

*Radio Transmission*  
*Electricity and Surrealist Art in 1950s and '60s San Francisco*

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Among the most erudite of the San Francisco Renaissance writers was the poet and Zen Buddhist priest Philip Whalen (1923–2002). In “‘Goldberry is Waiting’; Or, P.W., His Magic Education As A Poet,” Whalen remarks,

I saw that poetry didn't belong to me, it wasn't my province; it was older and larger and more powerful than I, and it would exist beyond my life-span. And it was, in turn, only one of the means of communicating with those worlds of imagination and vision and magical and religious knowledge which all painters and musicians and inventors and saints and shamans and lunatics and yogis and dope fiends and novelists heard and saw and 'tuned in' on. Poetry was not a communication from ME to ALL THOSE OTHERS, but from the invisible magical worlds to me . . . everybody else, ALL THOSE OTHERS.<sup>1</sup>

The manner of writing is familiar: it is peculiar to the San Francisco Renaissance, but the ideas expounded are common enough: that art mediates between a higher realm of pure spirituality and consensus reality is a hallmark of theopoetics of any stripe. Likewise, Whalen's claim that art conveys a magical and religious experience that “all painters and musicians and inventors and saints and shamans and lunatics and yogis and dope fiends and novelists . . . ‘turned in’ on” is characteristic of the San Francisco Renaissance in its rhetorical manner, but in its substance the assertion could have been made by vanguard artists of diverse allegiances (a fact that suggests much about the prevalence of theopoetics in oppositional poetics).

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In this essay, I will explore the context in which Whalen's theopoetics emerged (San Francisco in the 1950s and 60s) and show that a peculiar, but very lively, strain of Surrealism had emerged there and influenced a particular variety of San Franciscan theopoetics. I hope to show that Surrealism in San Francisco adopted a particular idiolect that grew out of an approach to artmaking and to prise open its recondite intentions—I want to do this in order to examine how the approach to artmaking adopted by the San Franciscan Surrealists distinguishes their work from that of European, Mexican, South American, or even New York, Surrealists.

I begin by juxtaposing the passage above to one from a pamphlet circulated by the Theosophical Society, likely written in 1961:

we interact with the astral and mental fields through our subtle vehicles, which are composed of energy from the corresponding fields. For example, our astral body is composed of energy from the astral field while our mental body is composed of energy from the mental field. In other words, our subtle bodies are localized fields existing within universal fields. They coexist with the physical body and interpenetrate each other as well. Thought and emotional energy are therefore very much interconnected. Mental processes that occur in the subtle vehicles are transmitted to our physical consciousness through the organ of the brain in much the same way that invisible broadcast signals are received by a radio and then converted into sound vibrations that strike the physical ear. The radio is not the source of the broadcast, nor is the brain the source of all thought.<sup>2</sup>

The allusion to the medium of radio is not incidental. In fact, the inventors of radio—often in those days referred to as the wireless—held similar convictions. They too believed that an invisible yet material ether permeated the universe. The concept of the ether was used to explain both sensory perception—which is created by heat waves or light waves or sound waves—being transmitted through the ether and finally striking sensory organs. Telepathy became a relatively common research topic in the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, and telepathy, the transmission of thoughts, was explained similarly: brain waves create vibrations in the ether, which the ether then transmits, and eventually these vibrations impact on another body (or some spiritual principle associated with the body) and affect the intellectual organs by inducing sympathetic vibrations. Thus, the wireless was associated with a model of mind that likened consciousness to a radio transceiver.

### *The Radio*

In postwar San Francisco, a number of surrealistically inclined artists, poets, and filmmakers adopted the idea that their art, far from being fashioned through their efforts, is instead actually formed by electromagnetic energies coursing through the ether. I want to reflect on the implications that belief had for their artistic methods and what characteristics their work took on in consequence.<sup>3</sup> In this paper I shall consider features of the work of Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan, Wallace Berman, and Harry Smith.

Jack Spicer compared writing poetry to taking dictation, and compared the poet to a radio, receiving transmissions from the invisible world. Poems come from the outside—indeed from an “outer space.” Like his friend Harry Smith, Spicer was an avid collector, and among what he collected was folk songs. He incorporated phrases from folk songs in his poems, partly, as Stephen Fredman suggests, to move his ego out from the center of his work. But there is more to it than that: Spicer, like Robert Duncan, believed that there is an impersonal field of knowledge/imagination in the beyond, and this knowledge/imagination is transmitted to the poet through something that resembles radio waves.

Spicer’s ideas on this topic are extremely intricate, but they must be addressed, and it will probably help to ferret them here, right at the outset. Spicer was impressed by Cocteau’s *Orphée* (1950), and especially by the scene in which the eponymous modern poet receives verses from an ancient maker over a car radio (he writes down the poems transmitted to him and publishes them as his own). This idea he sometimes connected to another equally extraordinary claim, one reminiscent of Theodore Flounoy, *viz.*, that the messages he recorded in his poems came to him from a beyond:

I think that poems are delivered very much like a message that’s delivered over the radio, and that the poet is a radio. I don’t think the poems come from the inside at all. Or at least the good ones don’t. You get all sorts of static from the radio, the bad transistors and all of that. But I think fundamentally a poem comes from the Outside. I have no idea where, I have no theological or any other kind of notion of it. Green Martians was the thing I used before. It’s obviously not Martians. But I do think that poems are delivered, when they are good, from the Outside . . . I know that to my mind, a poem is not something that comes out of me unless it’s a bad poem, which I’ve had plenty of.<sup>4</sup>

Allen Ginsberg seems to have befriended everybody who mattered, including Jack Spicer. He characterized their relationship—and the distance that separated them:

He was friendly toward me, but held a different vision of poetry. I think he had a thing that has nothing to do with Ego, messages come through the radio stations of the mind, so to speak, whereas I was thinking of the spontaneous mind...But at any rate I think he thought that my own method was much too involved with personal statement and ego: it's a legitimate objection.<sup>5</sup>

Likely Spicer's clearest statement on the topic of dictation was offered in the first of a series of lectures that he gave in Vancouver, beginning on 13 June 1964.<sup>6</sup> By fortuitous coincidence, the exemplary poet-occultist William Butler Yeats was born on 13 June 1864, so Spicer notes in his opening remark that, were he alive, Yeats would have turned one hundred years old the day of the lecture. This occasioned a rumination on the famous story of Yeats travelling in the company of his wife Georgie on a Southern Pacific train, going through San Bernadino, headed for Los Angeles. When they were passing through an orange grove, Georgie went into a trance, was visited by spirits, and began to produce automatic writing.<sup>7</sup> Yeats, it has been reported, was somewhat disconcerted, but decided to ask the spirits, "What are you here for?" One of the spirits replied, "We're here to give metaphors for your poetry."

That story about Yeats is well known. But Spicer's commentary on it takes it in an unusual direction, and the direction he takes it in tells us much about his ideas about poetic composition:

[This] was the first thing since Blake on the business of taking poetry as coming from the outside rather than from the inside. In other words, instead of the poet being a beautiful machine which manufactured the current for itself, did everything for itself—almost a perpetual motion machine of emotion until the poet's heart broke or it was burned on the beach like Shelley's—instead there was something from the Outside coming in.

Now, the difference between "We have come to bring metaphors for your poetry" and what I think most poets who I consider good poets today believe—and this would include people as opposite in their own ways as, say, Eliot on one hand and Duncan on the other—is essentially that there is an Outside to the poet. Now what the Outside is like is described differently by different poets. And some of them believe that there's a welling up of the subconscious or of the racial memory or the this or the that, and they try to put it inside the poet. Others take it from the Outside. Olson's idea of energy and projective verse is something that comes from the

Outside.

I think the source is unimportant. But I think that for a poet writing poetry, the idea of just exactly what the poet is in relationship to this Outside, whether it's an id down in the cortex which you can't reach anyway, which is just as far outside as Mars, or whether it is as far away as those galaxies which seem to be sending radio messages to us with the whole of the galaxy blowing up just to say something to us, which are in the papers all the time now. Quasars.<sup>8</sup>

Spicer is acute in recognizing that when Charles Olson asserts that an open form work evolves from the energies of the moment, he is claiming that messages (energies) coming from the outside steer the compositional process—that point is of cardinal importance and I shall expand on it shortly. Spicer continued the talk by elaborating on this notion of the poem coming from the Outside (the capitalization is his) and connecting his idea to that of the poet as a medium (which André Breton underwrote):<sup>9</sup>

And here the analogy of the medium comes in, which Yeats started out, and which Cocteau in his *Orphée*, both the play and the picture, used a car radio for, but which is essentially the same thing. That essentially you are something which is being transmitted into, and the more that you clear your mind away from yourself, and the more also that you do some censoring—because there will be all sorts of things coming from your mind, from the depths of your mind, from things that you want, which will foul up the poem. [...]

There are a great many things you can't avoid. It's impossible for the source of energy to come to you in Martian or North Korean or Tamil or any language you don't know. It's impossible for the source of energy to use images you don't have, or at least don't have something of. It's as if a Martian comes into a room with children's blocks with A, B, C, D, E which are in English and he tries to convey a message. This is the way the source of energy goes. But the blocks, on the other hand, are always resisting it.

The third step in dictated poetry is to try to keep as much of yourself as possible out of the poem. And whenever there's a line that you like particularly well, which expresses just how you're feeling this particular moment, which seems just lovely, then be so goddamn suspicious of it that you wait for two or three hours before you put it down on paper. This is practical advice and also advice that makes you stay up all night, unfortunately.<sup>10</sup>

The collage artist Wallace Berman was another artist who belonged to the circle in San Francisco and with whom Spicer and Smith were close. Berman's interests also crossed Theosophy, the Kabbalah, and electric vibrations. Among his favorite books was Henry Smith Williams's *Radio Mastery of the Ether* (1923), which offers the idea that "The ether is always vibrant with many messages" that continually course "not only through your room but through your body, without saying so much as 'by your leave'...bearing messages that are intelligible."<sup>11</sup>

Berman's reputation among cognoscenti is primarily for successive series of Verifax collages, which he began producing in 1964—Verifax was an early technology of photo-reproduction—and it remained his principal medium until the end of his life (he was killed by a drunk driver on his fiftieth birthday, in 1976). He called one series of Verifax collages the *Radio/Aether* series—collages showing a hand holding a transistor radio whose flat front surface serves as a screen for images. The images in some of the collages represent the collective psyche of America (these include football players, an astronaut, a lock-and-key, and a little girl), while others offer more mystical signals and symbols (a cross, a rabbit's foot, a snake, Hebrew letters, a folded rose). The radio itself acts as a symbol for the transmission of messages from the personal and collective unconscious. Or, at least, that is a part of its meaning, for it is important to note that these images are radically overdetermined. Berman's widow tells us how the *Radio/Aether* series began—from reading *Radio Mastery of the Ether*.<sup>12</sup>

Other members of the San Francisco Renaissance besides Smith, Berman, and Spicer claimed poets take dictation from messages carried through the ether. Robert Duncan went some distance in agreement. Duncan tells us that his idea of the serial poem was fashioned on the practices of his parents at the séance table, receiving messages from the ether.<sup>13</sup> He notes that he, like them, set up a table, "where he proposed on ten consecutive nights to receive ten consecutive Visions which were also messages in Poetry."<sup>14</sup>

Even the more individualist Allen Ginsberg often embraced the notion that electromagnetic waves coursing through the ether form a sort of collective intelligence.<sup>15</sup> Ginsberg wrote,

This image or energy which reproduces itself at the depths of space  
from the very  
Beginning  
in what might be an O or an Aum  
and trailing variations made of the same Word circles round itself in  
the same  
pattern as its original Appearance  
creating a larger Image of itself throughout the depths of Time  
outward circling thru bands of faroff Nebulae & vast Astrologies.

...

it goes its own way forever  
 it will complete all creatures  
 it will be the radio of the future  
 it will hear itself in time  
 it wants a rest.<sup>16</sup>

### *San Francisco's Etheric Surrealism*

Robert Duncan shared with other San Francisco poets and painters an interest in the Kabbalah, one ignited by Kenneth Rexroth. Kabbalists maintained that God created the universe through the twenty letters of the Hebrew alphabet—so these letters are creative principles or seeds (an idea alluded to in the name of Berman's magazine, *Semina*). Many San Franciscan poets, painters, and collage artists adopted this belief. Duncan's serial poem *Letters* draws on kabbalistic ideas of language: in it, Duncan takes the letters of the alphabet to be forms possessing a creative  $\epsilon\nu\epsilon\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$  (*energeia*, the power of be-ing) and therefore akin to the imagination (which, in his view creates the fabric of the world).<sup>17</sup> The San Francisco Kabbalah-Surrealist David Meltzer encapsulates the idea: "The *Yetzirah* expresses the concept of God creating the universe through letters which hold the possibility of creation's entire vocabulary. The world is entered and invented through language rooted in alphabet systems. God translates Himself, condenses into alphabet. To know alphabet is to approach creation's workings. Within and without are the letters."<sup>18</sup> For Duncan, similarly, letters mediate between the higher reality (an unfolding creative process) and ordinary reality. Letters create the universe, and through his work with letters, the poet participates in the ongoing creative unfolding of the cosmos. Duncan states in the preface to *Letters* that "the lore of Moses of Leon in the *Zohar*, has been food for the letters of this alphabet."<sup>19</sup> Duncan understands the *Zohar* (books offering mystical commentary on the Torah) as a tale about the imagination. We can read it as a discourse on the imagination's power, he contends. It is "the greatest mystical novel ever written...It seemed to me that in mystical traditions of Judaism, religion was passing into imagination."<sup>20</sup> Further, the Kabbalah suggests combinations of letters weave the world-cloth: "*Letters* is influenced toward a creative veil or world-cloth which would be identical with the *maya* in which it's woven all the way through. The warp and woof are connected and the figures emerge and disappear."<sup>21</sup>

Wallace Berman extended his static collages into cinema. He had adopted the Hebrew letter  $\aleph$  (aleph) as his personal sign; with the help of a friend, the surrealist collage artist-filmmaker Lawrence Jordan, he made *Aleph* (1966), a collage film that might well be the epitome of Kabbalah Surrealism. The letter is a sign of wholeness and the One beyond being: in his great work on the Kabbalah, Gershom Scholem points out that  $\aleph$  is an unvoiced form, a consonant that "represents nothing more than the position taken by the larynx when a word begins with a vowel."<sup>22</sup>  $\aleph$  mediates

between the higher reality and other letters: it is the silent source of all articulation, the seed of the entire alphabet, “and indeed the kabbalists always regarded it as the spiritual root of all other letters.” The Zohar recounts a tale to explain א’s importance: “When the blessed Holy One wished to fashion the world, all the letters were hidden away. For two thousand years before creating the world, the blessed Holy One contemplated them and played with them. As he verged on creating the world, all the letters presented themselves before Him, from last to first.”<sup>23</sup> One after another, a letter stepped forward to ask the Master of the world to use it to create the world, and the Holy One praised each in turn for being the first letter in some praiseworthy word, but He declined to create the world with it. Finally, the letter ב (bet) stepped forward and declared, “Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for by me You are blessed above and below [בְּרַכָּה, *berakhab*, blessing, which begins with ב].” The Holy One agreed. But the letter א had stood aside, at first not wanting to assert itself where other letters had failed, and then, after ב had been elected, had not wanted to usurp ב’s favor. So then the “blessed Holy One said, ‘*aleph, aleph!* Although I will create the world with the letter *bet* [using תִּיהֵי עֵר-עַב *be-reshit*, the first word of the Torah], you will be the first of all letters. Only through you do I become one [*aleph* is the number one]. With you all counting begins and every deed in the world.”<sup>24</sup> The point of the tale is that א is the gateway to creation, mediating between the one and the many, for through it one comes to ב, which the Holy One used to create the world: although א is implicit in creation, it remains itself inactive. The belief that art is that which returns the many to the One (exemplified in an artwork’s harmonious integration) is an easy conclusion—and one might conjecture that Berman, in taking א as his personal sign, was suggesting that his work might be the gateway to ב and from there to creation in all its diversity.

A tradition within kabbalist studies associates each letter with a number, so techniques (known collectively as gematria) for operating on these principles mathematically were also developed, and they were of great interest to Berman (as they were to Hollis Frampton). Poets, artists, and filmmakers associated with this tradition understand such processes to mirror the cosmic process of creation and to assure the harmonic unity of their work. It also influenced the combinatorial aspects of Harry Smith’s work and, as we shall see, Smith’s ideas on the way artworks affect viewers or listeners.

Wallace Berman, Wally Hendricks, Robert Duncan, and Kenneth Rexroth were deeply steeped in pre-eighteenth-century hermetic and gnostic traditions. And Berman was particularly interested in the Kabbalah. The Kabbalah emphasizes that God is utterly transcendent: He is beyond being and being known (to adopt the Platonists’ way of making the point). The idea that the Godhead is beyond knowledge and representation is one of the notions that impelled early twentieth-century artists in the direction of abstraction. Ideas drawn from the kabbalist



tradition help explain Berman's interest in etheric waves. According to the Kabbalah, the Godhead produces a series of emanations through a process akin to emitting radio waves, or any sort of electromagnetic vibration.

*Under the Sign of Artaud: Altering Consciousness*

It is perhaps surprising to think that there was an active surrealist movement in West Coast America—largely because the movement, as it is generally known, seems connected to a place (Paris, though of course Surrealism thrived in cities across Europe) and time (the 1920s and 1930s) far removed from it in location, climate, history, and terrain. But poet Robert Duncan offers this remark on issues of *Semina* as a collage:

The collage itself, which had been seen by Dadaists and Surrealists as a mode of attack upon the real or upon established relations, breaking into and deranging sacrosanct images...had, after all, projected in the attack the context of what we recognize as Dada and the Surreal. Now, in our conscious alliance with the critical breakthrough of Dada and Surrealism...we began to see ourselves fashioning unnamed contexts, contexts of a new way of life in the making, a secret mission.<sup>25</sup>

Two film teachers at the San Francisco Art Institute in the 1950s, Sidney Peterson and James Broughton, were essentially American Surrealists. Kenneth Rexroth and Lawrence Ferlinghetti both translated swaths of surrealist poetry. Philip Lamantia was through and through a Christian surrealist poet, who possessed a deep understanding of Surrealism in all its forms. Lamantia would sometimes highlight Wallace Berman's connection with Surrealism: "Something he was very emphatic about when he talked about poetry, he seemed to be particularly impressed by the surrealist movement. 'They're the only group,' [Berman said], 'that has remained together for'—by that time, late fifties, 'forty years.'"<sup>26</sup> Lamantia also testifies to the influence emigré Surrealists had on him: "Surrealism was what brought me to what you call hermeticism...The key for me was my weekly lunch with the [first European Surrealist to have taken up residence in New York] painter-engraver Kurt Seligmann, who graciously allowed me to look at his many volumes of very early, amazing alchemical texts. This was an unforgettable experience."<sup>27</sup> The poet David Metzler, too, is deeply influenced by Surrealism. The poetry of Gregory Corso and Bob Kaufman, with its dream-like images and its random juxtaposition of dissociated images, shows the influence of surrealist poetry. Wolfgang Paalen and Robert Motherwell's *Dyn* was essentially a latter-day surrealist journal that circulated in San Francisco. Look deeply enough into Kenneth Rexroth's poetry and you will discover dissociated images so accolated as to seem as seamlessly integrated as the elements

of a collage in a visual novel by Max Ernst.

Just what made Surrealism so important to the San Francisco artists of the 1950s? The Cold War had begun, and anybody with a brain in their head can figure out that the Cold War was an economic policy, aimed at putting the North American economy on a permanent war footing. The Second World War provided a model: it had pulled North America, and much of the West, out of the Great Depression. America understood the creation of the Permanent War Economy would stave off the economic crises that would result from enormous increases of productivity and resultant widespread unemployment.

Surrealism in San Francisco and New York developed in the context of the dominant economic strategy of the time, the Cold War. These economic management principles helped shape a particular sort of society, whose character Herbert Marcuse understood.<sup>28</sup> It was, he noted, founded on technological rationality—the goals of society now were being calculated by the market researcher, the behavioral scientist, and the bureaucrat. Their roles were to coordinate the “immediate, automatic identification of the individual with his society.”<sup>29</sup> The process through which this occurred involved a “quantitative extension” of social needs to supplant individual ones. The poet Kenneth Rexroth described the same phenomenon in his great long poem, “The Dragon and the Unicorn.”<sup>30</sup> There he identified the agencies responsible for rationalizing experience: the responsible parties were “two collectivities/—the State/And the Capitalist System.”<sup>31</sup>

Every collectivity  
Is opposed to community.  
As Capitalism and the  
State become identical,

All existence assumes the  
Character of a vast  
Conspiracy to quantify  
The Individual.

Rexroth also realized that oppositional strategies must avoid speaking the language of quantification, of scientism or of totalization, lest they duplicate the same errors as the intended targets. They must not submit to calculative reason: “Today the world is full/Of the vendors of well policed/Utopias, preachers of/Progress by mass arithmetic,” he declares, and among these vendors he ranks the “Quantified, passionate pseudo/Marxists and Freudians.”<sup>32</sup>

Like the Surrealists, the artists who congregated around *Semina* were influenced by the idea that life should be lived according to aesthetic principles. But the Surrealists and the *Semina* artists did not propose to bring art into everyday

life, so that it might be experienced in the same terms as the events and objects of quotidian existence. Rather, their aspiration—quite mad, no doubt, in being utterly impossible to realize, but estimable nonetheless—was to transform life, so that its events could be experienced as intense, as magical, as throbbing with excitement as the phrases of a great poem—that goes a way toward explaining the *maudit* quality of the magazine *Semina* and Berman’s film *Aleph*. They aspired to make life poetic. Recall André Breton’s *Nadja*—life was to be lived as the poet and wandering woman of that novel lived theirs. One should strive for the life experience of a *poète maudite* by engaging in transgressive acts and by committing oneself to a *derèglement de tous les sens*: this would be accomplished through meditation, midnight exploits, wild sex or drugs, all of which Duncan saw as aspects of a positive alchemical process.<sup>33</sup> Growing out of these surrealistic experiments, the Beat journal *Semina* ultimately became the first hippie forum, in which expanded perception and sexual display were celebrated as aesthetic achievements.

However, the San Francisco poets’ Surrealism was Surrealism with a difference. Because they embraced Surrealism as a form of life, they were most interested in their precursors who deliberately cultivated madness. André Breton and Salvador Dalí were suspect for their commercial success: “Breton and Dalí,” wrote Rexroth “made business careers out of purveying charlatan horrors as commodities to rich and idle women and ballet *régisseurs*.”<sup>34</sup> This criticism of Surrealism’s principal leaders was echoed by Duncan, who publicly decried from the pages of the magazine *Ark*, “the romantic revolutionists, Breton and Calas, [who] were taken up and taken in by the culture collectors...and capitalized on their revolutionary personalities.”<sup>35</sup>

In 1960, Rexroth could write of the younger writers in his midst, “to whom the whole epoch [of Surrealism] is today the adventure of another generation.”<sup>36</sup> No doubt that sense promoted their interest in dissident Surrealists, rather than the old-guard leaders, whose Surrealism seemed more indissolubly historical.<sup>37</sup> Artaud held a special appeal for them: Artaud, a rebel and outsider, expelled from the movement by Breton, became the supreme hero for the San Franciscan artists and writers of the 1950s and ‘60s. Allen Ginsberg and Michael McClure both testify to the importance Antonin Artaud’s “Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu” had for them. Michael McClure encountered the work in the early 1950s, in an unpublished translation by Guy Wernham, and recalls responding enthusiastically to its “insanely lucid picture of the military madness of the Cold War.”<sup>38</sup> In “Artaud: Peace Chief,” which appears in *Meat Science Essays* (the title must be taken as proposing a new science, beyond the quantitative sciences of the present), McClure lauds Artaud for being “more than a man of literature,” and notes that “[h]e has turned his body into an instrument of science and become a being of history” and declares that he “saw him [Artaud] as an older brother.”<sup>39</sup> In Summer 1954, Rexroth had published his translations of fragments from Artaud in *Black Mountain Review*. Duncan notes, “earlier, in 1948, *transition* 48...had presented Artaud’s *Journey to the Land of the Tarabumaras*, opening

the prospect of a Nature revealed anew by Kabbalah and by the drug peyote. Its opening sentence might describe the works of Berman.<sup>40</sup> And in 1965, City Light Books brought out Hirschman's *Artaud Anthology*.

The Antonin Artaud in whom the San Francisco Renaissance poets took an interest was, as Robert Duncan put it when he commented on Berman's work, the "Artaud who, in breaking with Marxist and Freudian *rationalizations* of Breton's official Surrealism took his sickness itself to be the new revolution." Madness was sought out. Madness became their form of revolution, sought for exactly because it constituted an inscrutable plane of existence which evaded capture by any discourse or instrument. "Everything that science has taken away from us," Artaud wrote, "everything it isolates in its retorts, its microscopes, its scales, its complicated mechanisms, everything it reduces to numbers, we aspire to win back from science, which is stifling out vitality."<sup>41</sup>

Artaud's writings also strengthened the San Francisco Renaissance writers' interests in the Kabbalah. He offered an interpretation of the Kabbalah consistent with Boethius's Pythagorean-inspired notion of a *musica universalis*: "There is in the Kabbala a music of Numbers, and this music which reduces material chaos to its prime elements explains by a kind of grandiose mathematics how Nature orders and directs the birth of forms she brings forth out of chaos. And all I beheld seemed to be governed by a Number."<sup>42</sup>

Christopher Maclaine's film *The End*, perhaps the ultimate Beat statement, was also a mad work of a sort. Brakhage pointed out that Maclaine "worked with a kind of dedication to madness. How intrinsic this was to his behavior can be seen in his films. He used to put it very simply by saying he fell out of a tree at a certain age and everything in his life had gone awry ever since."<sup>43</sup> Maclaine's film itself is a thoroughly paranoid work. A dedication to pursuing madness—or, at least, altered states of consciousness—through art, through meditation, through sex, and through drugs was very much what West Coast Surrealism became.

Harry Smith's connection to the surrealist tradition was more complex. His affiliation with Ordo Templi Orientis tells us that he sought elevated states of consciousness through Aleister Crowley's Sex Magick—he also sought ecstatic experience through alchemy, religious experience, and drugs. And as he told P. Adams Sitney, he understood his method as being surrealist:

After I came here [New York City] I started filming again. Toward the end, I had everything filed in glassine envelopes: any kind of vegetable, any kind of animal, any kind of this, that, and the other thing, in all different sizes [he tells us then that he created a sort of encyclopedic taxonomy]. Then the cards were made up. For example, everything that was congruent to that black and white film (#12, the Heaven and Earth Magic Feature), was picked out. All the

permutations possible were built up: say, there's a hammer in it, and there's a vase, and there's a woman, and there's a dog. Various things could then be done—hammer hits dog; woman hits dog; dog jumps into vase; so forth. It was possible to build up an enormous number of cross-references [the combinatorial possibilities of this taxonomic inventory were surveyed].

This was all written on little slips of paper, the file cards—the possible combinations between this, that, and the other thing. The file cards were then rearranged, in an effort to make a logical story out of it. Certain things would have to happen before others: Dog-runs-with-watermelon has to occur after dog-steals-watermelon [the imaginative combinatorial possibilities are subjected to the reality principle's criterion of representability].

I tried as much as possible to make the whole thing automatic, the production automatic rather than any kind of logical process. Though, at this point, Allen Ginsberg denies having said it, about the time I started making those films, he told me that William Burroughs made a change in the Surrealistic process—because, you know, all that stuff comes from the Surrealists—that business of folding a piece of paper: One person draws the head and then folds it over, and somebody else draws the body. What do they call it? The Exquisite Corpse. Somebody later, perhaps Burroughs, realized that something was directing it, that it wasn't arbitrary, and that there was some kind of what you might call God. It wasn't just chance. Some kind of universal process was directing these so-called arbitrary processes; and so I proceeded on that basis: Try to remove as much as possible from the consciousness or whatever you want to call it so that the manual processes could be employed entirely in moving things around. As much as I was able, I made it automatic.<sup>44</sup>

The key to organizing these vibratory realities can be found in gematria, which, like Theosophy, proposes that reality possesses layers of hidden structure, whose secrets can be unfolded in formal and mathematical methods that lay out the mathematical relationships constituting its elementary structures and correlate seemingly unconnected structures. That is why, to modify a point from the literary critic Hugh Kenner, to adduce lists, to enumerate or imply the enumeration of their elements, and then to permute and combine these elements, is the ultimate recourse of metaphysical speculation. That is exactly what Harry Smith does in film *No. 12* (usually referred to by the handle Jonas Mekas coined, the Heaven and Earth Magic Feature).

*Magic*

In the second letter in *Admonitions* (to Robin Blaser), Jack Spicer notes, “Things fit together. We knew that—it is the principle of magic. Two inconsequential things can combine together to become a consequence.”<sup>45</sup> Magic can be understood as a systematic set of procedures for reconciling opposing forces, with the ultimate aim of mending a broken world. The relation of Duncan’s conception of poetry to the occult theory of magic expounded by late nineteenth and early twentieth-century esoterists (for example Éliphas Lévi) is telling:

Equilibrium is the consequence of two forces. If two forces are absolutely and invariably equal, the equilibrium will be immobility and therefore the negation of life. Movement is the result of an alternate preponderance. The impulsion given to one of the sides of a balance necessarily determines the motion of the other...

To know the law of this change, to be acquainted with the alternate or simultaneous proportion of these forces, is to possess the first principles of the Great Magical Arcanum, which constitutes true human divinity. Scientifically, we can appreciate the various manifestations of the universal movement through electric or magnetic phenomena. Electrical apparatuses above all reveal materially and positively the affinities and antipathies of certain substances. The marriage of copper with zinc, the action of all metals in the galvanic pile, are perpetual and unmistakable revelations. Let physicists seek and find out; ever will the Kabalist explain the discoveries of science!

The human body is subject, like the earth, to a dual law; it attracts and it radiates; it is magnetized by an androgyne magnetism and reacts inversely on the two powers of the soul, the intellectual and sensitive, but in proportion to the alternating preponderances of the two sexes in their physical organism. The art of the magnetizer consists wholly in the knowledge and use of this law. To polarize action and impart to the agent a bisexual and alternate force is a method still unknown and sought vainly for directing the phenomena of magnetism at will. Highly trained judgement [sic] and great precision in the interior movements are required to prevent confusion between signs of magnetic inspiration and those of respiration.<sup>46</sup>

Open Form poetry also proposed that the making of poetry is directed by energies acting on the author. Spicer notes, “The trick naturally is what Duncan learned years ago and tried to teach us—not to search for the perfect poem but to let your way of writing of the moment go along its own paths, explore and retreat

but never by fully realized (confined) within the boundaries of one poem.”<sup>47</sup> In the autumn of 1983, Duncan co-taught a class “Field Theory in Poetics” with Michael Palmer at Bard College; there he made explicit that his (and Olson’s) ideas about taking direction from the field had their source in electrology. Lisa Jarnot reports what Palmer told her about the class: “Integrating art and science, Palmer and Duncan presented a series of lectures about Olsonian ideas of projective verse alongside Michael Faraday’s nineteenth-century theories of electromagnetic fields.”<sup>48</sup> The comment is richly suggestive of the idea of energy outside the poet directing the evolution of the poem, of the poet as a magnetized attractor, and of higher levels of reality, beyond the merely personal.

Berman’s window Shirley recalls, “We spent a lot of time reading poetry,” and asserts that poetry was more important than the other arts he loved, music (he had a passionate devotion to jazz) and film: “His working process was to read poetry, all the new young poets.”<sup>49</sup> He read with interest Robert Alexander, David Meltzer, Michael McClure, Robert Duncan, John Wieners, Philip Lamantia, Jack Hirschman, Bob Kaufman, Ray Bremser, and Kirby Doyle. From these, Berman acquired a profound occult erudition.

*Harry Smith: Kabbalah Surrealism Becomes a Form of Magic in Meeting Theosophy in the Ether*

Harry Smith described art and design as

a way of programming the mind, like a punch card [which, earlier in the computer era, encoded a set of instructions that the computer was to execute]. Being as it goes in through the vision, it is more immediately assimilated than if you have to listen to a two-minute record.<sup>50</sup>

If the music or film or design is good, then it will produce good effects: a sequence of good vibrations cannot but be uplifting to every man upon whose vehicle (i.e., the responsive body/ mind) they play. An artwork (or collage) can sometimes broadcast signals that affect a large number of people, and then recorded thought-forms might magically charm a new spiritual age into existence.

This in fact is the basis for Smith’s thinking about art: the artwork is conceived as instructions that float in the air (like theosophical thought-forms), available for the mind/spirit. The instructions, we have seen, have to do with the spiritual truths embodied in a culture that is on the cusp of passing away (and becoming art)—the purpose of embodying instructions in an art is to convey still vital spiritual forms from the past to the present.

The cosmology that emerges from this confluence of ideas is that reality is vibratory. Electricity is vibration, and electrical recordings are transcriptions of

these vibrations that provide us with the means to recreate them in a different time and place. (If reality is vibration, and vibrations can be recreated, what does that say about time?) But colours, feelings, emotions, and thoughts are equally vibratory, and sometimes hang in the air as thought-forms. Whether he was painting, animating forms, or recording sounds, Smith was collecting these thought-forms hanging in the electric ether, the archetypes or templates that produce thoughts and feelings. Electric media can record and convey thoughts/sounds/images/colours because thought, sound, images, and colour are all simply vibrations, and they can transmit these thoughts to another time and place.

Smith's beliefs about the reception of art were deeply influenced by the theosophical notion of thought-forms: for Smith an artwork is tantamount to a series of instructions that float in the air, available for the mind/spirit. Smith believed that because he was a medium sensitive to these vibrations, his senses could collect these thought-forms from the ether in a manner analogous to the way that electric recordings did, and that film could. He could then either paint or batik what he knew of them onto a film or canvas, in the process organizing them into a collage whose being resembles that of a computer program: the sequence of vibrations are essentially instructions that will be executed, one after another, by the mind/the age that receives them. Good music or good films produce vibrations that act on listeners' or viewers' bodies, with uplifting effects on their spirits.

If an artwork (or collage) can sometimes broadcast signals that affect a large number of people, then recorded thought-forms might magically charm a new spiritual age into existence. How does the Aerial Computer operate to sway people toward the Good? Consider the cover image for Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*, where the celestial monochord is being tuned by the hand of God. This is the monochord that taught Pythagoras, and so the West, about harmony. In the Renaissance, the purpose of the natural philosopher was understood to be that of uncovering the laws of nature, so as to reveal the mind of God, who steers the universe. A doctor from Essex put it this way: "*Aether is the Rudder of the Universe, or as the Rod, or whatever you will liken it to, in the Hand of the Almighty, by which he naturally rules and governs all material created Beings...Now how beautiful is this Contrivance in God?*"<sup>51</sup> Smith's electrologic theosophy brought him to a similar view.

The poet's experience of *ποίησις* (poiesis) is that of the beneficence of a gathering-into-harmony. If semantic chaos is moral anarchy, then the growing-together of words as they move toward an integrative form is the hierophany of the Good, for it is the Good's love that guides perception towards a harmonious vision. What is, comes to presence through a dually consolidative process—through an integration that brings the diverse elements into a harmonious form, and through an integration by which the self gives itself over to the other and at the same time (this is surely the ultimate of reciprocity) enters into the other. Kenneth Rexroth, reviewing Louis Zukofsky's *Some Time: Short Poems* (1956) for the *New York Review*



of *Books*, described its poems as “exercises in absolute clarification, crystal cabinets full of air and angels,” noting that the collection “was more important and moving (and more exemplary and instructive to the young)” than any “likely to be published for a long time.”<sup>52</sup> This is the core idea underlying San Francisco’s gently dreamy Surrealism, and it explains the interest these artists took in etheric transmission. Lawrence Jordan is correct in asserting that a quiet contemplative Surrealism has been the *vis viva* of this remarkable transformation.

A final point is worth making: a number of twentieth-century artists proposed that electric recording technologies and the cinema are analogous to the human senses and, if anything, are even more responsive to the influences that act on them. Harry Smith extended this idea, to maintain electrical or photo-chemical recording apparatuses (sometimes assisted by a human medium), like human responders, react to vibratory realities of many sorts (including visual forms that intense emotions project onto the astral plane). Such apparatuses (including human magnets) can respond to vibrations that exist on the astral plane and embody emotional truths. Photo-chemical, electrical, and human recording apparatuses are like the cosmic Aeolian harp or the celestial monochord, blown or played by mystical winds of the incoming age. On this conception, electric recording technologies and the cinema are the twentieth-century avatars of the Elizabethan magical devices (another of which was the memory theatre), the first electrical avatars of occult-influencing machines. They capture emotional truths hanging in ether. This is a remarkable conception of the public domain—and startlingly like ideas that are now offered by some digital artists.

Convictions that the cosmos is filled with an ether that pulses with vibrations, each of which interacts with all other vibrations suggest interconnectedness, interrelatedness, and interdependence—the interconnectedness of all existents with all other existents—had become the founding principle of the new world-view. It rose to ascendancy in the late nineteenth century—around the time the Theosophical Society was founded and Thomas Alva Edison was investigating what he called “etheric force” (radio waves). The belief in radical interconnectedness offers a potent remedy for the feelings of disconnection and anomie which modern society has raised to a crisis level. Today’s enthusiastic texts that present cyberspace as a network domain in which quasi-autonomous entities interact likewise offer a balm for our metalized anomie: our avatars, electric forms in cyberspace, are transported wirelessly with an ease that renders any contemporary reference to physical space an anachronism. Moreover our avatars interact with others with a remarkable intimacy, because the material being of these avatars is so subtle and insubstantial that their complete interpenetration by one another is possible. The contemporary metaphor has simply extended the earlier metaphor by making it pan-experiential and pansexual. The exhilaration of connection is just the same. Once again, beliefs about perception, technology and electric consciousness have led artists to celebrate

an ecstasy of intimate communication, which makes all bodies one body—or, at least, electric organs of one all-encompassing electric body. The universe chants the ecstasy of the giant body electric. (But does it do this at the cost of belief in the sacredness of flesh contact?)

But I am writing about Harry Smith and messages from the ether. How does this jibe with Surrealism? For the Surrealist, the self is operated by another: “Je est un autre,” Rimbaud famously proclaimed. Smith joined that lesson (including the principle that truly creative thinking has a cosmic origin and goes on beneath—or above—individual consciousness) with the electromagnetic revolution that took place in the arts in early twentieth century). In doing this, he came to understand these messages from the beyond as having originated in the history of human thought and as having been projected, in an intense moment of experience, onto the astral plane, carried there by etheric waves whose nature resembled electromagnetic vibrations. These messages could circulate, by etheric or electromagnetic means, among the community of adepts.

Tesla had claimed that a “human being is a self-propelled automaton entirely under the control of external influences. Willful and predetermined though they appear, his actions are governed not from within, but from without. He is like a float tossed about by the waves of a turbulent sea...”<sup>53</sup> For his part, Michael McClure appealed to that notion to inspire his poetry:

I wanted to turn to electricity. I needed  
A catalyst to turn to pure fire

Thus begins a poem by McClure in the second issue of *Semina* (1957).

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, only a few vanguard thinkers could comprehend the electrological conception of the human being. By mid-century a rock band, the Beach Boys, a few hundred miles down the coast from San Francisco, were singing, “I’m getting those good vibrations./ She’s giving me the excitations./ Good, good, good/ good vibrations,” to the accompaniment of a theremin, an electronic instrument that has often been used to produce eerie effects—and in that song, to suggest energy percolating through the ether.<sup>54</sup> And views about interpersonal dynamics first proposed by Wallace Berman, Jack Spicer, and Bruce Conner’s art were now the common sense of popular culture.

This positive, collectivist version of Surrealism, which embraces the physics of electromagnetism to suggest a merging with a universal mind, seems to me a distinctly American, and largely San Franciscan, Surrealism. It is not so much about conveying the “true functioning of thought” (Breton) as it is about the ecstasy of merger. Breton would surely have characterized this sweetness as feeble. “Anemic” will do.

1 In Philip Whalen, *The Collected Poems of Philip Whalen*, ed. Michael Rothenberg (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 827-33, at 830.

2 The leaflet can be found at <https://www.theosophical.org/online-resources/leaflets/1801>. No author or date for this text is given. I believe the author is Geo. W de la Warr, and the work quoted from is likely “The Power of Thought” (1961).

3 Kenneth Rexroth’s ideas on non-grasping, derived partly from the Daoist/Buddhist idea of by *wu-wei* (无为); the term used to be translated as “no action,” though the preferred translation now is “effortless action”), and his understanding that the working of the Dao is characterized by spontaneity, non-interference, and an allowing things to unfold as they will, influenced how San Francisco artists thought of selfless creation.

4 From Jack Spicer’s lecture at UC Berkeley, published in *The House that Jack Built: The Collected Lectures of Jack Spicer*, ed. Peter Gizzi (Hanover, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 168; the reference to a poem coming from inside is probably an allusion to Charles Olson’s notion of projective verse, which was being touted at this time by Robert Duncan (and by this point Duncan and Spicer were not on good terms).

5 Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian, *Poet Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the Berkeley Renaissance* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 58.

6 A transcription of the lecture (with introduction) can be found as “Vancouver Lecture: Dictation and ‘A Textbook of Poetry,’” in *The House that Jack Built*, 1-48.

7 In suggesting the poet and his wife were on a train when Georgie went into a trance, Spicer actually embellishes the story. Gizzi points out that in his account of the episode, which appears in *A Vision* ([London: Macmillan & Co., 1937], 8-9), Yeats “recalls the incident as occurring on ‘the afternoon of October 24<sup>th</sup> 1917, four days after my marriage.’ While the precise date is open to debate...placing this event on a train between Los Angeles and San Bernardino is evidently Spicer’s innovation. In his Introduction to *A Vision* Yeats places his visit to California in early 1919, but his papers indicate the trip took place in 1920.”

8 Spicer, *The House that Jack Built*, 5. As for the mention of quasars, Spicer actually said “quasads,” and then someone corrected him, with “quasi-stars”—I have used the standard term. Gizzi points out that “Quasars were discovered in 1963. Also known as ‘quasi-stellar radio sources,’ they are objects emitting significant amounts of radio energy several billion lights years from earth.” *Ibid.*, 43, note 5.

9 He offers several interesting comments on the differences between his idea of the Outside and Charles Olson’s. They are all very interesting, but I cite only two, because of their particular relevance to the topic at hand:

Now the other kind of thing, other than Olson’s energy, which to him is not something from a great galactic distance out there but something you plug in the wall, and it’s really the machine which is the converter of the electricity which makes another machine work, and so forth. And I don’t agree with that either, but I go nearer to that.

Then there’s finally Williams, who sees in objects essentially a kind of energy which radiates from them. The fact that this chair has a chairness, a nimbus around it, a kind of electrical thing which gives energy enough so that it can be transformed almost directly—*it*, the thing that the chair in its chairness radiates—into poetry.

10 Spicer, *The House that Jack Built*, 7.

11 Henry Smith Williams, *The Story of Modern Science, Volume IX: Radio Mastery of the Ether* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1923), 5 and 20.

12 Sandra Leonard Starr, *Lost and found in California: Four Decades of Assemblage Art*, exh cat. Santa Monica, CA: James Corcoran Gallery; Santa Monica, Pence Gallery; and Santa Monica, Shoshana Wayne Gallery, 1988, 115. Berman, too, was interested in gematria—the lid of the *Radio/Aether* series was inscribed with Hebrew letters and corresponding numbers.

- 13 On the serial poem, Duncan, in a letter to Robin Blaser dated 19 December 1957, quotes Spicer “Let your way of writing of the moment go along its own paths, explore and retreat but never be fully realized (confined) within the boundaries of one poem...There is really no single poem... They cannot live alone any more than we can...A poem is never by itself alone.” Jack Spicer, “Admonitions” (1957), collected in Spicer, *my vocabulary did this to me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer*, Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian, eds. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 157-68, at 163-64.
- 14 Robert Duncan, “Introduction to a Bibliography,” unpublished (in the collection of Poetry and Rare Books Collection at SUNY Buffalo); quoted by Lisa Jarnot in *Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus: A Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 104.
- 15 Ginsberg’s poetics were largely shaped before he arrived in San Francisco in 1954, but he lived in San Francisco for many years, and the people he met there, including Kenneth Rexroth, Gary Snyder, and Robert Duncan, exerted an immense influence on him, to the point that he is sometimes associated with San Francisco’s Beat movement.
- 16 Allen Ginsberg, “Lysergic Acid,” written in San Francisco, 2 June 1959; published in Allen Ginsberg, *Kaddish and Other Poems 1958–1960* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1960), 86–91.
- 17 The “imagination is the final ground of reality,” Duncan declares. See Roger Kamenetz, “Realms of Being: An Interview with Robert Duncan,” *Southern Review* Vol. 21 No. 1 (1985): 5-25, at 13.
- 18 David Meltzer, “The Door of Heaven, The Path of Letters,” in Hal Glicksman, *Wallace Berman Retrospective* (Los Angeles: Otis Art Institute Gallery, 1978), 93.
- 19 Robert Duncan, *Letters: [poems mcmlüi-mcmlvi]* (Highlands: J. Williams, 1958), xii.
- 20 For “the greatest mystical novel ever written” see *The Secret Garden: An Anthology in the Kabbalah* ed. David Meltzer (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), x; for the remarks Duncan made during the interview, see Stephen Fredman, *Contextual Practices: Assemblage and the Erotic in Postwar Poetry and Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 116.
- 21 Cited in Fredman, *Contextual Practices*, 116.
- 22 Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 30.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 12. Cited in Fredman, 118.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 16. Cited in Fredman, 118.
- 25 Robert Duncan, *Selected Prose*, ed. Robert J. Bertolf (New York: New Directions, 1995), 198.
- 26 Quoted in Lisa Phillips, *Beat Culture and the New America: 1950–1965* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995), 76.
- 27 Quoted in David Meltzer, ed., *San Francisco Beat: Talking with the Poets* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001), 137.
- 28 Joanna Pawlik’s “Artaud in Performance: Dissident Surrealism and the Postwar American Literary Avant-garde,” *Papers of Surrealism* Issue 8 (2010): 1-21 is excellent on the topic of the San Francisco poets’ interest in Artaud and its connection to Marcuse. I have drawn some quotations in the following paragraphs from her essay.
- 29 Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (London: Routledge, [1964], 2002), 12.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 31 Kenneth Rexroth, *The Dragon and the Unicorn* (New Directions, New York, 1952), 104.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 128, 95.
- 33 Robert Duncan, “Wallace Berman: The Fashioning Spirit,” in Robert Duncan, *Robert Duncan: A Selected Prose*, Robert J. Bertholf, ed. (New York: New Directions Books, 1995), 197-203, at 200.
- 34 Kenneth Rexroth, “Citizen Fromm,” in *With Eye and Ear* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 197. The San Francisco surrealist filmmaker Lawrence Jordan was even more extreme in the topic of Dalí. Asked if he saw his animated films as a continuation of the surrealist tradition, he commented, “To call images ‘surreal’ is pitifully inadequate, because the term should not be applied to art, but to life. Dalí is an idiot; everyone knows that. He was rightfully kicked out of the spiritual brotherhood.

Surrealism is a way of life: the works that fall out of that way of life are accidental.” Robert Russett, “Interview with Larry Jordan,” in Robert Russett and Cecile Starr, *Experimental Animation: An Illustrated Anthology* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1976), 154-55.

In an interview, Jordan characterized West Coast art as possessing a “mystical interiority” and its Surrealism as less confrontational and more “Pacific” than East Coast art (for references, and further comments on the character of West Coast Surrealism, see Elder, *DADA, Surrealism, and the Cinematic Effect* [Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013], 435-39).

35 Robert Duncan, ‘Reviewing *View: An Attack*,’ *Ark* (Spring 1947): 66.

36 Kenneth Rexroth, “Poets in Revolt,” a review of *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* by Anna Balakian, *The New York Times*, April 24, 1960. Rexroth acknowledges that the poetry of Charles Henri Ford, Parker Tyler, Eugene Jolas, and Philip Lamantia shows that, at one point, some American poets adopted Surrealism—but this development had quickly waned.

37 In this paragraph and next, I am again drawing on Pawlik.

38 McClure, “What are Souls? An Interview with Michael McClure,” by Jack Foley, *Alsop Review*, taped 5/24/01. <http://www.alsopreview.com/columns/foley/jfmminterview.html>.

39 Michael McClure, *Meat Science Essays* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1963), 77; Michael McClure, *Lighting the Corners: On Art, Nature and the Visionary* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 168.

40 Duncan, “Wallace Berman: The Fashioning Spirit,” 199.

41 Antonin Artaud, “Man Against Destiny,” in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 361.

42 Antonin Artaud, *Artaud Anthology*, ed. Jack Hirschman (San Francisco: City Lights, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.1965), 71. I quote from this anthology because of its origins in the Berkeley Renaissance. Hirschman was greatly involved with kabbalistic studies and published *Black Alephs: Poems 1960–1968* (New York: Phoenix Bookshop, 1969); *KS: An Essay on Kabbala Surrealism* (Venice, CA: Bayrock & Beyond Baroque Press, 1973); and “On the Hebrew Letters,” *Tree 2* (Summer 1971): 34-45.

43 Stan Brakhage, *Film at Wit’s End* (Kingston, NY: McPherson and Company, 1989), 115-16.

44 *Film Culture*, Summer 1965.

45 Jack Spicer, “Admonitions,” in Spicer, *my vocabulary did this to me*, 164.

46 Éliphas Lévi, *Dogma et rituel de la haute magie*, trans. A. E. Waite as *Part II: The Ritual of Transcendental Magic* (Rider & Company, 1896), 17.

47 Jack Spicer, “Admonitions,” in Spicer, *my vocabulary did this to me*, 163.

48 Lisa Jarnot, *Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus*, 409. I should point out that this course was taught a few years after Duncan began writing about open form (or field) poetry, some years after he began reading Whitehead, and many years after he began writing about magic. Still, I believe it is significant that he did connect field poetry to Faraday’s theories on electromagnetism. It is also worth pointing out that Duncan had been reading works by the translator of the passage below since he came of age.

49 Starr, 81 and 70.

50 Harry Smith, “Interview with John Cohen” (1969), originally published in *Sing Out!* Vol. 19 No. 1; reprinted in expanded form in Harry Smith, *Think of the Self Speaking: Harry Smith—Selected Interviews* (Seattle: Elbow/Cityful Press, 1998, 67-100, at 81-82. The belief that “being as it goes in through the vision, it is more immediately assimilated than if you have to listen to a two-minute record” explains Smith’s more enduring dedication to cinema.

51 John Cook, quoted in G. Cantor, “The Theological Significance of Ethers,” in G. Cantor and M. Hodge, *Conceptions of Ether: Studies in the History of Ether Theories, 1740 - 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 135-156, at 137.

52 Cited in Mark Scroggins, *The Poem of a Life: A Biography of Louis Zukofsky* (New York: Counterpoint Press, 2007), 276.

53 Nicola Tesla, "How Cosmic Forces Shape our Destinies," *New York American* 7 February 1915: 3.  
54 Léon Theremin's patent for the eponymously named instrument was for an etherphone, that is, a device that would make the ether audible. To be sure, the instrument that Brian Wilson plays on "Good Vibrations" is not a theremin, but an electro-theremin, an instrument that produces sounds by heterodyning (as the theremin does), but uses a keyboard.