwick (Broderick)
19. Dan (Flo Airwaves)	46. Jolla (Broderick)	73. Raymond (Medical Opera)	99. Winston (Fell St)
20. David (Kaliflower)	47. Josey (Fell St)	74. Renee (Flo Airwaves)	100. Winston (Kaliflower)
21. Dennis (795 Frederick)	48. Justin (Haight St)	75. Richard (Hunga Dunga)	101. Yana (Winfield)
22. Dennis (Kaliflower)	49. Krishna (23rd St)	76. Rick (1202 Arguello)	
23. Dick (Hunga Dunga)	50. Laura (Hunga Dunga)	77. Rick (Flo Airwaves)	
24. Don (795 Frederick St)	51. Leonce (Medical Opera)	78. Rick (Hancock St)	
25. Eric (Kaliflower)	52. Leslie (23rd St)	79. Rick (Rick's house)	
26. Gary (1202 Arguello)	53. Lily (Hunga Dunga)	80. Rob (15th St)	
27. Gary (Kaliflower)	54. Lizzard (Hunga Dunga)		

Figure 46. Commune Members in the Free Food Family

Mike's Treasure Trove Reveal #4

Scott Street's
Bombshell (Dec 4,
1972)

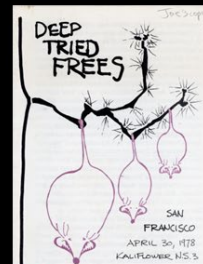
And Scott Street's
Explanation (1978)

WE HAVE DECIDED TO WITHDRAW FROM THE FREE FOOD FAMILY. WE ARE COMPELLED TO, BY THE IMPATIENCE OF OUR DESIRE FOR CHANGE. OUR DREAMS ARE BITING US. OUR WITHDRAWAL WILL, HOPEFULLY, ALLOW OTHER FAMILIES IN THE FREE FOOD FAMILY TO WORK AT THEIR OWN PACE AND US AT OURS.

WE DO NOT MEAN BY THIS ACT TO EXCLUDE ANYONE WHO SINCERELY THINKS THAT HE OR SHE OR THEY CAN WORK WITH US AND DREAM WITH US PAINLESSLY. YOU ARE WELCOME TO COME OVER FOR QUERIES OR CONSTRUCTIVE DISCUSSIONS (AS OPPOSED TO ARGUMENTS).

LOVE,
SCOTT STREET

DECEMBER 4, 1972



We helped initiate the Free Food Conspiracy, whose member communes pooled their members' food stamps to buy food in bulk, which was then distributed to these communes according to need. In our mind it was a watershed operation because, if successful, it would have opened the road to pooling all resources and the possible buying of costly things like land in the country and houses in the city. The Free Food Family, as it later came to be called, the new name expressing homeyness and vague hopes for the future, lasted about a year. It failed because it satisfied neither those communes eager to communalize further, nor those communes unwilling to sacrifice imported cheese and health-food extravagances for a common diet. Simply put, most participating communes actually liked where they were at and felt no need to commit themselves more deeply. The Free Food Family actually was a kind of watershed, in that it brought us to the absolute outside limit of intercommunal cooperation in 1972.

Figure 47. Sutter Street Drops Out

Chapter Six. Judges in Black Masks & Robes

There was madness in any direction, at any hour. If not across the Bay, then up the Golden Gate or down 101 to Los Altos or La Honda. . . . You could strike sparks anywhere. There was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was right, that we were winning. . . . And that, I think, was the handle—that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil. Not in any mean or military sense; we didn't need that. Our energy would simply prevail. There was no point in fighting — on our side or theirs. We had all the momentum; we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave. . . . So now, less than five years later, you can go up on a steep hill in Las Vegas and look West, and with the right kind of eyes you can almost see the high-water mark — that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back.

—Hunter S. Thompson³⁷⁸

High-Water Mark

The high-water mark for the Kaliflower Intercommunal Network was 1972. In May, the grandest (and final) gathering of communes in San Francisco took place at one of the sylvan and secluded public playgrounds that dotted the city's neighborhoods.

The first issue of volume four of *Kaliflower* announced:

A carnival of the communes is coming soon. The theme centers around sharing our creative work energies and projects. Already many

³⁷⁸ Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*, [1st] ed. (New York: Random House, 1971), 67. The quotation is part of what is known as the “Wave Speech” at the end of chapter eight and is reported to have been Thompson's favorite passage in this work. The complete passage provides the full sense of a millenarian encounter.

communes have begun working on ideas and on getting their acts together.³⁷⁹

The announcement went on to describe the gathering as the organizers had in mind:

There will be an Arabian Desert Tent where you can sink into 3 feet of decadently decorated pillows. Sip hot mint tea, munch majoon candy, and play along with Moroccan musicians. A massage tent where your body will be rubbed with homemade body oil prepared from a two thousand year old recipe. Throb like a Chinese firecracker while watching the new Angels of Light allstar spectacular Cabaret. Free Japanese kites and Tarot Card readings. Look at your future in a crystal ball. Dip your and your child's fingers in a rainbow of colors and paint murals. Enjoy puppet shows with no strings attached, float along with a flute while a ballerina glissades on the grass. Finger and pocket a free fabulous trinket displayed by the famous trinkster himself. Pick a bale of popcorn, soak up some saki, and pin a Japanese button mask on your costume. Sing along with Madrigal singers, samba with a Brazilian commune band. Lunch on a loaf of hot commune bread. Swallow a mouthful of soup, jump into the Orient and sample some sushi. Dance the Maypole dance, listen to the rockin' raga of the Mantric Sun Band. Ragamuffins have your rags patched by the marvelous patcher. Visit the herbalist and take home a fresh herb cutting (and learn about their culinary and curative values). Browse in the Free Store stalls.³⁸⁰

On that spring day in 1972, the Intercommunal Free Carnival brought together hundreds of commune members who were participants in the vision of Digger Free that *Kaliflower* had promulgated over the previous three years. A brief synopsis of the event two weeks later summarized the sense of hopefulness that pervaded the season, "It was a day of joy & inspiration, and on that little green meadow I knew our world, which

³⁷⁹ "Inter Communal Free Carnival," *Kaliflower* 4, no. 1 (May 11, 1972).

³⁸⁰ "Inter Communal Free Carnival."

was once only a hope and a dream, does indeed exist.”³⁸¹ As told in chapter three, the Angels of Light performed their latest show, “Peking On Acid,” to a crowd of hundreds of commune members. Jilala’s footage of the day — including the elaborate costumes, sets, and performances of the Angels, the large communal tents with all manner of provisions and activities — is available and should be viewed to understand this moment in time.³⁸²

Two weeks later, Scott Street turned over the editing of the third issue of volume four of *Kaliflower* to Hunga Dunga, the commune that coordinated the Free Food Conspiracy. The cover article was an allegorical story by one of the Hunga Dunga members about a king who learned to share power. As an implied criticism of communal leaders, the article can be seen as a premonition of the clash between Hunga Dunga and Scott Street later in the year.³⁸³

The End of *Kaliflower*

Four weeks later, *Kaliflower* ended publication. The final issue of the three-year run was June 22, 1972. The ostensible reason for this abrupt discontinuance can be found in an article that announced a series of armed robberies that had taken place at communes. The detectives investigating suggested that the robbers were getting addresses from culling the free ads in *Kaliflower*. This, and the fact that the detectives were given two issues of *Kaliflower* for their investigation, freaked out Scott Street:

³⁸¹ "It was a day of joy & inspiration," *Kaliflower* 4, no. 3 (May 25, 1972).

³⁸² For a link to the video of the Inter Communal Free Carnival, see Figure 26, “Angels of Light Video Library.”

³⁸³ "How the Word 'King' Became Archaic (Hunga Dunga's Issue)," *Kaliflower* 4, no. 3 (May 25, 1972).

This episode has made us think once more that KF's distribution is too large, both because addresses have fallen into the wrong hands, & because of the new lack of understanding of KF's confidentiality.³⁸⁴

Two weeks later, the cover article was a handwritten (unsigned) letter from Mutty:

I have lived with the people of Califlower commune for over three years I have not written anything for it aside from this last month (My Father is a Mattress Salesman). Now it looks like the magazine is in the last issue. And I would like to thank the people who have worked on Califlower for all they have done for me and for all the love they have given me."³⁸⁵

It is somehow appropriate that Mutty would be the person to announce the end of *Kaliflower's* run because he was instrumental in the commune's early stirrings. The fact that he had found refuge in the commune after shock therapy authorized by his parents added a poignant sense to his farewell announcement.³⁸⁶

Even though the immediate cause of the abrupt end of *Kaliflower* has always been attributed to the communal robberies (and the sharing of two issues with the police), there are other contributing factors that should not be overlooked. The Scott Street Commune's relationship with other communes was not always harmonious.

³⁸⁴ "Bandito Bulletin," *Kaliflower* 4, no. 5 (June 8, 1972).

³⁸⁵ "Dearest Califlower," *Kaliflower* 4, no. 7 (June 22, 1972).

³⁸⁶ Irving wrote about Mutty extensively in the tenth anniversary issue of *Kaliflower*. The pertinent passage for this reference is: "Mutty's drug was acid, and he did a lot of it and I mean a lot. One day, after sitting on the front steps talking to some black kids of kindergarten age, he came running down the hall of 1869, screaming, with his hands in his hair, 'The girls are throwing matches in my hair.' Soon after, he left for New York, where his parents gave him a series of electroshock treatments." Rosenthal, "Back in 1966...". By June 1972, Mutty was back living at Scott Street where he wrote this article.

Three weeks prior to the final issue of *Kaliflower*, "Excerpts from a Meeting at Scott St. Commune" gave a verbatim transcript of a confrontation between members of Scott Street and members of the Haight Free School.³⁸⁷ The Free School had submitted a poster for the Free Print Shop to produce. The copy for the poster contained a description of the Free School and a hand-drawn graphic depicting an open book surrounded by a set of tools — a hoe, shovel, and rake — but also a rifle. The camera copy had been photographed and was on the light table in the process of being turned into goldenrod sheets for burning the aluminum offset printing plates when Irving happened to notice the rifle. He objected to the image and the poster was ultimately returned unprinted.³⁸⁸ There had been a similar incident between the two groups a few months previously. The meeting in May was most likely at the behest of the Free School to understand the reasoning for the second rejection. Three of the Scott Street people present were identified in the transcript with pseudonyms, the Free School representatives by their first names. The following are excerpts of the "Excerpts":

Arch: [W]e feel that there's a great segment of the community — Third World People, people like those who got busted at the Good Earth — that you're not listening to.

Gloria: I was sort of confused about policy. How much do you people feel that the print shop and KF reflect your politics? What things, what criticisms, would you print? I also wonder how open you are to discussion — there are many different points of view among people in

³⁸⁷ "Excerpts from a Meeting at Scott St. Commune," *Kaliflower* 4, no. 4 (June 1, 1972).

³⁸⁸ Irving was identified in the transcript of the meeting with the pseudonym of "Bowser" (obvious from the context of his other remarks).

the community. How do you relate to the different ideas of other communes?³⁸⁹

These were very cogent questions that the Kaliflower Commune had been asked on many occasions. What was unique is that these meeting notes are a record of the commune's reaction to these questions. Irving responded by explaining that the commune doesn't "print things that smack of rhetoric" and goes on to explain that, just as corporations are considered persons, so too the commune is looking for articles that have been written in collaboration with the other members of a commune. Linda from the Free School interrupts and says, "In terms of our page, we thought your objections were objections to the idea of armed struggle rather than rhetoric." Stevie responded, "It's true. A different aspect of people's feelings is the question of non-violence; that's another question." Randy from the Free School was blunt with his criticism, "I used to do the route on Potrero Hill. I used to talk to people about what they thought about *Kaliflower*. A lot of people weren't really into it — most of what was in the paper didn't relate to their lives. I think that situation is a real shame. You could reach a lot more people if there were more things in KF that you didn't necessarily agree with."³⁹⁰

Since its inception, *Kaliflower* had often solicited criticism (of the paper and the commune both) and would print the responses, both the verbatim transcripts of formal criticism meetings as well as the occasional angry letter from readers. At the core of many of these critiques was the objection to unbending principles. On the one hand, *Kaliflower* was following a pure interpretation of Digger Free. On the other hand, there seemed to be no room for compromise.

³⁸⁹ "Excerpts from a Meeting."

³⁹⁰ "Excerpts from a Meeting."

The Clash of Communes

A perfect example of this “no compromise” attitude on the part of the Kaliflower Commune was captured in several documents that came to light with the sharing of the Free Food Family Archive in 2022. A portion of this story was told in chapter five.

By July 1972, there had been several incidents that caused friction between Hunga Dunga and Scott Street Communes. Hunga Dunga was upset when Lynn Brown, one of the early members of the Kaliflower Commune, had been unilaterally asked to leave the commune. At a Free Food Family meeting that took place at Hunga Dunga, a member of Scott Street had asked two people to stop smoking indoors; Baird, the senior member of Hunga Dunga, took exception to anyone telling a guest in their home what they could and could not do.³⁹¹

By July, it had become obvious to everyone in the Scott Street Commune that relations with Hunga Dunga had hit a patch of turbulence. At a contentious meeting of the Free Food Conspiracy, at which a common food treasury was proposed, disagreements erupted about foods that would be permitted and whether decisions would be unanimous. Some of the Scott Street representatives took offense by what they considered insulting remarks.³⁹² Two days later, Scott Street sent the following letter to Hunga Dunga:

Dearest Hunga Dunga brothers & sisters —

³⁹¹ Questioning of Scott St. Commune by Hunga Dunga, July 5, 1972, Free Food Family Archive, Lily Marnell (curator).

³⁹² Four Free Food Family Meetings (July 2, 3, 6, 12), 1972, Free Food Family Archive, Lily Marnell (curator). The conclusion that some from Scott Street felt insulted is found in the notes of the encounter between Hunga Dunga and Scott Street on July 5, 1972, and which is related in the subsequent discussion in this chapter.

We want to resolve the criticisms that seem to have arisen about our commune, but we feel that a large general discussion between our houses would be unwieldy and confusing, especially considering the emotional undercurrents of some of our smaller discussions. And we understand that you do not wish to use third persons. Therefore we would like to suggest these forms, as possibilities for you to consider:

1. A question & answer session, in which we would be willing to answer questions, provided they were concrete and direct, not rhetorical.
2. A formal criticism of our house by your house.
3. A formal criticism of your house by our house.
4. Both 2 & 3, but separated by at least two weeks.
5. We would be open to other suggestions you may have.

(Formal criticism would include silence by the group being criticized, and a three-day period afterwards in which the criticisms would not be discussed between our houses.)

As always, Scott St. | Fourth of July, '72³⁹³

The last parenthetical statement is how the formal ritual of “Mutual Criticism” (modeled on the Oneida Commune) was practiced at Scott Street. Hunga Dunga opted for #1 of the five options listed in the invitation — a question-and-answer session with questions posed by Hunga Dunga, but with a caveat. The questions needed to be “concrete and direct, not rhetorical.” There again is that negative criteria that Irving had mentioned in the discussion with the Free School. “We don’t like to print things that smack of rhetoric, or formulas.”³⁹⁴ Here, Scott Street would only answer questions that

³⁹³ "Dearest Hunga Dunga brothers & sisters ...", July 4, 1972, Free Food Family Archive, Lily Marnell (curator).

³⁹⁴ "Excerpts from a Meeting."

were “not rhetorical.”

Who the judge of what was rhetorical was ultimately Irving. And therein lay one of the points of friction between the two communes, especially between the two senior male members of each group. Baird and Irving had a contentious relationship. Both were adamant believers in Free, so there was little ideological difference. But each man had authority issues: Irving demanded recognition of himself as a teacher and final arbiter of issues of substance; Baird bristled at Irving’s authority, which he saw as capricious.³⁹⁵ This was a familiar pattern with many who associated with Irving. Think of the comment by Eila Kokkinen, the art editor for the *Chicago Review* who joined the staff at the same moment that Irving was plucked for the position of editor-in-chief. “When we joined, Irving Rosenthal was very quiet, a meek little soul. Absolutely. But in a matter of months he had taken over, like a dictator.”³⁹⁶ Those who thought of Irving as a teacher, as most of the members of the Kaliflower Commune did, overlooked his strict and at times harsh judgment.

The meeting between Hunga Dunga and Scott Street Communes took place at Scott Street on July 5, 1972, a day after the invitation quoted above. Eight members of Scott Street and ten members of Hunga Dunga attended. The second floor was one large space — all the walls had been demolished (except for the bathroom) soon after the commune had moved into the Redevelopment Agency-owned three-story Victorian in

³⁹⁵ Baird’s opinion of Irving’s judgment is clear in the account of an interview with Baird by Windcatcher. Baird was highly critical of the donation of the set of *Kaliflower* to the California Historical Society in 1973. “They are saying essentially that a counterculture no longer exists. In their eyes. They’ve given up on an alternative society. And of all people, the California Historical Society! That’s going over to the other side with a revenge!” Windcatcher, “Interview of Baird Underhill ” (The Digger Archives, ca. 1973), Photocopy.

³⁹⁶ See Chapter One, fn. 6.

1971. When they arrived for the question-and-answer session, Hunga Dunga was escorted to the second floor. There, the members of Scott Street were sitting together, all dressed in black robes and masks. A barrier separated the two communes. Not exactly an invitation for conviviality.³⁹⁷

The verbatim transcript of the meeting between Hunga Dunga and Scott Street runs eighteen pages. The back-and-forth was stilted at points and illuminating at others.

Scott Street called the question-and-answer format a “form” in the sense of a formal practice, just as third persons and ritual criticism were forms. Hunga Dunga at first struggled with asking questions, when they obviously wanted to follow up with responses to Scott Street’s answers, which were often obfuscatory. (In the following, [H] [S] indicate communal affiliation.)

Mikey [H]: I'll read it. Do you understand that the root of our misunderstanding is the use of unilateral action?

Winston [S]: No.

Irving [S]: I don't understand either.

Psylvia [H]: Do you feel you understand the root of the misunderstanding as a group?

Dennis [S]: I don't.

Psylvia [H]: Can you accept our understanding of what it is?

Steve [S]: We don't know what it is.

Mikey [H]: (deliberates a while) I can't compose this.

Lizzard [H]: Maybe you should read the 3rd question.

Mikey [H]: (reading) Do you agree to join us in a community where unanimous decisions are made and there isn't unilateral action?

Irving [S]: I don't understand the terms.³⁹⁸

Hunga Dunga continued to struggle, not only with the Q & A format, but with the

³⁹⁷ Questioning of Scott St. Commune by Hunga Dunga.

³⁹⁸ Questioning of Scott St. Commune by Hunga Dunga.

formality of the occasion:

Bobby [H]: Why did you all wear black robes and masks, and why is there a barrier?

Irving [S]: These are forms that keep out anger, envy, greed and malice.

Bobby [H]: Bobby: What are the forms? Do you do this when there are meetings with other people? Maybe it's just me but I feel very uncomfortable, and I was just wondering why you do it. Is there reason to wear masks? It's hard for me to talk to somebody when I can't see their eyes.

David: We've felt very uncomfortable with the relationship that is between us, and this — these forms are couches for our insanity which we wish you to learn more about.

Bobby: Do you feel these forms are helping us to get together?

Irving: Yes.

Bobby: In what way?

Dennis: Part of any dream meeting needs theatre and a light side to things. We have costumes, more robes, if you would like to wear them.

Lizzard: We had considered ourselves coming naked. I think your explanation is very good, David. I really like that.³⁹⁹

At that point, Baird of Hunga Dunga took off his clothes, and the rest of Hunga (except one) disrobed. With Hunga Dunga naked and Scott Street robed (and masked), the question and answer back-and-forth continued.

Eventually, the three incidents that had caused the friction between the two communes were uncovered and discussed, although in the stilted “form” of question-and-answer that Scott Street insisted be used. Irving explained the complex relationship between the commune and Lynn, who had been asked to leave the commune. This was the incident that had most freaked out Hunga Dunga because it had been the unilateral

³⁹⁹ Questioning of Scott St. Commune by Hunga Dunga.

action of one of the women at Scott Street. Hunga Dunga believed “in doing things totally by unanimous decisions” and asked if Scott Street would commit to not using unilateral action in dealing with them. Irving replied: “The answer is no. We can’t make any such promises. We feel that promises like that are paper promises.” To further obfuscate the discussion, Dennis added, “I don’t understand the term — unanimous decision.” This from one of the core members of Scott Street, which practiced consensus in its daily meetings.

As for the “no-smoking” incident, one of the Scott Street members explained that he had asked two people to stop smoking. “The first person took it well, the second person didn’t.” Hunga Dunga was outraged.

Baird [H]: Why do you feel that you have the right to ask people not to smoke in somebody else's home? [The meeting where the smoking run-in happened was taking place at Hunga Dunga.]

Dennis [S]: We feel that your home that day was a public meeting place and that in a public meeting place we have the right to ask or tell people anything we feel is right. Then, if there is disagreement or a refusal, we have to decide what to do — who should leave, who should stay, etc.

(The meeting minutes then note: Exchange between Dennis, Irving, and Baird. Dennis doesn't want Baird to be in his home if he is going to continue interrupting.) [The “black robes” meeting, recall, was at Scott Street.]

Lizzard [H]: We all interrupt each other at times.)⁴⁰⁰

Looking back a half-century later, the idea of allowing smoking in a communal household seems quite ludicrous. Nevertheless, the presumption of Scott Street in making demands of another commune’s household also seems like a point of

⁴⁰⁰ Questioning of Scott St. Commune by Hunga Dunga.

contention.

As for the incident that occurred two days prior at the Free Food Conspiracy meeting, it never gets spelled out except by insinuation. Hunga Dunga must have asked for a commitment to unanimous decision making, and some reference to Scott Street's condoning of unilateral action may have been made.

Bobby [H]: The question wasn't put just to you but to everybody. We also decided that unanimity is very important. What has happened in our lives made us ask the question.

Steve [S]: That question by itself shouldn't have bothered you. It was the question as pointed to us.

Irving [S]: We feel there was sniping.

Laura [H]: Could you give examples?

Irving [S]: I would choose not to.

David [S]: We'd rather be asked questions that pertain to things you don't understand.⁴⁰¹

At that point, Baird left the meeting and went downstairs. He returned and announced:

Baird [H]: I would suggest that we end this meeting since one group isn't comfortable with one form, and the other group isn't comfortable with the other form.

Irving [S]: Can you state that as a question?

Baird [H]: I will not.

Irving [S]: Then I guess the meeting is over if you won't abide by the rules.⁴⁰²

Running throughout the meeting was not only the subtle challenge by Baird to Irving's authority, as seen in the above exchange, but also Irving's unabashed declaration of the

⁴⁰¹ Questioning of Scott St. Commune by Hunga Dunga.

⁴⁰² Questioning of Scott St. Commune by Hunga Dunga.

importance of authority.

Irving: We take stock in willingness and obedience in people. If a person is grumbling about something, if they're members they get criticized. We want each other to be like water — servants of each other. We think words like independence, pride and self-reliance are bad words.

Baird: I understand your feelings about these words, but you should understand that what is negative to you is positive to others.

Irving: We respect what others say. We tend to see things in evolutionary terms. Independence is a virtue in young communes, but obedience is a virtue in older communes.⁴⁰³

At another point in this bizarre encounter, Irving may have inadvertently revealed one of the crucial factors in ending the publication of *Kaliflower*:

Irving: You've seen *Kaliflower*. You know what it is. When we started *Kaliflower* we limited the circulation, with the deliberate intention to catalyze the creation of as many communes in S.F. as we could. We never used the word elite in *Kaliflower*. It was our wish to carry things to the next step that we thought they should go to. All you had to do to get this elite publication was to consider yourself a commune. As with all things elite, pretty soon everybody gets there. Then what you do, if you want, is create something new again, higher, giving out enough good vibrations that others want to share in it.⁴⁰⁴

The implication is that a compelling reason for stopping *Kaliflower* was to “create something new again, higher” — which was the idea of forming a common treasury of the two dozen communes that formed the Free Food Family.

Alas, this “higher” purpose was not to be. The encounter between two of the most active communes in the *Kaliflower* intercommunal network would have dire

⁴⁰³ Questioning of Scott St. Commune by Hunga Dunga.

⁴⁰⁴ Questioning of Scott St. Commune by Hunga Dunga.

consequences. The unbending attitude of no compromise would eventually bring about two fatal schisms: one in the Free Food Family and one within the Kaliflower Commune itself.

Schism at Scott Street

In late summer 1972, a second Intercommunal Carnival took place, not in San Francisco, but at a commune in Wolf Creek, Oregon, near Grants Pass, where the Kaliflower Commune had purchased a nearly inaccessible logged-over mountain top in 1969.⁴⁰⁵ Three years later, the two informal branches of the commune exchanged trips back and forth between city and country, but the members who were working on building a permanent home on Roundtop Mountain spent most of their time there that summer. The Wolf Creek Intercommunal Carnival in August 1972 was as electrifying for the communes of southwest Oregon as the event three months earlier in San Francisco. However, for the Kaliflower Commune, the event turned out to be a disaster. The following is an excerpt from an article in the Tenth Anniversary issue of *Kaliflower*, titled "My Favorite Crises":

9/72 After Intercommunal Carnival in Oregon, travellers from city-half of commune are miffed by what they consider an "unwelcome" reception by the Oregon half. Leads to hysterical meeting on the mountain top at which wellsprings of hidden resentments gush to the surface--mostly between members of the two different branches and between the branches themselves!

Irving: "The feeling I have is that people here don't think S.F. exists."

⁴⁰⁵ "Five Days Ago Sutter Street Commune Bought a Mountain in Oregon," *Kaliflower* 1, no. 36 (December 25, 1969).

Miriam: "You bad-mouth Oregon in the city ... Sam when he came here thought he was going into hell or Siberia."

David: "I'm freaked out with Art & Paula as I was 2 yrs. ago."

Paula: "If you bring our relationship into this--I refuse to stay here at the meeting."

Miriam (to Irving): "I think that you thinking that people are thinking of you as an evil old wizard is your problem."

Talk of splitting the commune in half! Ghost of the Colorado incident [another previous crisis] evoked! S.F. branch returns to city where it is decided that we be one commune again for a while. Courier sent north saying Oregon should be shut down and people return to city [it has never reopened] and that Art & Paula stop sleeping together. Wishes complied with.⁴⁰⁶

The schism within the Scott Street Commune that resulted in several core members leaving happened in close proximity to the commune's dropping out of the Free Food Family and the conflict with Hunga Dunga. The ascerbic account of "My Favorite Crises" in the Tenth Anniversary Edition of *Kaliflower* followed up its retelling of the butting of heads that took place at the Wolf Creek Intercommunal Carnival with the following:

12/72 Three months later came--Black December! Dec. 2 Paula leaves the commune! Ten days later Geoff Smith, and 2 wks. after that Art & Vikki, also leave! This was in midst of marathon meetings on subjects such as criticism and love affairs (for duration of which all couples asked not to sleep together). Meanwhile on Dec. 4 we drop out of Free Food Family! (An intercommunal experiment in common food-buying.) This after months of horrible meetings, both between the communes

⁴⁰⁶ "My Favorite Crises," in *Kaliflower (New Series 2): The Intracommunal Infusion* 67-77 ([Free Print Shop], 1977).

and about it among ourselves, and encounters with Hunga Dunga. (Commune which did main food-buying). At one such encounter, a formal one, we'd dressed in black robes and masks, Hunga Dunga naked, we spoke only in response to their questions, such as: "Must we be two small green apples or can we be one large red apple?"⁴⁰⁷

This intracommunal rupture took place in September 1972, and it foreshadowed the eventual departure of most of the members of the Scott Street Commune in the coming months and years. At the same time, differences between Hunga Dunga and Scott Street continued to fester. Hunga Dunga did not attend the Wolf Creek intercommunal carnival and instead chose to go looking for land in Washington State. This decision to not locate a country branch in the Grants Pass area was considered an insult by Irving.⁴⁰⁸ Then, three months later, as told in the previous chapter, Scott Street dropped out of the Free Food Family only five months after the plunge into intercommunal communism, ostensibly over Scott Street's disagreement about inclusion of dairy products in the food purchases.

In an interview in 1977, Jet (as he was known then) had some thoughts about the breakup of the Kaliflower Commune as recorded in a memcon at the time:

Talking about Irving's role in the commune, Jet said it's not a commune really — it's an ashram. All those who wanted a commune have left (each in some way still suffering yet better for having lived there). The ones who wanted an ashram are remaining. Irving never waged war for his position. He once told Jet that power is in the air. Reach out and

⁴⁰⁷ "My Favorite Crises"

⁴⁰⁸ "Mike [ex-member of Hunga Dunga Commune] also made an interesting comment. He believes that one of the main points of contention between Scott Street and Hunga Dunga was that the latter ended up buying land in Washington State, not near Roundtop Mountain as Irving had wanted. Mike thinks Irving saw this as defying him." Burrow's Bees Pandemic Zoom, BUZZ: A Memcon. October 2, 2022.

take it. Which is what Irving did. Everything the commune has done is from him. Jet worries that Irving will die without the dharma having been passed on, and he means that in the strict sense — without some one person having had the power transmitted to them. He at one time thought of himself as the heir (and people resented him for that).⁴⁰⁹

Seeking Answers

When looking back at these fateful events, we are left attempting to explain them in the context of the history of intercommunalism and in the context of the counterculture of the Sixties. There are several possible paths we can explore. But as I have been reminded many times in the Zoom group of communal survivors, using the term “failure” is fraught with expedient risks. Is a social movement, even if it eventually dissipates, necessarily a failure? Were the English Diggers of 1649 a failure because they disappeared after two years? How can we say they disappeared if their corpus of radical manifestos and ideological tracts survived to inspire the San Francisco Diggers three hundred years later?

Tim Miller, in his work on the history of communes in the 1960s, suggests several factors that contributed to the dissolution of those that did not survive the 1970s. These include external pressures such as economic challenges, legal opposition, and social prejudices; internal conflicts among commune members; and shifting cultural attitudes.⁴¹⁰ Miller’s analysis suggests that the decline of the 1960s communes was due to a complex interplay of these factors, reflecting both the inherent challenges of communal living and the changing societal contexts in which they operated.

The Kaliflower intercommunal experiment foundered after the end of the

⁴⁰⁹ Eric Noble, Memcon with James "Jet" Tressler, June 16 1977.

⁴¹⁰ Miller, *The 60s Communes*.

newspaper. At first, the network of committed communes seemed to continue strong, especially with the deepening commitment of the Free Food Conspiracy to form a common food treasury. And yet, the seeds were there for the inter- and intra-communal schisms that led to an end to the intercommunal network. It seems that external challenges were the least of the reasons for the demise. *Kaliflower* existed in a bubble that the communes had consciously protected by not entertaining the incessant questions of reporters or researchers. By avoiding contact with both the underground and mainstream press, the Kaliflower network had been insulated from the “outside” world. Economic challenges were also minimal. *Kaliflower* preached a form of voluntary poverty and acceptance of welfare as a subsistence strategy.

Internal conflicts, both within the network of communes and within the Kaliflower Commune itself, were rife. As seen in the confrontation between Hunga Dunga and Scott Street, although Scott Street practiced the Oneida custom of Ritual Criticism and regularly invited criticism from the other communes, its members seemed impervious to accepting the voices of those who lived outside its walls.⁴¹¹

The idea of a commune that found itself self-isolated from its larger community fits with a theory that Freeman House first proposed. Linn House (as he was known at the time) was the editor of *Innerspace Magazine* in New York City in 1966. He published

⁴¹¹ This lesson illustrates the speech of Eryximachus in Plato’s *Symposium*: “For surely there can be no harmony so long as high and low are still discordant; harmony, after all, is consonance, and consonance is a species of agreement. Discordant elements, as long as they are still in discord, cannot come to an agreement, and they therefore cannot produce a harmony.” Plato, Alexander Nehamas, translator, and Paul Woodruff, translator, *Symposium* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 1989). That the Scott Street Commune was not able to work with other communes on an equal basis, with mutual compromise, would be the discordant element that contributed to the collapse of the intercommunal dream.

a letter from the Diggers in December that is among the foundational documents of the movement.⁴¹² In mid-1967, Linn moved to San Francisco and became a core member of the Digger/Free City project, editing and publishing, along with David Simpson, the Free City News. Scott Street conducted an interview with Freeman (Linn) in 1974 as part of the Digger history project that had been undertaken after Eric joined in 1971. At one point during the interview, Freeman interrupted the discussion and interjected the following:

Linn: I wanted to get this on tape — why I'm not living communally at this point. From a rural perspective, the only kind of communes that are doing anything, other than just surviving, are those who are either service oriented, or there's some kind of internally disciplined growth.

Irving: In other words, religion.

Linn: Yes, service or religious oriented. The rest of them are involved in self-sufficiency, which I'm not interested in. It really seems to me like that the problem with service communes is that they form a kind of ego-skin around them, as the people inside are giving up their own ego-skins, except that usually the commune's skin is thicker than any of the individual skins of the people who made up the group. It creates an inside and an outside — the people inside become smug and the people outside are envious, jealous and violent, because of what they see as the ecstatic lives being enjoyed by the people inside — which is true to some extent. It creates a breakdown in communications. I've seen it happen again and again and again. It was like that up north in the boat-building commune — or community.

⁴¹² "The Diggers Are Not That! Digger Papers and Papers on Diggers," *Innerspace Magazine*, ca. December, 1966.

Irving: Oh, I don't know. I've always thought that the communal ego was one step higher than the individual ego. Perhaps just a short step – but a step.

Linn: I'm not so sure. I get along better with my own ego than with most group egos. I like to be alone now so I can talk to the old-timers, the American old-timers. Most of the new settlers have cut themselves off from the local inhabitants, the natives. Communes even cut themselves off from other communes. Somehow they forget that we're all new settlers of this planet.

Steven: Do you have any advice?

Linn: No, but I'm hoping that this rap will provoke some feedback. I thought that this group here should have the solutions if anyone does.

Steven: We've had similar problems – they're things we've had to struggle with too.⁴¹³

Freeman's theory of a communal "ego-skin" that "creates an inside and an outside"

⁴¹³ House and Waterworth, interview. Linn and Ivory spent an afternoon at the invitation of the Scott Street Commune reviewing the collection of Digger street sheets that the commune had been collecting. As was their wont, the commune turned on a reel-to-reel tape recorder as the session rolled on, capturing Freeman's recollections and analyses of the Digger phenomenon. While Linn was editing *Innerspace Magazine*, he visited San Francisco in late 1966 where he attended the Digger Free Feeds in the Panhandle. Subsequently he published the aforementioned Digger contribution in the December issue, one of the first underground notices about the Diggers in the December 1966 issue of *Innerspace*. After the Free City Summer Solstice 1968 events Freeman, along with most of the remaining Diggers, left the urban environment in the general back-to-the-land movement. In the coming decades, Freeman would become one of the stalwart proponents of bioregionalism, the anarchist wing of the environmental movement, furnishing concrete examples of watershed restoration in the Mattole Valley of Humboldt County, California. His attendance at the early Digger feeds was discovered in the recent scanning of William Gedney's photography collection at Duke University. Freeman contributed numerous written accounts of bioregionalism, including his own *Totem Salmon* and contributions to *Planet Drum* and other environmental journals.

makes sense when looking at the schism between Kaliflower and other communes.

Theodore Roszak Looks Back

In the larger context, the end of the Kaliflower intercommunal network can be viewed through the lens of Sixties historiography. By the mid-1990s, the Reagan Revolution had swung American and world history onto a trajectory consciously at odds with the social movements of the 1960s. Both Arnold Toynbee and Kenneth Rexroth were no longer alive to comment on the outcomes of their earlier prognostications. Not so Theodore Roszak. He was alive and well and writing as prolifically as ever. In 1995, Roszak penned a new introduction to a reprinted edition of *Counter Culture*. In this introduction, Roszak offered a fuller theory of the counterculture based on his historical analysis of the three-decade “Age of Affluence” in the United States after 1942. By 1995, the rise of the “burgeoning right wing” was most visible in the “unrelieved fury and vituperation of talk radio.”⁴¹⁴ His outlook is much darker twenty-five years after his initial pronouncements on the promise that the counterculture held for Western civilization. His prophecy of doom is hardly a whisper when he suggests that the backlash against the counterculture would turn its distrust of power against liberalism in the service of the corporate establishment and the rise of a perverted “one-eyed populism” that would scapegoat the poor.⁴¹⁵

In his 1995 look-back, Roszak highlights several key mistakes that the counterculture made. The most critical mistake in his estimation was that the counterculture “grossly underestimated the stability and resourcefulness of the

⁴¹⁴ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, xxxvi.

⁴¹⁵ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, xxxvii.

corporate establishment,” which “outlasted its opposition and struck back with astonishing effectiveness.”⁴¹⁶ Roszak in 1995 outlines the strategic response of the “corporate community,” which included a shift from alliances with liberal elites during the Age of Affluence to the active cultivation of the Evangelical Christian Right, many of whose members’ mission was to overturn the lifestyle advances of the Sixties social movements. Roszak contends that the shift of military spending and industrial investment to the Sun Belt states (in part to search for non-union labor) was a key propellant in this energizing of the Christian Right. The overall programmatic shift in the desired outcome for the “corporate community” was the “systematic repeal of the affluent society” to undercut the economic foundations of the counterculture.⁴¹⁷ This involved several key elements—the export of jobs that had created middle-class affluence in postwar America; the assault on organized labor that had prevailed in securing living wages and benefits; and the dismantling of social programs at the local, state and federal levels.

In 1995, Roszak’s dystopic critique of American capitalism envisioned even darker events on the horizon, including increasing homeless and jobless populations and an array of right-wing think tank proposals for a new Social Darwinism (“orphanages, work houses, chain gangs, means testing, corporal punishment, public executions, company unions, and the iron law of wages”).⁴¹⁸ In a moment of prescience, Roszak warns of a new “populism” that scapegoats the poor and powerless rather than

⁴¹⁶ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, xxix.

⁴¹⁷ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, xxx.

⁴¹⁸ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, xxxi.

populism's traditional enemy of "the money power."⁴¹⁹ The counterculture's attack on the "power structure" had been co-opted to focus on social programs, and away from the "corporate establishment" and the "war-making, surveillance, and police powers of the federal government."⁴²⁰ Roszak's judgment is to the point: "What we have today is a one-eyed populism that fails to see the main source of its victimization."⁴²¹ Roszak's final indictment of American society in 1995, which would loom large in the coming decades and the rise of conservative media outlets, included the following warning: "The heart of the ascendant conservative culture would seem to be solid money all the way through. And around that dead and deadly core, the most distinctive feature of protest is the unrelieved fury and vituperation of talk radio: thousands of self-pitying voices baying for blood—interrupted only for commercials."⁴²² By the time he died in 2011, Roszak undoubtedly believed his dystopic vision had been corroborated.

Judging the Outcome

With the end of *Kaliflower* publication, the homegrown feedback channel ended not only for the Angels of Light but for the Free Medical Opera, Hunga Dunga, and the rest of the 300+ communes that had come to rely on the weekly connection they had to each other. With Scott Street dropping out of the Free Food Family, one of the mainstays of that experiment in pure communism soon came to an end, despite Hunga Dunga's continuing efforts to keep it going. Eventually Lizzard (the Hunga Dunga member most involved in the day-to-day food buying) started his own business, which

⁴¹⁹ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, xxxi.

⁴²⁰ MISSING REF

⁴²¹ Roszak, *Counter Culture*, xxxii.

⁴²² Roszak, *Counter Culture*, xxxvi.

became one of the San Francisco Bay Areas most successful food distributors to restaurants and retail outlets.⁴²³

After ending publication of *Kaliflower*, the Scott Street Commune immediately began work on a project that would occupy them for the next decade — an anthology of *Kaliflower*. Irving's account of the commune's early history discussed the last Digger publication that was published and distributed in June 1968, just at the moment that the Sutter Street Commune was getting pulled into the Free City orbit. Irving wrote that The Digger Papers "is a document that cannot be praised enough. It is the epitome of Digger idealism, and the last act that should be required of any actors on the stage of history: a final summary written by themselves."⁴²⁴ Indeed, that was the main intent of the *Kaliflower* anthology, too:

This book is a culling from *Kaliflower*, a small weekly newspaper hand-delivered to communes in the San Francisco Bay Area from April 24, 1969 to June 22, 1972. Through the paper and its unwritten supplement (the gossip of its carriers) local communes crosspollinated each other with ideas, needs, and information. In *Kaliflower*'s third year the circulation grew at so swiftly increasing a rate, that we editors realized we were working for a largely anonymous readership— something we had never intended to do. After weighing a number of alternatives, we simply suspended *Kaliflower*, but not without

⁴²³ The Free Food Conspiracy was not only a grouping of the couple of dozen *Kaliflower* communes most committed to a functioning intercommunal network. It was also a recognized food-buying club with a bank account that enabled it to exchange food stamps for cash. The naming of the food-buying club is one of the legendary stories that Joseph and Paula recounted in the Burrow's Bees Pandemic Zoom group. After two suggestions, one slightly more suggestive, Greenleaf was chosen for the name. After the breakup of the Free Food Family, that was the name that Lizzard continued to use for his wholesale grocery supply company. As of 2024, the company is thriving in Marin County.

⁴²⁴ [Irving Rosenthal], *Deep Tried Frees*.

promising to re-state, in a simple and condensed form, the main insights about communal living that had appeared in it.⁴²⁵

The *Kaliflower* anthology project became a massive undertaking. The "Introduction" stated, "It has taken seven years to produce this book, seven times as long as we had projected."⁴²⁶ Many of the tasks associated with compiling, editing, illustrating, printing, and finishing the book required whole new skill sets. For example, the decision to use Caslon Old Style typeface required the acquisition of and learning how to operate a Linotype typesetting machine. One of the commune members' father, president of the New York Printing Industries trade association, arranged a donation of a complete font of metal type, including upper- and lower-case letters, numbers, special characters, ligatures, etc. The question of how to bind the Anthology was another area of research that involved visiting local hand bookbinders, as well as large publishers. Ultimately, the decision to use signature binding involved one of the members taking ongoing classes with The Capricornus School of Hand Bookbinding in Berkeley.

In assessing the decision to end *Kaliflower*, the introduction to the Anthology had this profound statement:

When we suspended *Kaliflower* we thought we were throwing the communes' crutch away, and that after three years of written help and reassurances, the communes would be ready to face each other and help each other directly. We had dreams of land trusts and organic farms that would feed the communes free. We thought a new intercommunal era of working together would begin. It didn't. Difficulties arose that we attribute to the same factors that gum up relations inside a commune: egoism, defensiveness, paranoia, and confusion. A commune is not going to understand nor be understood

⁴²⁵ *Kaliflower Volume Five*, (San Francisco: Free Print Shop, 1980), iv.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

by other groups until its members reach one mind among themselves. Nothing is harder to deal with than a commune that can't say yes or no to anything because no ritual, no meeting, no leader, no central authority of any kind is acknowledged. In such a case hidden leaders who won't cop to what they're doing often make the real decisions—in an indirect and covert way. We suspect that a network of busily interacting communes will have to wait for the wider practice of some kind of internal straightening-out program, such as the formal criticism discussed in this book. What we think our book is, besides a bunch of tips on getting a commune (or other group) begun and working, is the record of a historical mood—in which a large number of people, with no money and many of society's cards stacked against them, tried to think things out freshly, and tested out a new way of living together, that seemed moral, simple, and aesthetic.⁴²⁷

The advice, admonitions, and lessons of the Kaliflower intercommunal network wait for future generations, just as the Sutter Street Commune discovered the nineteenth-century Oneida Commune and the San Francisco Diggers discovered the seventeenth-century English Diggers. Until then, let this be a record of the ideas that motivated this unique experiment.

Legacy and Implications

The Kaliflower intercommunal network was a social experiment to create a reimagined society, a world turned on its head where cooperation replaced competition and creativity supplanted commerce. In rejecting the dominant structures of capitalism and hierarchy in its many forms, Kaliflower offered not just an alternative but a challenge—a living embodiment of the possibility that society could be otherwise. Though the network dissolved, its ripples persist.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

We see its echoes in today's mutual aid networks, food cooperatives, and intentional communities, where the threads of collective support and resource sharing continue to weave quiet revolutions. The principles that guided Kaliflower—prefiguring a world of communal solidarity, economic freedom, and ecological sustainability within the cracks of the existing one—remain a compass for those seeking to navigate beyond the constraints of individualism, commodification, and environmental degradation.

Yet Kaliflower's history also reminds us of the fragility of such bold experiments. Internal conflicts, diverging personalities, and the challenge of sustaining a unified purpose across many communes proved their undoing. These are not failures so much as lessons: how easily the bonds of solidarity can fray; how critical transparency and shared vision are in maintaining the delicate web of communal society.

What Kaliflower leaves us is a question as much as an answer: How might we once again embrace the ideals of the gift economy, the ethic of mutual service, the radical notion that life is best lived not as isolated individuals but as interdependent members of a human community within the bounds of Nature? In an age teetering on the brink—environmental collapse on one side, ever-widening inequality on the other—the spirit of Kaliflower whispers of another way. Its story is not just one to be remembered but to be reimagined, to be lived anew.



Figure 48. The Kaliflower Intercommunal Carnival



Figure 49. The Angels in "Peking on Acid" at the Intercommunal Carnival

[Follow-up on:]

"Peking On Acid"

"HIGHLIGHTS: Everything and everyone that was painted, the printed program, the bigness of everything, the beautiful zany leader of the orchestra, the frog, the red-headed demon, the Courtesan's skillful stilt walking, the love-making sequence between Courtesan and swain at the end of Act I."

"CHARITY: The Angels have made peace with women. The bitter misogyny of all their past shows is gone. In PEKING ON ACID a gifted female impersonator successfully portrayed feminine elegance and beauty. Now they are theatre for everyone instead of just half of us. A few months ago this reviewer thought he had had it with what passes for drag these days. It was nice to see this ancient art redeemed." (KF, 5/25/72)

PEKING REVIEW

NOTES on "PEKING ON ACID," a NEW SHOW PRESENTED by the THEATRE of TOTALLY DISHABLED ANGELS of LIGHT at the FIRST INTERCOMMUNAL CARNIVAL, SATURDAY, MAY 20, 1972

THE AUDIENCE: The Angels of Light played to Emotional Mothers, sisters, and friends, and there has hardly been a calmer, more appreciative, and less partisan audience. And it was not captive. It was sitting on the grass and could come and go freely any time it wanted, and so it consisted mainly of those spectators whom the Angels had spellbound.

THE SUN: It was daytime, and the power of the Angels' performance delighted friends, the idea that the sun might happen only at night, in a blacked-out auditorium. The baseball diamond turned into a great black amphitheater.

PAINT: No justice can be done to the acts, costumes and make-up by describing them. Considering the humble scope of our intercommunal culture, they were titanic in conception and aesthetic in execution. The Courtesan was a working Brazilian jungle. Our jagas were

owned by still more spectacular acts and still more spectacular music. Acts and costumes are hard to preserve intact, outside of a reporting theater workshop, but some, although shabby, he made to peek. PEKING ON ACID, at least by color photograph or videotape sketch - for unborn fans of the future.

SPACING OUT: A baseball diamond was the huge space contained by the Angels as their theater, and they handled it masterfully, building acts and costumes of a day to get it, transforming the backstop into a procession, and the pitcher's mound into an orchestra pit. The Courtesan's procession meandered slowly over the road down to the second act. The twelve-inch high parade of the Courtesan, and shorter, parade of her retainers, gave them the added delight to come with so large a space. Creek drama was also played in the sunlight, and the players wore drags, shoes called *shoes*.

MUSIC: The orchestra proved that you don't need a band of professional pianists in order to provide an aesthetically perfect musical accompaniment. For just need about. There was no orchestra that the orchestra did not glide over or zip away. When two music-built pianists appeared on a promontory overlooking the park, and started playing a loud duet, the star-invisible things were simply picked up by the orchestra.

FREEDOM: The Depression musical had been the story in, trade of the so-called "Cocktail Angel" - light piano music, and it was applied somewhere between Pops' Theatre and Upper Douglas Playground. For what passed at the Courtesan was the whole world of "Theatre, East and West, past and present. How can the Courtesan and the Angels of Light be so much in the same place again? The Angels at last appeared out of their godaunt's busy busy place, a wide beam of light

Intense slowly stroking back and forth through world myth and history, popping from the glorious simplicity of their culture to the meter they used to refresh us back at home.

CHARITY: The Angels have made peace with women. The bitter, misogynist of all their past shows is gone. In PEKING ON ACID a gifted female impersonator successfully portrayed feminine elegance and beauty. Now they are theatre for everyone instead of just half of us. A few months ago this reviewer thought he had had it with what passes for drag these days. It was nice to see this ancient art redeemed.

ENSEMBLE: The show was not merely a dramatic act, but a series of acts, each with each other for the benefit. A new, gentler, and more powerful company has formed, with room for everyone to be seen and heard. The experience was exquisite by their absence.

PACING: The great flaw of the show was the long, long between acts, and the corresponding failure to know, only the other from inside the show. But because Saturday was a lucky day, only this flaw was a blessing. It dragged out the show to this all-day Kabuki length, allowing us to share when we got bored, and resist the other brother of the Carnival. We came back when the action picked up.

HIGHLIGHTS: Everything and everyone that was painted, the printed program, the bigness of everything, the beautiful zany leader of the orchestra, the frog, the red-headed demon, the Courtesan's skillful stilt walking, the love-making sequence between Courtesan and swain at the end of Act I.

COMPLAINTS: Not enough rehearsing, one actor smoking on stage, a film made, directing the performers to act for him rather than for the audience, the two frequent refinements of drag and stilt performance appearing on stage.

WHERE TO: There is a rumor, against that the Angels are planning a trip to Cambodia and possible European tour. Nothing would be more detrimental to their development at this time. They would be cutting themselves off from the community they come from and play for, and just before their last coming about a growth has had a chance to develop. They should wait a couple of years before thinking of foreign travel, at least as a "Peking On Acid" should wait its capital in a warehouse theater, lighting equipment, and no further. And in the meantime, if the Angels want to tour, we know of a dozen West Coast communities they could visit, and in particular we know of a mountain top in Oregon with what could be called a challenging backdrop.

Figure 50. Review of "Peking on Acid"

June 22, 1972.

End of an Era: Time to Jump Orbit?

A month after the writer of "Peking Review" asked "Where To?" *Kaliflower* ended publication. The last two cover pages are shown here. In the one on the left (June 15, 1972), the writer recounts the founding of *Kaliflower* and the sense of mission that propelled the weekly production. The article ends, "A remarkable number of these dreams have come true.... Now it is quite ordinary to come across communal bedrooms, daily meetings, communal treasuries, communes which have been together for a year or longer. There are important free intercommunal services & dreamily high intercommunal events at which no one smokes cigarettes. Now it is time to jump orbit."

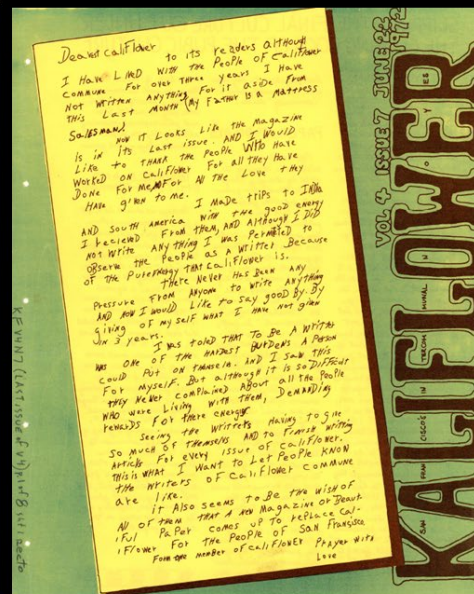
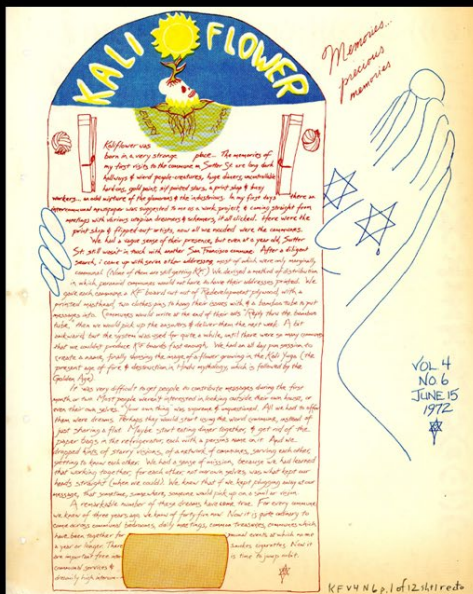


Figure 51. The End of Kaliflower

Mike's Treasure Trove Reveal #3

Meeting of the Free Food Family at Scott Street Commons
Sunday, November 12, 1972

Present: WALTER (Valencia Street), WANNICK (Broderick Street), TAMARA, LIZZARD (Hunga Dunga), MUTTY (Scott Street), TOWPIE (Scott Street), ED, KRISHNA (23rd Street), LESLIE (23rd Street), DENNIS (Scott Street), GARY (Scott Street), DICK (Hunga Dunga), TONY (Fell Street), SAM (Scott Street), RICK (Hancock Street), PAULA (Scott Street), RICK (Arguello Street), ART (Scott Street), JOEL (Fell Street), STEVEN (Broderick Street), RICHARD (Hunga Dunga), SYLVIA (Hunga Dunga), MIKEY (Hunga Dunga), RAIRD (Hunga Dunga), WINSTON (Fell Street), MADELINE (Fell Street), JOE (Scott Street), SANDRA (Scott Street) (notetaker), ERIC (Scott Street) (notetaker), B JOSEY (Fell Street), JOHN (Fell Street), BILL (Fell Street), RAYMOND (Broderick Street), BEAVER (Clayton Street), RODNEY (Broderick Street), VICKI (Scott Street), BOB (15th Street), BOB (15th Street), CHUCK (15th Street), PHILIP (Hunga Dunga), LAURA (Hunga Dunga), GREGORY (Clayton Street), DIANDRA (Clayton Street), MICHAEL (Arguello Street), ALAN (Arguello Street), GARY (Arguello Street), STEVIE (Scott Street), YANA (Winfield Street), MICHAEL (Winfield Street), JASMINE (Broderick Street), CYNTHIE (Winfield Street)

ART: There's no point in waiting any longer. My name is Art. Hunga Dunga called us today and proposed that there be a chairman for the meeting, and asked that we find someone among us to do it. Anyway, so I'm going to do that if I can. I have introduced myself, and I think it would be a good idea for everyone to introduce themselves. A good way to do it would be a role call of various households; so, as I call out a house everyone from that house can introduce themselves.

LIZZARD: I'm representing Bobby Star; I have to talk about cheese.

WANNICK: Less dairy products. VICKI: Getting more people on food stamps.

KRISHNA: I would like to talk about changing the name of the Food Family.

LESLIE: I'd like to talk about getting bulk bio-degradable soaps and cleaners.

STEVIE: I would like to talk about the free bakery at some point and maybe at the end of the meeting, if people feel like it, we can talk 'bout how people feel about having more meetings.

PAULA: I want to talk about how we're getting people into the family or something that pertains to that and what ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ relationship it has to the ideals that I feel I'd like to be working toward. There are people I'd like to have in the family but we have to decide on what basis..

KRISHNA: The need for more oranges in the food family.

PAULA: Maybe we can think about people putting energy into finding sources of food that we could find ourselves--maybe finding small farmers around who have food that we could pick. I'm sure we could find lots of sources once we start to look.

GREGORY: You must understand about the Angels of Light--they're all a little crazy. We made up a list of foods that isn't provided that people ~~xx~~ would like. It starts ~~xxx~~ with vanilla, herbs, mustard, mushrooms, noodles--a variety of them, we didn't get enough flour this month, crackers, sugar--brown and white sugar, chocolate, carob, a heavy-duty-super-duper-cleaner-wiener...

Meeting of the Free Food Family, November 12, 1972

Figure 52. Free Food Family Meeting Notes

Mike's Treasure Trove Reveal #4

These meeting contain confidential information about the state of these. Not meant to be shared or that will be kept confidential.

Meeting of Scott St. Commons by Hunga Dunga
Sunday, July 5, 1972

Present from Scott St.: Irving, Mitty, Dennis, David, Winston, Steven, David and Ted (Stalder notes).

Present from Hunga Dunga: Mitty, Irving, David, Mitty, Sylvia, Rodney, Dick, Johnny, Laura and Mike.

Bobby: It's just like TV. I think it would be nice to start the meeting by holding hands.

Everyone holds hands for several minutes in silence.

Mike: Our first question is - how everyone here want to be here?

Several people answer yes.

Mike: I'll read it. So you understand that the rest of our misunderstanding is the use of misunderstanding.

Winston: No.

Irving: I don't understand either.

Sylvia: Do you feel you understand the rest of the misunderstanding as a group?

Dennis: I don't.

Sylvia: Can you accept our understanding of what it is?

Steven: We don't know what it is.

Sylvia: Mike -

Mike: (deliberates a while) I can't commit this.

Mike: (reads) In you come to join us in a community where ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ decisions are made and there isn't unilateral action.

Irving: I don't understand the term.

Mike: Can we try the 4th question?

Mike (reads): What we be two small green apples, or can we be one large red apple?

Steven: It depends if the growing stock is strong.

Laura: What would it take to strengthen the stock?

Bobby: I feel very naive sometimes. Why did you all wear black robes and masks, and why is there a barrier?

Irving: These are forms that keep out anger, envy, greed and malice.

Bobby: What are the forms - do you do this when there are meetings with other people?

Maybe it's just me but I feel very uncomfortable and I was just wondering why you do it. Is there a reason to wear masks? It's hard for me to talk to somebody when I can't see their eyes.

David: We've felt very uncomfortable with the relationship that is between us, and this - these forms are couches for our insanity which we wish you to learn more about.

Irving: We take much stock in willingness and obedience in people. If a person is grumbling about something, ~~xxxx~~ if they're members they get criticized. We want each other to be like water - servants of each other. We ~~xxxx~~ words like independence, pride and self-reliance are bad words.

Meeting Between Hunga Dunga & Scott Street, July 5, 1972

Figure 53. "Black Robes & Masks" Meeting Notes

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