An Appetite for the City

by Richard A. Walker

SAN FRANCISCO IS RENOWNED as a beautiful, vibrant, livable city. But it was not always so: nineteenth-century San Francisco was excoriated as a wood yard of unusual extent and, later, as a scene of vulgar display by the newly rich. And it would be less admirable today were it not for an extraordinary popular upheaval against the wrecking ball and new construction. Nowhere else in America was such opposition as successful as in postwar San Francisco, and this revolt conserved much of what makes the city livable. I want to retell that story as one of pitched battle over civic space, a war of position between the titans of capital Downtown and people from many neighborhoods and many walks of urban life. But more than that I want to tell it as a struggle for the soul of the city, in which an unlikely configuration of people from many points on the social compass came to defend the city they lived in and loved from destruction by the forces of progress.

Such opposition is not what one would expect in a country in which "progress" is the watchword. Not in a country always profoundly ill at ease with cities, whose urban landscapes have been pulled down and built over without a second thought. Not in a state with impeccable Republican credentials for most of its history, and not at a time when urban renewal and suburban flight gutted city cores from San Jose to San Diego. Not even in San Francisco, whose present image as a comely dowager belies its history as the cannibal city of the nineteenth-century West, devouring the resources of the Pacific Coast and its own little peninsula with aggressive callousness. How did this rapacious polis become more civilized over time?

Such cultivated urbanity is founded on political economy and political culture more than on natural scenery and urban design. It does not arise naturally from affluence or maturity. Consider the eagerness with which the local burghers tried to pull down the city after World War II. A politics of resistance and preservation

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Market Street (c. 1940)

derives from a vision of the city as a good place, informed by an aesthetics of urbanism and a sense of popular entitlement to urban spaces. Moreover, it must be driven by a civil society breathing life into oppositional words, having the political capacity to take on the powerful, and providing the armies of the night to rebuild the everyday city again and again out of the fragments of stone and memory lying all about.

Saving the City

A simple political geography of San Francisco places downtown business at the center, a hodge-podge of neighborhoods east of Twin Peaks as the heart of opposition, and the outer realms as conservative minions of order. The business class, led by the biggest banks, industrial corporations, and property owners, initiated the battle for the city after World War II by their plans to expand the Downtown through better transit, clearance of nearby areas, and more and taller buildings. They were met on every side by popular revolt. Although the city's core was recast dramatically over the next thirty years, resistance nevertheless achieved a great deal. Skyscrapers were prevented from going west and north, saving Chinatown, North Beach, Telegraph Hill, and the old retail district. The Tenderloin is still alive with hotels and poor working people. Freeways were stopped before they could desecrate the northern waterfront and Golden Gate Park. The Ferry Building still stands. Many fine old commercial buildings were saved, and thousands of Victorian houses have been restored. Meanwhile, a cosmopolitan throng continues to occupy city neighborhoods: Africans, Chinese, Filipinos, Vietnamese, queers, residual hippies, punks, and poets. The living city lives on, even through hard times.

Downtown Expansion: Property and Progress

From the Depression through the fifties, decaying urban cores were a national obsession. San Francisco business leaders in particular suffered from intense vertigo induced by a metropolis spinning outward like a red giant, threatening to leave a dwarf city behind. This spurred coordinated action through bodies such as the Public Utilities Commission, the Regional Plan Association and the Bay Area Council. A plan for a Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system was drawn up by Bechtel Corporation to keep commuters flowing downtown. This was conceived in 1942 and built in the 1960s. The 1940s also saw the first designs for a freeway network, spurred by national planning for a national defense highway system. The California Department of Highways went to work right after the war, and freeway madness hit full speed with passage of the 1956 Federal Highway

Act. Freeways were soon marching up from the Peninsula, around the waterfront, and behind the Civic Center. Freeway off-ramps led directly into all the principal redevelopment zones. New bridges were envisioned across the northern and central bay. Obsolete forms of transit, like cable cars and trolleys, were destined for the scrap heap.

Urban renewal legislation passed by Congress in 1949 and 1954 gave cities the power to assemble land, clear it of offending uses, and finance redevelopment. San Francisco, like all big cities, established a Redevelopment Agency to spearhead its efforts. Justin Herman directed that agency aggressively for many years, backed by the San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association (a citizens group), and later the Convention and Visitors Bureau (arm of the hotel and tourism industry).

The first renewal plan targeted the Western Addition, an area of dense rental housing occupied by former wartime shipyard workers, many of them black. The Agency aimed to rid the city of over two square miles of Victorian houses, replacing them with thirty-three ten-story slabs to lure middle-class suburbanites back to the city. One planner put it succinctly: "Nothing short of a clean sweep and a new start can make the district a genuinely good place in which to live." The project began by ramming through the Geary Expressway and clearing old Japantown for a retail complex; then it headed south on both sides of Fillmore. Four thousand people were rousted out in the late 1950s and over 13,000 in the 1960s. Over 1,000 Victorian houses were clear cut, eliminating ten percent of the city's total stock.

Along the northern edge of Downtown lay the produce district, eyed for renewal. The Blythe-Zellerbach Committee, formed in 1956, drew up the Golden Gateway project (including the Embarcadero Center, to be built with Rockefeller and Mellon money). The Montgomery Block, the city's oldest building and bohemian haunt, was cleared in 1959. Cyril Magnin, port commissioner and later president of the Chamber of Commerce, had the city buy back its port from the state in 1959, then offered a grand design for hotels and offices along the Embarcadero. Chinatown was targeted and Portsmouth Square was torn up for a parking garage. Manilatown, a stretch of Kearny Street known for its many Filipino residents and shops, was slated for demolition.

South of Market an assault was planned on Skid Row. In 1954, Ben Swig, the biggest hotel owner in San Francisco, laid out a nine-block Yerba Buena project as a combination convention center, stadium, hotel, and park. The area was a jumble of single-room-occupancy hotels built after 1906, replete with eateries and entertainments for the poor; occupants were overwhelmingly single, retired white men, blacks, and Filipinos who had worked as dockers, sailors, and day laborers. For years, San Francisco had the highest proportion of hotel housing of any city in the United States.

Urban renewal was only the prelude to the property boom that followed from 1960 to the recession of 1973–1975. The planners need not have worried, after all. Soon Downtown was bristling with new skyscrapers. Any number of buildings could be cited as flash points for opposition to Manhattanization: Bank of America's Darth Vader hat, Transamerica's pyramid, new hotels around Union Square, or a proposed US Steel tower flanking the Ferry Building. After 1975 a new boom came clad in postmodern finishes and Downtown surged across Market Street until halted by the recession of 1985–1986. Twenty-five-million square feet of new office space were added, doubling the size of the corporate heart of San Francisco. More hotels went up, and dozens of cheap residential hotels in the Tenderloin were converted for upscale uses.

The tragedy is not that Downtown grew and San Francisco was physically transformed; rather, it is the way in which thousands of ordinary people and urban places the size of a small city were cleared away with the rubble. In the symbolic contest for space, the victims shrink to insignificance. The class and race hatred behind the Downtown master vision should not be underestimated. The ruling elite sought to level the waterfront haunts of longshoremen who had brought the city to its knees in 1934, to drive blacks out of the Fillmore, to sweep aside the aging and discarded workers from their last redoubts south of Market Street, and to be rid of eyesores such as Manilatown. Crowds, dense quarters, and the commingling of classes and races have always provoked a chill of horror in the heart of the local bourgeoisie.

Downtown Encircled: Resistance on Many Fronts

As soon as the grand design for Downtown was put into motion, San Francisco was shaken by popular revolt. The first volleys were fired from the northern flanks of Telegraph and Russian Hills by well-to-do (but often bohemian) residents worried about their bay views. Frida Klussman put her foot down over the removal of the cable cars as early as 1947, winning them National Landmark Status in 1964. Then came the Freeway Revolt in 1955, triggered by the advancing Western Freeway that was to run through Golden Gate Park. The Supervisors stood up to the state highway department in 1959, and San Francisco became the first city to stop the freeway mania. Next, apartment buildings on the northern waterfront were killed by shipping magnate William Matson Roth and his friends, and Ghiradelli's shuttered chocolate factory was resurrected as a cozy shopping plaza, becoming the model for such conversions around the world.

Organized under the Western Addition Community Organization and several African American churches, the people of the Fillmore fought against the bulldozers and for replacement housing. They won the first court injunction in the country against an urban renewal project in 1968, and local Congressman Philip Burton pushed through a law requiring compensatory housing. After that the southern tier of the clearance area was filled with public and subsidized housing for the poor. The African American neighborhood was not eliminated, and it eventually reoccupied a large part of the redeveloped housing (but the wretchedness of the ghetto dwellers also produced the People's Temple and its mass execution at the hand of Jim Jones). The project was a dismal failure in attracting investment, and huge swathes of land lay barren for twenty years.

The historic preservation movement was born of this rebellion. A taste for Victorian houses was produced not so much by revulsion at modernist aesthetics as from distaste for the modern wrecking ball. A City Landmarks Commission was established in 1968 and the Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage in 1971. Political alliances made for strange bedfellows, with the Junior League of San Francisco working hand in hand with African American groups, gay activists, and gentrifiers. As a consequence, the political significance of architectural preservation in San Francisco was more radical than the commercial heritage industry that swept the country in the 1980s.

Meanwhile, as the familiar skyline disappeared behind an archipelago of towers, the high-rise revolt erupted. Enter Alvin Duskin, who had fought off Lamarr Hunt's mad scheme to place a giant Apollo spacecraft on Alcatraz as atonement for the 1969 Native American occupation. Duskin wanted a drastic height limit on buildings, and his ballot initiatives of 1971 and 1972 gathered support from a broad coalition of preservationists, hillside dwellers, environmentalists, anti-redevelopment groups, and political progressives. Though defeated, they spurred city officials, led by Planning Director Allan Jacobs, to write a new Downtown plan, with a line drawn at Kearny and Clay Streets to stop Downtown's northward and westward march. This was too late to save the International Hotel, bought for a high-rise by Hong Kong investors but defended from the wrecking ball by thousands of angry demonstrators, before finally being torn down in 1978.

An elderly cohort of workers in the South of Market, living out their days on meager pensions and vilified as winos, were similarly being forced out by the Redevelopment Agency. But the old men drew on their experience in organized labor, forming the opposition group Tenants and Owners in Opposition to Redevelopment, under George Woolf, former president of the Alaska Cannery Workers Union, and Peter Mendelssohn, former seaman and Communist Party

organizer. By a series of lawsuits, they were able to extract new housing projects for the poor and elderly. Protracted opposition led to the collapse of the project by 1975, to be replaced by a stripped-down version. Ground was broken for a convention center in 1979, yet two huge city blocks lay barren for another decade.

Discontent with the rule of Downtown and with the transformation of San Francisco also surfaced in residential neighborhoods such as the Haight, the Castro, and Noe Valley. Activists began pushing an electoral reform plan that pivoted on district elections of the Board of Supervisors, picking up the support of gays, hippies, African Americans, Asians, and the progressive white middle class. The key figure in the revolt of the neighborhoods was Harvey Milk, the man most responsible for turning the Gay Awakening into a political movement. The return of district elections allowed Milk to take a seat on the Board of Supervisors in 1977 as the country's first openly homosexual elected official.

Electoral reform mobilization converged with the efforts of the anti-high-rise and anti-renewal forces to unseat Mayor Joe Alioto, leader of the pro-growth coalition. They also dovetailed with the political aspirations of George Moscone and the liberal Democratic machine of Phil Burton. The building boom went bust between 1973 and 1975, throwing the developers into disarray and giving opposition forces a precious opening. Moscone beat out John Barbagelata for mayor in 1975, on a promise to return control to the neighborhoods and end high-rise construction. Moscone did not keep his promise, though he did appoint some valuable mavericks, such as Sue Bierman, to the Planning and Landmarks Commissions. Neither Moscone nor Milk was allowed to finish his work. Both were assassinated in 1978 by Supervisor Dan White, a reactionary ex-cop and Marine, who represented a white working class suspicious of a changing civic landscape and the lone remaining spokesman for Downtown interests on the Board.

In the Tenderloin another grassroots mobilization took shape in the early eighties, led by Brad Paul of the North of Market Planning Coalition, Cecil Williams of Glide Memorial Church, and Leroy Looper of the Cadillac Hotel. Encroachment from Union Square, building conversions, and rising rents were forcing out the elderly residents. But opponents were able to win rent and conversion controls that held the property owners at bay, while nonprofits and churches began upgrading buildings for the poor.

As the property market heated up again, anti-high-rise activists forced votes on height limits in 1979 and 1983. These initiatives narrowly lost, but officials were again forced to respond, with Planning Director Dean Macris's Downtown Plan. This new plan altered very little, holding the line in the Financial District (where property values and landmarked buildings prevented most building any-

way) and giving its blessing to construction south of Market. Activists responded with Proposition M, a more severe containment measure, which finally triumphed in 1986. The battle over Downtown catapulted liberal Art Agnos, another Burton prodigy, into the Mayor's office, but he promptly lost supporters by backing unsuccessful ballot issues for a new baseball park and an end run around Prop M by the gigantic Mission Bay project. The building boom was exhausted all the same, terminated by economic crisis.

Roots of Urban Resistance

The contrariness of San Franciscans to the annihilation of their city has been exceptional, as has the success of antidevelopment politics. Simple defense of living space and neighborhoods against the wrecking ball has played its part, to be sure, and so have the organizing efforts of dedicated radicals and the peculiarities of local political structures. But these visible parts of civic resistance need roots and soil to grow in, and here San Francisco demonstrated for a time a most favorable economic, political, and cultural substratum.

Under the Economic Volcano

Economics undergirds so much, and it is hard to escape San Francisco's legacy of wealth. Cities have been wellsprings of modernization and modern life because of their capacity to siphon wealth from many corners of the land (and overseas), concentrating and multiplying it in a narrow space. California has, moreover, been one of the greatest engines of economic growth in the world over the last fifty years. While Los Angeles outgrew its northern rival before World War II, the Bay Area has been singularly favored by the wars in the Pacific, its financial complex, and the growth of electronics.

That prosperity erected new pyramids downtown, but also helped generate opposition to the business vision of civic progress. It brought many new residents to the city in the first place, as California's booming economy generated millions of jobs and supported a large public sector. This magnetic field of opportunity drew everyone from ex-GIs enrolling at the Art Institute in the 1940s to computer hackers in Multimedia Gulch in the 1990s. It called up people of every class, from the professionals in the Marina district to immigrant workers in the Mission. It provided a cushion for those who did not come for economic reasons, whether beats, students, hippies or gays, and allowed them the freedom to create subcultures that reinvigorated the city. The mass character of those bohemian elements was unprecedented, and can only be explained by the economic liberation of the young. The civic surplus even supported many of those who explicitly opposed

redevelopment, whether businessmen like Duskin, bohemians like Lawrence Ferlinghetti, or gay activists like Milk.

Prosperity worked its magic more effectively as long as rents remained low enough to allow artists, refugees, and those outside the mainstream to survive, if not prosper, in the inner city. The long slump in central-city investment due to depression, war, and suburbanization had left property markets relatively untouched for two decades. The confluence of economic growth without property speculation through the 1950s was ideal for nurturing the countercultures that mushroomed in San Francisco. Conversely, the heating up of real estate in the seventies and eighties drove out many of the marginals; as old commercial space disappeared, the affluent crowded into gentrifying neighborhoods, and mortgage markets overflowed with easy credit.

A Republic in Miniature

American leftists are prone to beg the question of the origins of urban protest by reference to grassroots movements and to reject any class analysis of such upheavals. Others refer vaguely to the middle-class character of the antigrowth movement. Neither interpretation will do. In San Francisco the balance of classes has tripped up the business elite in their efforts to command the civic skyline. The Downtown capitalists do not rule the roost in so clear-cut a fashion as in other cities. This weakness (relative, to be sure) is sometimes attributed to schisms such as those between the Spreckels and DeYoungs or Giannini and the Anglo-Saxons of Montgomery Street, but there is little evidence for a falling out in the postwar era within San Francisco, when the real fight was with the East and South Bay. Instead, difficulties came from below, and from three different directions.

To begin with, San Francisco has a curiously skewed class distribution because of its role as a commercial, financial, and corporate center as well as a government and public service node that is heavy on administration, education, medicine, and foundations. The division of labor tips toward upper-level managers, professionals, and technical workers, including doctors, lawyers, journalists, accountants, computer programmers, and administrators. This makes the city's class structure bulge in the middle. Add to this the skilled workers who keep business and the city running through supporting roles in printing, electrical, office machines, carpentry, technical writing, and the like, and the working class skews upward as well, with wages well above the national average.

At the same time, the workers of San Francisco have historically been well organized and able to hold their own against the bully-bosses, through union militancy and political activism. Racial exclusion reinforced working-class strength

and the sense of rough equality among European Americans of diverse backgrounds. At the end of World War II, San Francisco was a union town and working-class leaders were powers to be reckoned with. Although key unions cut a deal with big business and Mayor Alioto to support Downtown building, many workers still carried memories of militancy and class hatreds in their trouser pockets. This is manifest in the old Filipino, white, and black longshoremen, and sailors fighting against the destruction of their hotels. Worker empowerment and good wages fueled class struggles rather than dousing them, brought alliances between skilled and unskilled male workers, and blurred the edges between the working and middle classes.

Finally, rapid growth and personal mobility have had a permanently destabilizing effect on the class system, top to bottom. The massive influx of people into California, and rapid turnover at all levels, has frequently meant that class allegiances are poorly formed, with individualism in the ascendant. Moreover, a certain wage and rank mobility and the rapid formation of new businesses by aspiring people of skill (from Esprit to *Wired*) has reinforced individualist aspirations. The effect has been to strengthen the middle-class outlook of San Francisco, a further petty bourgeoisification at the expense of both ends of the class spectrum. Curiously, this has not made San Franciscans less but, instead, more liberal, and even libertarian, in the face of power plays by big business. This contrasts with Los Angeles which, with a similar class structure, has always been more conservative.

Lifelines of Liberality

Politics is more than the geometry of class forces, and the liberal bent of San Francisco's citizenry cannot be explained by the mere presence of a working-class or petty bourgeois bloc among the electorate (nor by race, in the white postwar era). Electoral politics have been so progressive that they have won San Francisco the moniker "Left Coast City," making it a liberal island in a sea of California Republicanism. Voting patterns have a clear geography, with the east of Twin Peaks tilting consistently to the left (with its own political microgeography based on race, class, and sexual orientation). Worse for the business interests, the east side has been the part most impacted by development.

Behind this liberalism lies a political culture forged out of the class standoff between capital and labor in the early twentieth century. That political culture includes high voter turnout, political clubs, freewheeling initiatives, and weak mayors. Capital could not vanquish labor from the political landscape of the city, so it has had to go through progressive Republicans such as Sunny Jim Rolph and Warren Christopher or pro-growth Democrats such as Joe Alioto and Willie Brown

to get its business done without mobilizing class opposition. At the same time, a liberal Democratic party apparatus could be stitched together that owed little to capital, as was done by Harvey Milk's Gay Democratic Club, and Phil Burton, who became a civic, state, and national power from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Part of the aims and accomplishments of this political culture has been to dispose middle-class people toward organized labor and to weaken their allegiance to the burghers of Pacific Heights. This sort of position is rarely rationalized in terms of class, but rather as libertarian independence from all power blocs and sympathy toward the oppressed. As a result, any number of transgressive political bridges were constructed in the postwar era across conventional boundaries of class and race formation. Harvey Milk organized gay men across the class spectrum, turning personal liberation into political power. Burton got his start by uniting Chinatown and white workers of the hotel districts, then brought in middle- and upper-class liberals from the eastern half of the city. Civil Rights activists and the Burton machine forged alliances between African Americans protesting black removal and white liberals opposing Downtown expansion. Meanwhile, the beats and hippies contributed by their rebellious race-mixing and incorporation of black culture into their practical critique of the oppressions of bourgeois expression and repression.

A Taste for the City

Neither can politics stand alone as an explanation for widespread opposition to the spatial incursions of the Downtown. The protagonists of urban preservation were inspired by more than distaste for capitalist power plays, particularly since so many of them were (petty) bourgeois in background or aspiration. Nor were they simply defending hearth and home. People rallied to protect urban life as they knew it. The everyday urbanity of San Francisco is undergirded by a webbing of popular culture and public vitality that sustains the city; the wellsprings of affection for urban life flow from many quarters. All opponents of redevelopment, of whatever origin or neighborhood, had experiences of urbanism to draw on and visions of civic space as a public good. These experiences inspired people and got their backs up against the destruction of San Francisco (often after drawing them to the city in the first place). Such urbanity is rarely taken into consideration by leftists, even proponents of the postmodern turn. Yet the density, commingling and variety of the city, and inhabitants' ordinary encounters with the urban world, have real effects on consciousness and action.

It helps that San Francisco had a rich cosmopolitan tradition to begin with. The city was the urban oasis of the West in the nineteenth century. The Victorian

makeover of the last quarter of the century rebuilt the city as a stage set of middle-class rowhouse respectability and upper-class pomposity, but left the vast redoubt of the working class lying South of Market, and the public secrets of the Barbary Coast and the waterfront on full display. After half the city was erased in the catastrophe of 1906, San Francisco was rebuilt along radically new, vertical lines. The central districts were reconstructed at a much higher density as hotels and apartments. Thousands of multiple housing units were purpose-built for businessmen, saleswomen, clerks, longshoremen, and the whole gamut of the urban labor force. These were, moreover, intentionally done in a modern style, with the latest improvements, as an explicit alternative to the suburban house; these were meant to be homes for urban living. This was the high tide of dense urbanism, full of pedestrian life, bright lights, and popular entertainments along the Great White Ways such as Market, Mission, and Fillmore. Many San Franciscans still occupied this urbane space after World War II, long after it had been junked in favor of the suburban model for American cities.

The rebellion against Downtown was not fought by denizens of the past but by the city's postwar occupants, many of whom were new arrivals. At the very moment when most Americans were fleeing the central cities, others fled in droves to San Francisco to escape dystopian suburbs and to create their own utopias. This was urban renewal of a different stripe. It brought African Americans into the Fillmore district during the war, along with the first gays discharged from the military. Next came former GIs who had seen the city in passage from Toledo to Guam and had fallen in love with it. The pioneering beats drifted in after the war, finding refuge in North Beach and the Fillmore; they were joined by growing numbers of alienated white youths in the 1950s. Students came from around the country, swelling the ranks of those cutting ties to bourgeois domesticity.

After the beats established San Francisco as the countercultural capital of postwar America and student rebellion heated up in Berkeley, the Bay Area became a new sort of urban oasis. Hippies overran the Haight, a district on the decline (bordering the Fillmore), with spacious Victorians and cheap rents. Gays flocked to the queer Mecca of the Castro district in the 1970s (the Castro was another working-class neighborhood emptying out). Gay liberation jump-started the yuppie era and its celebration of personal indulgence among the well-paid middle classes spawned by Downtown's office revolution.

For the beats, hippies, gays, and yuppies the city itself was an object of celebration as well as a place of liberation. More than housing, it promised tolerance, promiscuous mixing, cheek-by-jowl density, public life, and a landscape to delight the eye. The beats fit easily into North Beach's Italian community, with its traditions

of anarchism, café chatter, and public display. Beat sculptors used the rubble of building demolitions for their found art. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, a founder of City Lights Bookstore, was a protester at the razing of the Montgomery Block. A local judge refused to censor Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*. Hippies painted up the Victorians of the Haight, held their Be-ins at neighboring Golden Gate Park, and listened to rock in the nearby Fillmore Auditorium. Urban space served as a critical resource for the flowering of gay life, providing collective self-affirmation and protection in the face of a hostile world. Few people outside the police department gave a damn about enforcing heterosexuality. Gays pioneered the improvement of Victorian housing and the South of Market, and they were leaders in the preservation movement. Yuppies had good, city-based jobs and bought city homes to go with them. They sought the kind of urbane culture they had witnessed on student travels to Europe and Latin America, and took to gentrifying Victorian and Edwardian neighborhoods with a vengeance.

Contrary Spirits

Along with the spirit of urbanism, San Franciscans, particularly intellectuals, have moved in counterflow to mainstream ideas of modernity. Despite living at a crossroads of American capitalism, where money, commerce, industry, and commodities bray from every corner, they developed a critical distance from the sirens of modernism and modernization. In short, they never bought wholeheartedly into the ideology of progress. This was by no means true of nineteenth-century San Francisco, the Las Vegas of its time. Over the years, the lust for money-making at the cost of land and landscape had been blunted.

The first meek turning away came as San Francisco's second generation bourgeoisie sought to erase its ragtag origins in the mining districts and create a semblance of civilized urbanism modeled after eastern cities. San Francisco's burghers eschewed the sinewy modernism of Chicago in favor of Victorian fiddle-faddle (though such buildings were thoroughly modern in construction). A second turning away came at the end of the century, when third-generation burghers rejected Victoriania but also refused the modernism of Prairie or Bauhaus for the historicism of the Shingle, Renaissance, and Mediterranean styles. More generally, they fell under the sway of the Arts and Crafts movement; nowhere was the radical romanticism of William Morris embraced more fervently than in California. So dominant was the cultivated rusticity propagated by Bernard Maybeck that modernism finally came to the Bay Area in the 1930s clad in redwood and rough-hewn planks suitable to the regional myth of the naturalized city. Contrast this with Los Angeles, which abandoned historicism in favor of high modernism in the 1920s, and never looked back.

The leading contrarian of the Progressive era was John Muir, a mechanic and naturalist turned rustic bohemian and transcendental mystic, whose crusading zeal and savvy propaganda for the mountains of California launched the American environmental movement. The most popular writer of the time was Jack London, and Frank Norris was not far behind. Both made nature the backdrop for their greatest novels, while pushing the critical reach of literary realism to the limits of respectability. And both, despite their contrasting social origins, were thoroughly imbued with the petty bourgeois streak of independence and self-righteousness of their home city. Journalists Lincoln Steffens and Upton Sinclair were cut of the same cloth, one moving east and the other west in the course of their careers.

The New Deal era found San Francisco at the head of labor upheavals with the General Strike of 1934 and the cultural turn toward social realism in painting, photography, and literature, another flux of contrary modernism. Diego Rivera spent his first years in the United States working here, where he left a host of local acolytes. Dorothea Lange, Paul Strand, and the f64 movement redefined photography both in subject matter and in art. Ansel Adams broke away to follow Muir's vision of pristine nature. Contrarian writers nurtured in isolation around the region between the wars included Robinson Jeffers, Henry Miller, and Eugene O'Neill.

After the war, San Francisco was propelled from cultural Hill Station to the global focal point for a generation of youth rebellion and countercultural experimentation. Many beat writers were restless New Yorkers drawn to San Francisco because their sort of ragged poesy and vagabondage was irresponsible, even deplorable, in New York's literary and political hothouse. San Francisco offered the right combination of urbanity and obscurity to ferret away New York's mantle as the cultural capital of modernity, and to begin in a marginalized, noncommercial, anarchistic way to stumble toward postmodernism. When realism gave way to abstraction in the visual arts, San Francisco leapt on the boat from New York in the glory years of abstract expressionism at the Art Institute in the late forties. But the counterflow of local culture twisted back into a figurative turn in the 1950s and, in the hands of Bruce Conner, Wally Hedrick, and Jess, shifted constructivism toward the political art of the 1960s. Musically, black jazz briefly merged with white poetics; then the Bay Area sound of Dave Brubeck went off on its own iconoclastic tangent.

The Beat Generation slid easily into the rebellious sixties, with politics and counterculture in closer dialogue in the Bay Area than anywhere else. Rock was the voice of the new generation and San Francisco's Fillmore Auditorium the launching pad for its most innovative bands, such as Big Brother and Jefferson Airplane, or the black-white combustibles of Sly and the Family Stone and Tower of Power. The most enduring were those epigones of laid-back licks, the Grateful Dead. Psychedelic poster art was a kind of *Jugendstil* gone mad, while clothing took a lurch back to Victoriana. A familiar strand of the counterculture was an affection for nature, running from Kenneth Rexroth, the key intellectual bridging the 1930s and 1950s, to Gary Snyder, beat poet and Zen master of bioregionalism today. Disaffected hippies and students took to the countryside by the end of the sixties, seeking a rural utopia after their urban one had failed.

Gays were largely white and middle class and had more disposable income than earlier countercultures; nonetheless, they were social pariahs. They elevated the joyful abandon of civic sinning to a level not seen since the closing of the Barbary Coast. Gay liberation exceeded even the beats and hippies in its flouting of social convention and confirmed San Francisco's reputation as a refuge from small-minded America. On the other hand, the counterculture's rejection of consumer culture was swamped by the hedonistic rush of gay pleasure-seeking (not without contradiction: hedonism fell afoul of the AIDS epidemic and consumerism split the well-heeled from poor gays and lesbians).

As the eighties dawned, the San Francisco counterculture had achieved an unexpected degree of mainstream acceptance. The yuppie consumer culture carried some of the spirit of refusal against American domestic rectitude, ushering in the "latte leisure class," as well as gay sensibilities in architecture, dress, and the arts. The yuppies' affluence and consumerism eroded the radical basis of urban culture, but distinguished the Bay Area's petty bourgeoisie as a world-historical force in the realm of consumption: nouvelle cuisine, hot tubs, wines, personal computers, the Nature Company, backpacking gear, New Age music, Esprit and Gap clothes, and more spewed from this fount of liberatory self-indulgence.

The beats, hippies, and gays represented a very ungenteel sort of bohemianism that was more confrontational, more political, and more bizarre than ever before in this country. Rexroth, Ginsberg, and the rest showed a ferocious independence and spiritual refusal to follow orthodox parties, preferring a left anarchism that is a touchstone of San Francisco's political culture. The New Bohemianism was absolutely critical in forming the political consciousness and urbane outlook of the Bay Area, moving the middle class decisively to the left of the American mainstream, celebrating the frightful asymmetries of urbanity and re-igniting a radical romanticism that went far beyond the aesthetics of Arts and Crafts, the mystical environmentalism of John Muir, or the manly socialism of Jack London.

What Next?

San Franciscans can be justly proud of their record of opposition to the bulldozer of progress, but such resistance has decided limits. Downtown expansion was

contained on the north and west, only to cross Market Street and trigger the radical transformation of the South of Market to Mission Bay. Property speculation fell into the doldrums for a decade after 1985, but has picked up again. Downtown's growth is limited more by the property cycle than by social protest. As the city's economy went into the tank in the worst depression in fifty years, job loss (30,000 in San Francisco) laid waste thousands of lives. Political conditions around the state and the country have deteriorated, as the triumphant demagogues of the right put the screws to urban Democrats, the intelligentsia, working people, immigrants, and the poor. Even in San Francisco, bourgeois reaction is out of the closet, where popular struggles had locked it up for half a century, and the ruling class is more interested in sweeping the streets of the homeless and cutting wages than in meeting the needs of the people.

Meanwhile, the wellsprings of opposition have been drying up. The left is worn out, gays have been preoccupied with AIDS, yuppie exuberance is gone. High rents put the squeeze on the counterculture, and outcast youth today are more likely to be homeless than bohemian. Wages and union strength have eroded, and the working class has been recomposed as largely foreign-born Asian and Latin peoples who face greater obstacles than their white predecessors, and whose political and organizational presence is just awakening. At the same time, the skilled hotshots of computing, multimedia, and brokerage are more inclined toward monetary payoffs and expensive cars than to the public duties and pleasures of civic life. A fine and noble epoch is over and done with much as the Gold Rush era of libertine opportunity faded away in its time. San Francisco has not sunk as far as the rest of America (Dole got only 17 percent of the vote in 1996), but the survival of the city as a decent place to live is by no means assured.

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ONE FOUNDATION FOR THIS LIBERALITY is undoubtedly the strong labor movement of the past, which is well treated by McWilliams but in more detail by Issel and Cherny, and Michael Kazin, "The Great Exception Revisited: Organized Labor and Politics in San Francisco and Los Angeles, 1870–1940," *Pacific Historical Review* (1986) 55: pp. xxxx, and *Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), and David Selvin, *A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strikes in San Francisco* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996). Kazin and Selvin understand the curious class makeup and outlook of San Francisco workers, who were mostly skilled and highly independent.

ANOTHER WELL-REHEARSED THEME is the cosmopolitan character of the city, and its free-wheeling, tolerant, and even libertine ways of life. See, for example, Herbert Asbury, *The Barbary Coast: An Informal History of the San Francisco Underworld* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1933), John Findlay, *People of Chance: Gambling in American Society from Jamestown to Las Vegas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), Paul Groth, *Living Downtown*, Irena Narell, *Our City: The Jews of San Francisco* (San Diego: Howell-North Books, 1981), and Glenna Matthews, "Forging a Cosmopolitan Civic Culture: the Regional Consciousness of San Francisco and Northern California," in Michael Steiner and David Wrobel, eds., *Many Wests: Essays in Regional Consciousness* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, in press).

SAN FRANCISCO HAS A LONG BOHEMIAN TRADITION of wayward intellectuals and iconoclastic artists going back to the Gold Rush. This is surveyed by Frances Walker, *San Francisco's Literary Frontier* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1939), Oscar Lewis, *Bay Window Bohemia: An Account of the Brilliant Artistic World of Gaslit San Francisco* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1956), and Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Nancy Peters, *Literary San Francisco: A Pictorial History from its Beginnings to the Present Day* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1980). The intellectual counterculture stole the national spotlight with the coming of the beats in the 1950s. On that era, see Jerry Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them: North Beach and the Bohemian Dream, 1950–1980* (San Francisco: Peeramid Press, 1981), Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Rebecca Solnit, *Secret Exhibitions: Six California Artists of the Cold War Era* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1991), Richard Candida Smith, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry and Politics in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), and Linda Hamalian, *A Life of Kenneth Rexroth* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).

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