Beautiful Games: Alienation, Autonomy and Authenticity in Leonard Cohen's Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Beautiful Games: Alienation, Autonomy and Authenticity
in Leonard Cohen's Fiction

Claudine Gélinas Faucher

As a young artist, Leonard Cohen continually attempted to navigate between the conflicting ideologies of bohemia and bourgeoisie, and his struggle was representative of the widespread postwar North American concern with marginality, conformity and alienation. Cohen's fiction, in turn, engages with these various postwar North American values and ideologies. More specifically, his two novels examine how the conditions of alienation, autonomy and authenticity combine and interact to either uphold or destroy one's identity. The Favorite Game portrays a young artist who cultivates alienation, or the image of alienation, because he believes it fosters creativity. Beautiful Losers illustrates the fate of a character whose individuality is threatened as his alienation grows more acute. My thesis discusses these two novels through the lens of mid-century thought. Particularly relevant to my examination of Cohen's novels are the writings of Herbert Marcuse, Norman Mailer and David Riesman. I contend that, in The Favorite Game and Beautiful Losers, Leonard Cohen argues that the artist, though subject to failure, is the individual most likely in this society to achieve and sustain a state of autonomy. Cohen thereby advances his belief that aesthetics may be mobilized against the condition of alienation.

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Chapter One: Cohen and the Postwar Discourse on Alienation

In 1993, Stephen Scobie addressed the fact that Leonard Cohen's work had "suffered from a scandalous lack of serious attention over the past decade or so" ("Counterfeiter" 7). Clearly, his concern is still very much justified, as the most recent piece of literary criticism published on Cohen, Linda Hutcheon's Leonard Cohen and his Works, dates back to 1989. In truth, only a handful of academic critics (among them Stephen Scobie, Michael Ondaatje, Patricia Morley and Linda Hutcheon) have engaged in any serious way with Cohen's texts. Most mainstream literature on the artist seems to be more concerned with the "7 Reasons Leonard Cohen is the Next-Best Thing to God" than with critical analysis. One possible reason for this lies in the sheer paradox of Cohen's public persona, fueled by his ascension to pop stardom in the 1970's and 1980's. Michael Ondaatje believes that Cohen and two of his contemporaries, Bob Dylan and Norman Mailer, relied "heavily on their ability to be cynical about their egos or pop-sainthood while at the same time continuing to build it up" (4). Cohen simultaneously rejected and bought into what fueled his art and thus tended to attract more attention to himself as a celebrity than as an artist.

In the midst of Leonard Cohen's popularity as a poet and singer-songwriter, we tend to forget that the artist also yielded two important novels to Canadian literature. I have chosen these two novels, The Favorite Game (1963) and Beautiful Losers (1966), as the focus of my thesis in order to reassess the importance of Cohen as an author actively engaging with postwar North American values and ideologies. In The Favorite Game, Cohen describes the coming of age of Lawrence Breavman, a young Jewish artist, as he struggles to develop and come to terms with his artistic identity. Beautiful Losers, by far

Cohen's most controversial work, shocked many of its initial readers because of its obscene language and experimental nature but enjoyed great popularity from the time of its publication until the mid-seventies. Both The Favorite Game and Beautiful Losers were published early in Cohen's career, wedged between the success of his two first books of poetry, Let Us Compare Mythologies (1956) and The Spice-Box of Earth (1961), and his debut as a singer. As such, they are often treated as elements of Cohen's overarching artistic project. Desmond Pacey, in his article "The Phenomenon of Leonard Cohen," attempts to trace the evolution of "the twin quests for God and sexual fulfillment" which he considers central to Cohen's poetry, novels and songs (75).

While this is a justifiable approach, it seems to have run its course. Because the themes of sex and spirituality abound in Cohen's work, they have been the main angle from which most fans and critics approach his texts. Cohen's sensibilities, therefore, have often been over-simplified, and other, more relevant themes in his novels have been overlooked. In fact, one of the main reasons for the waning interest in Cohen's novels may be the feeling that everything has been said on the subject. Thus my ambition with this thesis is to discuss both novels without reference to either his previous or subsequent work, but with an approach more deeply invested in the historical and cultural framework which informs them. I wish to demonstrate how the two works are profoundly influenced by the sociological trends of their time and, more specifically, by the discourse on alienation. To understand more clearly what motivates Cohen's literary project, it is important to situate him within the larger structure of postwar North American society and its at times conflicting ideologies.

The postwar period has been the subject of much debate by historians and critics alike. Some look back fondly at the 1950's as a period of economic prosperity and social stability. Others see the decade as containing the seed of the 1960's counterculture, arguing that the two periods are in fact a continuation of each other and that below a seemingly complacent surface, the social fabric was already unraveling in the fifties, preparing the way for the explosive revolt and rebellion of the sixties. However, as historian John Patrick Diggins points out in The Proud Decades, "whatever the retrospective of writers and intellectuals, those who lived through the fifties looked upon them as a period of unbounded possibility" (178). One of the main consequences of this robust economy was the growth and establishment of a larger middle class: "as industry turned to consumer goods, to new housing and technology, the growing economy opened the gates to a social mobility only dreamed of during the lean years of the Depression" (Dickstein 3). The postwar period was thus viewed by some as the golden age of the middle class. Ironically, however, as the literary critic Morris Dickstein observes, the majority of writers and intellectuals of the time were concerned with "the unease of the middle class at its moment of triumph, the air of anxiety and discontent that [hung] over this period" (4). At a time during which the notion of identity was emerging as a crucial feature of the individual, many felt that the symbol of the middle class, the man in the grey flannel suit, was in fact being divested of his identity. Economic prosperity had its price, for the danger was no longer "social inequality but standardization and uniformity, not economic exploitation but the moral consequences of abundance" (Pells 187).

This new preoccupation illustrates the important shift in ideology which took place in the aftermath of the war. Indeed, intellectuals and writers were becoming less

concerned with the structure of society and rather more concerned with the fate of the individual. Their engagement with the struggle of the working class was being redirected to a desire to question and critique the values of the middle class. In The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age, Richard Pells sums up the magnitude of this shift:

> Above all, having rejected the notion that political ideologies and organized social movements would provide some form of salvation for themselves and their society, the postwar intellectuals reemphasized the virtues of privacy and personal fulfillment. Where the search for community had captured the imagination of the Left in the 1930's, the search for identity inspired the writers and artists of the 1950's. Where social critics had once insisted on the need for collective action, they now urged the individual to resist the pressures of conformity. (187)

In other words, if poverty and exploitation were the main concerns of the 1930's, alienation became the leitmotif of the 1950's and 60's, as a growing number of social critics began cataloguing and discussing the alienation of the corporate drone, the alienation of youth, and the alienation of marginalized groups. Political economy was giving way to psychology and sociology; Marx was being shelved in favour of Freud.

Leonard Cohen was born in 1934 and came of age during this period of transition. His father and his uncle ran the Freedman Company, a "successful mid-priced men's clothing manufacturer" which was, at one time, considered "the largest men's clothing manufacturer in Canada" (Nadel 14). Cohen grew up as a child of the upper-middle-class, comfortably nestled in the predominantly English neighborhood of Westmount, in Montreal. As he developed into a young adult, however, Cohen began to experience the

tension between "a bourgeois life defined by Westmount expectations and the emerging demands of an artist" (31). Cohen attended Columbia University's School of Graduate Studies from 1956-1957, just as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and other Beat poets and novelists were beginning to attract attention. Although his stay in New York, and his contact with those who would become icons of the counterculture, influenced his attitude and art, Cohen was never quite integrated into the Beat movement. Cohen explains, "I was always on the fringe. I liked the places they gathered, but I was never accepted by the bohemians because it was felt that I came from the wrong side of the tracks. I was too middle-class" (qtd. in Nadel 52). When he moved back to Montreal, Cohen began experimenting with music and poetry, prompting his friend and mentor Irving Layton to declare that Cohen was "bringing a new Beat style from New York and San Francisco to Montreal" (64).

Leonard Cohen, familiar with tension and contradiction, thus emerged as a figure bridging the cultures and sensibilities of Canada and the United States. He was also revealed as an individual who, while struggling to distance himself from his wealthy background, was nevertheless incapable of completely embracing the radicalism of the counterculture. Cohen, then, was neither bourgeois nor bohemian, and yet he was a little of both. His attempt to navigate these two ideological currents is representative of the widespread concern in postwar North America with the sociological conditions of marginality, conformity and alienation. As a public figure, Cohen embodied these underlying tensions. As a writer, he projected them onto his characters and investigated their role in the construction or destruction of identity. Certainly, <u>The Favorite Game</u> and <u>Beautiful Losers</u> are both concerned with sexuality and mysticism as two facets of the

same quest. But these two works are also actively engaged with the notion of alienation and its connection to the concepts of authenticity and autonomy, concepts which will be discussed at length in the following pages. In sum, my thesis examines Cohen's two novels within the postwar discourse on alienation, autonomy and authenticity. I demonstrate that Cohen explores these social and existential conditions in his fictional accounts of the meaning and value of identity.

In order to establish a concrete context through which to discuss Cohen's work, I wish to begin by laying out some of the important ideas and theories pertaining to alienation and its derived concepts which were circulating in the postwar period. For if alienation was considered by some as a distortion of human essence, it was envisioned by others as the only proper response to an inhuman system. Alienation became the new plight of the middle class, one which Herbert Marcuse, a postwar intellectual whose theories inspired diverse aspects of the counterculture, examined in depth and sought to alleviate. Marcuse remains an important figure because he, perhaps more than any other intellectual, illustrates the shift in American interest from politics and economics to culture and society, and successfully bridges the gap between Marx and Freud. His ideas, though not radical in themselves, prefigure a more drastic approach to postwar society. His theories mark him out as a left-wing intellectual who foreshadows but does not embody the convictions of the counterculture.

Marcuse also functions as a mediating figure between David Riesman and Norman Mailer, the two other postwar figures I will be using to support my argument. One of the most influential sociologists of his time, David Riesman adopted a pragmatic approach to the problem of alienation. Because he "doubted the likelihood of and

necessity for a radical transformation of the nation's political and economic institutions," Riesman is often seen as taking a more conservative stance towards social issues (Pells 232). But Riesman's critique of his contemporaries' social values nevertheless remains pertinent. His concern with society and the individual is at the center of his discussion of autonomy, which he considered an alternative or solution to alienation. Norman Mailer, for his part, offers a radical and opposing conception of alienation. Mailer was a figurehead of the counterculture, and, as such, he belonged to those who believed that alienation should be embraced as a state which entails a high degree of authenticity. It is worth taking a closer look at these three important figures of the postwar era in order to understand how their concepts may be applied to Cohen's fiction.

In 1955, Herbert Marcuse published Eros and Civilization in an attempt to reconcile the ideas of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud and thus to establish a continuity between socioeconomics and psychoanalysis. The result, as one critic points out, was "a sort of eroticized Marx" (Young 666). Adopting Freud's assumption that "civilization begins when the primary objective – namely, integral satisfaction of needs – is effectively renounced," Marcuse argues that our civilization is essentially based on the repression of desire (11). However, while Freud limits his observations to the historical shift from a pleasure principle (instant gratification of desire) to a reality principle (restraint of pleasure in favour of social unity), a shift that according to Freud is irreversible, Marcuse introduces the notion of "surplus repression" by which he designates additional and unnecessary repression "arising from specific institutions of domination" (34). This "surplus repression" is made possible by a specific reality principle which Marcuse refers to as the "performance principle" (40). There have been a multitude of different reality

principles throughout history, but Marcuse's theory focuses on modernity's socio-economic conditions: under the rule of the performance principle, "society is stratified according to the competitive economic performances of its members" (41). The performance principle is therefore indicative of an "acquisitive and antagonistic society" (41). Although it is never named as such, it is clear that the term "performance principle" is Marcuse's own expression to designate capitalism. Thus, under capitalism, the philosopher writes, the vast majority of the population's labour is "work for an apparatus which they do not control, which operates as an independent power to which individuals must submit if they want to live. And it becomes the more alien the more specialized the division of labour becomes" (40).

Marcuse is faithful to Marx's conception of estrangement by implying that the product of labour, as well as the institutions and relations that allow it to circulate, form an apparatus which dominates individuals. The workers are alienated from and ruled by the very labour they perform. In The German Ideology, Marx writes that alienation occurs because

> the social power, i.e. the multiplied productive force, which arises through the co-operation of different individuals as it is determined by the division of labour, appears to these individuals [...] not as their own united power, but as an alien force existing outside them, of the origin and goal of which they are ignorant, which they thus cannot control [...]. (46)

Marx believes that alienation occurs when men subordinate themselves to their own product. Marcuse agrees with this notion but also allows for a slightly broader conception of alienation in order to include the condition of a worker whose labour consists solely of

the fulfillment of pre-established functions. Admittedly, pre-established functions are inherent to the division of labour, and this broader idea is thus inevitably intertwined with Marx's more rigid definition of alienation. But Marcuse's psychoanalytic bias prompts him to consider workers in general as highly repressed individuals. To Marcuse, then, alienation also occurs when individuals perform labour that does "not fulfill their own needs and faculties" (41). Viewed as such, alienated labour becomes "the absence of gratification" and "negation of the pleasure principle" (41).

Marcuse effectively recontextualizes Marx in order to apply the latter's theory of alienation to the postwar American social landscape. Indeed, while Marx is preoccupied with the proletariat as an alienated class, Marcuse speaks of an alienated society as a whole:

> The sadistic principals, the capitalist exploiters, have been transformed into salaried members of a bureaucracy, whom their subjects meet as members of another bureaucracy. The pain, frustration, impotence of the individual derive from a highly productive and efficiently functioning system in which he makes a better living than ever before. (89)

The struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat has been replaced by the domination of the productive apparatus over the middle-class as a whole. There are no longer classes, only different "bureaucracies" which interact with one another and are distinguished by their salary.

Marcuse also successfully bridges the gap between socioeconomics and psychology. As he explains, psychoanalysis is an attempt to elucidate "the universal in the individual experience" (232). In light of this attempt to reconcile the general with the

particular, Marcuse's definition of alienation may then be considered simultaneously a social and an individual phenomenon. It is social in that it operates on a large scale under capitalism, but it is also individual because alienation "makes the person into an exchangeable function and the personality into an ideology" (232). What Marcuse argues here is that under the performance principle, personality tends towards a normalization or standardization and no longer serves as the distinguishing feature of the individual. Rather, personality follows a pattern which is imposed by the dominating apparatus as surplus repression. In this sense, alienation comes to be the equivalent of conformity and therefore the antithesis of autonomy. Under these circumstances, Marcuse notes, it is clear that "the autonomous personality, in the sense of creative uniqueness and fullness of its existence, has always been the privilege of a very few" (230).

As a solution to alienation, Marcuse envisions a non-repressive society based on the "non-repressive sublimation of libido," whose constituents perform "nonalienating work" (190-4). It is clear, however, that Marcuse's appeal to this kind of socioeconomic system is utopian. The only immediate and viable alternative to alienation his work seems to offer is autonomy. But it is unclear exactly what this autonomy implies. In this regard, and despite its vagueness, Marcuse's conception of the autonomous personality seems to concur with what David Riesman and William Whyte consider the rarest, most desirable character structure. Riesman, who published The Lonely Crowd in 1950 and Individualism Reconsidered in 1954, and Whyte, whose book The Organization Man appeared in 1956, both remain significant social analysts of postwar society. Their attitude towards middle-class values was neither conservative nor complacent, and they offered an alternative to both radicalism and mainstream ideology. More importantly,

through their accessible writing, the two sociologists "made clear the dominant values of the postwar intellectuals," who were now more concerned with identity and self-fulfillment than socioeconomic reform (Pells 246). Riesman and Whyte engage with the postwar socio-economic structure of the United States by studying the individual in relation to its emblem, the organization.

Whether the term refers to the corporation, as in Whyte's case, or to society as a whole, as Riesman seems to imply, the organization pressures the individual in the same way as Marx's and Marcuse's apparatus dominates him or her. Succumbing to the pressures of the organization, the individual's actions and decisions become ruled by exterior forces. To Riesman, the appearance of this type of individual occurred as the result of a shift in the character structure of modern man. Riesman traces the evolution of character by dividing mankind into three types of individuals: the "tradition-directed," the "inner-directed" and the "other-directed" (Lonely Crowd 23). Interestingly, these three types of character coincide with the Marxist categories of feudalism, industrial capitalism and socialism, suggesting that though Marx may be outdated for a liberal such as Riesman, he has not quite become irrelevant. As Riesman explains, the tradition-directed individual is a product of the "family- and clan-oriented traditional ways of life in which mankind has existed throughout most of history" (20). With the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Industrial Revolution, however, Western civilization allegedly underwent a revolution in terms of modes of conformity and social character. This revolution, or shift, brought about the inner-directed type, whose source of direction is inner "in the sense that it is implanted early in life by the elders and directed toward generalized but nonetheless inescapably destined goals" (30). The inner-directed person

obeys a "psychological gyroscope" and is eager for accomplishment and fame (31). This type of individual was predominant mostly before WWII in a period of open capitalism, which "rewarded ability to envisage new possibilities for production, and zeal to realize those possibilities" ("Saving" 104). Riesman's readers have often confused the inner-directed and the autonomous individual, but Riesman insists that the inner-directed person is not an exemplar of autonomy since he obeys the internalized injunctions of parents, heroes or revered elders. Riesman is more concerned with the shift from the predominance of the inner-directed type to the other-directed type, a revolution he considered to be underway in the 1950's.

In contrast to the inner-directed individual, the other-directed person "needs open approval and guidance from contemporaries" and is literally unable to pass judgment unless he feels it is the socially accepted judgment (105). Essentially, both inner-directed and other-directed persons submit to conformity. The former's conformity stems from the internalization of the convictions of others at an early age, while the latter's conformity is renewed with every new social situation he encounters. The alternative to these two types is the autonomous personality. Like Marcuse, Riesman is unable to describe exactly what autonomy entails. Strictly speaking, the autonomous are "those who on the whole are capable of conforming to the behavioral norms of their society [...] but are free to choose whether to conform or not" (Lonely Crowd 278). This definition, of course, does not provide guidelines to achieve autonomy, nor does it inform us how to know if and when one is being autonomous. What it does make clear is that non-conformity is not necessarily autonomy. This claim is exemplified through Riesman's portrayal of bohemians and rebels, who, he argues, are in fact "often zealously tuned in to the signals

of a defiant group that finds the meaning of life, quite unproblematically, in an illusion of attacking an allegedly dominant and punishing majority" (296). In other words, the nonconformist succumbs to a form of inverted conformity, as he must often "accept the role in which he is cast, lest he disappoint the delighted expectations of his friends" (296).

The argument that non-conformity for the sake of non-conformity is no better than blind acquiescence to the prevailing opinion is echoed by Whyte, who states that his book, though critical of individuals who "take the vows of organizational life," is "not a plea for nonconformity." Non-conformity, for Whyte, is "an empty goal" (3-10). Whyte also writes of an important ideological shift which coincides with Roosevelt's New Deal, the Second World War and the prosperity of the 1950's. Although he is not clear about what exactly brought about this shift, Whyte maintains that the worship of individualism has somehow come to be replaced by a "Social Ethic." Whyte's two conflicting categories of character structure greatly resemble Riesman's own classifications. Individualism, an ideological feature of the Protestant ethic, finds its embodiment in the notion of the American Dream and the idealized self-made man. Behind the ideology of individualism lies the thought that "pursuit of individual salvation through hard work, thrift, and competitive struggle is the heart of the American achievement" (4). Whyte's individualist and Riesman's inner-directed man thus share the same motivations and convictions.

The Social Ethic which superseded individualism is defined by Whyte as the "contemporary body of thought which makes morally legitimate the pressures of society against the individual" (7). The organization man is thus pressured into adopting certain

modes of conduct, and his decisions become increasingly influenced by his social environment. Although Whyte specifies that he does not "equate the Social Ethic with conformity," his work seems to imply the contrary (11). The majority of his book criticizes the use of personality tests, which he clearly equates with conformity tests, since they act as "a gauge of the 'normal' individual" (182). Like other-directedness, the Social Ethic effectively thwarts individual creativity, but Whyte, like Riesman, does not consider a return to individualism (or inner-directedness) the solution. Individualism, for Whyte, is merely a different form of conformity and cannot be a viable ideology for an increasingly collective society. For this society, in which the organization is an established fact, Whyte suggests an equivalent to Riesman's autonomy: a form of individualism "within organization life" (11).

For Whyte, this form of autonomy is an "elusive middle of the road" (13). Like Riesman and Marcuse, he is unable to describe the psychic or cognitive process responsible for autonomy in specific terms. What he describes instead is the insecurity of the individual who works and lives within the organization, feels an obligation to the group, and senses moral constraints on his free will: "if he goes against the group, is he being courageous – or just stubborn? Helpful – or selfish? Is he, as he so often wonders, right after all?" (14). One could certainly argue that the mere act of questioning and the agency which it presupposes are signs of autonomy. The self-consciousness displayed in voicing the interrogation itself would then constitute the essence of autonomy, thus providing us with a formal conception of the idea. Once again, however, it is difficult to confirm that one is asking the correct questions, or to assess the degree of honesty in the answers. Because there are no defined, objective characteristics by which to judge an

individual's actions, autonomy becomes impossible to qualify or quantify. For this reason, historians such as Richard H. Pells have criticized both Riesman and Whyte for indulging in "utopian flights." Pells nevertheless concedes that both sociologists make a serious attempt at redefining "the meaning of individual freedom in a postindustrial society where psychological well-being was more important than economic reform" (246). Riesman remains important for other cultural historians because he understands the "the viability, indeed the necessity, of remaining committed to an abstract conception of autonomy while also being as experientially alive and politically engaged as any New Left radical" (Esteve 330).

In discussing Marcuse, I have accepted the argument according to which autonomy, as conceived by Riesman and Whyte, is the only suitable solution to the problem of alienation. Perhaps in doing this I have too easily glossed over the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in Eros and Civilization. Indeed, as Marcuse summarizes his theory that man does not realize himself in labour but becomes dominated by his work and its products, he asserts that "the liberation from this state seems to require, not the arrest of alienation, but its consummation, not the reactivation of the repressed and productive personality but its abolition" (95). It is unclear to what extent Marcuse actually accepts the implications of this statement, as the sentence makes no reference to previous ideas or arguments, but it seems probable that Marcuse considers the condition of the individual so distorted that insanity itself "looks not only like a symptom but a solution" (Esteve 328). In suggesting this, albeit elusively, Marcuse conveys the notion that utter alienation may be more valuable in terms of human potential than the less accessible possibility of autonomy. Such a claim aligns Marcuse with many

of his contemporaries who believe that alienation is not a symptom of the individual but of society itself. This conception, of course, is heavily infused with Marxian ideology, but it goes beyond Marx in that it suggests that it is perhaps better for the individual to be completely estranged from such a society than to attempt reintegration and readjustment.

While Marcuse was concerned with the alienation of individuals within American society and of the society itself, many sociologists of his time were concerned with the social integration of a more specific group of individuals, the youth. Riesman and Whyte, like Marcuse, were concerned predominantly with the organization man, the middle-class worker, while failing to address the plight of juvenile delinquents, hipsters, bohemians, and Beats who emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. The disaffection of these youth groups, however, was becoming ever more visible, thus prompting intellectuals to reassess mainstream societal values in light of youth's widespread rejection of them. For instance, in his book Growing Up Absurd (1956), Paul Goodman discusses the problematic situation, suggesting that the alienation of American youth is not, as authorities and public spokesmen think, the result of a "failure of communication" (11). Perhaps, Goodman argues, the message has been communicated clearly but has been refused. In this case, it is essential to ask whether "the harmonious organization to which the young are inadequately socialized, [is] perhaps against human nature, or not worthy of human nature, and therefore there is difficulty in growing up" (11). If this is the case, and Goodman certainly seems to believe it is, the only solution to the problem of youth lies in a profound change of "society and its culture, so as to meet the appetites and capacities of human nature" (11).

The writings of Marcuse and Goodman, though not advocating alienation in itself as a desirable state, nevertheless open the door to a more radical interpretation of their ideas. Because the individuals they portray as alienated in fact stand against a deeply flawed system, these same individuals somehow come to represent integrity and, more importantly, authenticity in refusing to become integrated into such a defective system. Goodman thus implies that the juvenile delinquent and the Beatnik share the same lucidity about the distorted values put forth in their environment and the same authenticity in choosing instead to be faithful to their own experience. Marcuse is less straightforward, but the precepts of his reasoning may lead one to the same conclusions. In his book Sincerity and Authenticity, mid-century literary and cultural critic Lionel Trilling examines in depth the notion of authenticity and addresses Marcuse's Eros and Civilization specifically. Trilling's critique of Eros and Civilization is based on what he believes is the unresolved contradiction between Marcuse's "predilection for the strongly defined character-structure that necessity entails and his polemical commitment to a Utopia which will do away with necessity" (166). Trilling argues that, as a result of this contradiction, Marcuse sets himself apart from "and at odds with, the prevailing tendency of radical speculation about personal authenticity" (167). I disagree with Trilling on this particular aspect. I believe that through his critique of capitalism as an ideology and practice which alienates the worker not only through its system of labour but through the excessive repression of his desires and instincts, Marcuse portrays the alienated worker as an individual who possesses some degree of knowledge or truth, some degree of authenticity. The solution he proposes, the "consummation" of alienation, does not set him apart from, much less at odds with, what Trilling considers the cant of authenticity.

Rather, Marcuse seems a precursor to the more radical conviction that insanity, the ultimate form of alienation, is "a state of being in which an especially high degree of authenticity inheres" (Trilling 167).

The belief that alienation is synonymous with authenticity is expounded by Norman Mailer in his 1957 essay "The White Negro," as he attempts to describe and explain the hipster. Mailer's radical views are quite representative of the countercultural spirit and therefore offer a counterpart to Marcuse's and Riesman's more pragmatic approaches. To Mailer, conformity is as damaging to the individual as cancer, and the only life-giving answer is to

> divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self. In short, whether the life is criminal or not, the decision is to encourage the psychopath in oneself, to explore that domain of experience where security is boredom and therefore sickness, and one exists in the present. (339)

Such is the way of life of the hipster, which Mailer depicts as the result of a marriage between the bohemian, the juvenile delinquent and the Negro. Because the hipster lives only in the present, his values and ideals cannot consist in legacies or anticipations. Because he lives on the margin of society and refuses conformity, the hipster is impervious to any social pressures. The hipster is thus an existentialist and a psychopath, for he shares with these types of individuals a "burning consciousness of the present" (342).

The hipster is, more importantly, an existentialist and a psychopath because he "extrapolates from his own condition, from the inner certainty that his rebellion is just" (343). Here Mailer once again stresses the hipster's absence of external reference; the hipster cannot be accused of conformity by Riesman or Whyte because he does not define himself as part of a group, nor does he define himself against it. The hipster, according to Mailer, is entirely self-referential as he has "converted his unconscious experience into much conscious knowledge" (343). The only authority he accepts is personal experience. If indeed authenticity may be defined as "something like being true to one's experience," then there can be no doubt that Mailer believes the hipster to be its best representative (Esteve 328). By drastically amplifying the assumptions upon which Marcuse and Goodman lay their claims, Mailer demonstrates that the concept of alienation has undergone a significant shift. Indeed, whereas Marcuse and Goodman consider alienation as an inevitable consequence of conformity, Mailer's discussion of the alienated youth presupposes alienation as social estrangement and its emblem, the hipster, as the ultimate outsider.

The conviction that alienation or "holy madness" was a sign of authenticity became increasingly popular in the 1950's, but it also had its share of critics (Trilling 169). As a response to the growing enthusiasm of critics like Mailer, Lionel Trilling devotes the last section of his book Sincerity and Authenticity to the possible source of such a commitment and its inherent weaknesses. Trilling argues that the growing visibility of mental illness led to the conviction that society was in fact "the destroyer of the very humanity it pretended to foster" (168). This line of thought in turn inevitably issued in the view that "insanity is a state of human existence which is to be esteemed for

its commanding authenticity" (168). One cannot fail to recognize the intellectual legacy of Marcuse in this statement, as it necessarily derives from the assumption that insanity is "a direct and appropriate response to the coercive inauthenticity of society" (168). Indeed, although I have previously noted that Marcuse does not explicitly celebrate alienation, his indictment of society as the source of the individual's alienation inevitably represents the embryo of such theories as Trilling condemns.

Certainly, Trilling concedes, our social reality is alienated and alienating. But "who that has spoken, or tried to speak, with a psychotic friend will consent to betray the masked pain of his bewilderment and solitude by making it the paradigm of liberation from the imprisoning falsehoods of an alienated social reality?" (171). The idealization of madness by those who have themselves no intention of becoming mad thus represents, for Trilling, a gross distortion of human experience which common sense itself seems to contradict. Through their utter rejection of the hypocrisies of society, he argues, the proponents of madness as authenticity favour an "upward psychopathic mobility to the point of divinity, each of us a Christ" (172). To a certain extent, this is what Mailer is describing as he states that to swing or to "be with it" is to be "nearer to that God which every hipster believes is located in the senses of his body" (351). Every hipster is a Christ, but without the suffering and sacrifice that come with the consecration. Thus Trilling's main critique is of the unavoidable hypocrisy of such dogma, of the belief that we can all be Christ without being crucified.

Thus far I have discussed the concepts of alienation, autonomy and authenticity as they have been put forth by different intellectuals and in relation to one another. However, although alienation is an emergent concern in postwar society, the era's

intellectuals seemed unable to propose tangible solutions. The alternative to alienation as conformity may well be autonomy, but as the examples of Whyte and Riesman make clear, the appeal to this idea is somewhat in need of specification and clarification. Mailer's celebration of alienation as authenticity is, in light of its radicalism, not a viable option for society. And Goodman's and Marcuse's conviction that the problem of alienation can only be overcome through a massive change in and of society is scarcely more realistic. With these discursive interconnections of alienation, autonomy and authenticity in mind, I wish to return to Leonard Cohen's situation in the postwar era. I wish to advance the argument that, by juggling these three concepts in life as well as in his novels, Cohen seems to suggest that the artist is the one figure who might provide or embody the solution to the problem of alienation. Due to his aesthetic perception and creativity, the artist is perhaps more liable than most postwar North Americans to achieve and sustain a state of autonomy, however threatened his autonomy may be by the conditions of conformity and alienation.

As a young Jewish artist, Leonard Cohen experienced alienation from three different angles. He was one of the young men growing up in the 1950's, of whom Goodman wrote with something bordering on approval. A figure often associated with but never quite integrated into the counterculture, Cohen demonstrated that though he gladly flirted with nonconformity, he nevertheless refused to be defined through it. Though he lived in exile in Greece for a few years and even traveled to Cuba to "see the socialist revolution firsthand," Cohen refused to relinquish certain aspects of his bourgeois heritage, such as his penchant for fine clothing (Nadel 91). Cohen was also the grandson of a rabbi, on his mother's side, and of the chairman of the National Executive

Committee of the Canadian Jewish Congress on his father's side. He was part of the important Jewish minority of Montreal and began writing as literature and academic life was opening up to Jewish writers, who, in the wake of WWII, proved to be "specialists in alienation, virtuosos of moral anguish, witnesses to the pains and gains of assimilation" (Dickstein 4). As a Jewish writer, Cohen was more likely to be subject to what David Riesman calls the "nerve of failure," which he argues is shared by most minorities and refers to "the courage to face aloneness and the possibility of defeat in one's personal life or one's work without being morally destroyed" ("Minority" 55). As Mary Esteve recently argues, Riesman's definition of the nerve of failure, as it resides in the resistance to assimilation (a form of conformity), is consistent with his conception of autonomy. The two concepts inform his argument that those who "cope with material defeat in a way that modernity's 'success ethic' cannot" are endowed with an "autonomous nerve of failure" (Esteve 333).

Thus Cohen was exposed to notions of alienation, authenticity and autonomy through his socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious background. But it is through his status as an artist that Cohen seems to become a central Canadian figure in the discourse of alienation. Indeed, Cohen tends to use his vocation to reconcile the numerous contradictions of his personality. Patricia Morley writes that Cohen sees the artist as "the nonconformist, the rebel, the suffering alien" ("Knowledge" 125). This is certainly true, as he gladly projects the image of himself as a "black romantic" (Djwa 94). Yet Cohen also needs an audience, and appears to embrace this need without shame[1]. The interaction he shares with his audience proves that he is not alienated. In this sense, Cohen seems to

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[1]See the CBC's *Ladies and Gentlemen...Mr. Leonard Cohen* for a good example of Cohen's interactions with an audience of students.

consider artistic creativity as a possible solution to alienation, taking for granted that the artist, through his aesthetic perception, is necessarily a more autonomous being. Cohen's stance hearkens back to Riesman's conception of the autonomous figure, who is "marked by Kantian conditions for the aesthetic endeavor: disinterested interest, critical reflections and imaginative play" (Esteve 334). But his faith in the artist also aligns him with Herbert Marcuse's discussion of the "aesthetic dimension," in which he proposes the aesthetic function, the epitome of which is the artist, as containing "the possibility of a new reality principle" (164).

Because Marcuse believes the aesthetic function to be a liberating force, the new reality principle he evokes is certainly less repressive and therefore less alienating than the current reality principle. Marcuse argues that the individual's alienation is not only caused by labour, but also occurs because under the repressive reality principle, sensuousness and reason have been torn asunder and as a result, the former has been subjugated to the latter. The tyranny of reason over the senses accounts for the individual's lack of freedom or autonomy. To remedy this situation, Marcuse explains, the aesthetic faculty must act as a mediating function between the two antagonistic impulses. This mediation takes place in the aesthetic dimension, which, because it is the "medium in which the senses and the intellect meet," must perforce contain "principles valid for both realms" (161-3). In Cohen, and through his works, we perceive the engagement of the aesthetic faculty to reinstate sensuousness as a ruling impulse and to mediate its interaction with reason.

According to Marcuse, who invokes the ideas of Friedrich Schiller and makes them his own, the introduction of aesthetics into the philosophy of culture would "greatly

enhance [civilization]'s potentialities. Operating through a basic impulse – namely, the play impulse – the aesthetic function would 'abolish compulsion, and place man, both morally and physically, in freedom'" (166). Marcuse defines Schiller's conception of the "play impulse" as the impulse intertwined with the aesthetic function, whose objective is beauty and whose goal is freedom from repression, which dovetails with what Riesman would refer to as autonomy (170). Marcuse's convictions resonate with Schiller's in that they presuppose the abolition of repression and the gratification of desire. However, although Marcuse clearly supports Schiller's appeal to an "aesthetic state," a state of freedom, he is also firm about the prerequisites to achieve such a state (175). As he notes, these requirements, the most important of which is the conquest of economic scarcity (in order to eradicate alienating labour), are almost identical to the ones necessary to reconcile the pleasure principle and the reality principle. Overcoming scarcity is already no small obstacle to the establishment of the aesthetic state, and to some extent Marcuse acknowledges this in admitting that Schiller's work, like his own, contains "radical implications" (175).

Marcuse's discussion of Schiller, like his discussion of surplus repression, provides only an abstract solution to the problem of alienation because his theory contains too many "radical implications," such as the need for a shift in social values. The underlying idea, however, remains pertinent as it suggests some redemptive quality in art and aesthetics. As Marcuse explains, "art challenges the prevailing principle of reason: in representing the order of sensuousness, it invokes a tabooed logic – the logic of gratification as against that of repression" (168). Art is liberating, then, but assuredly it is impossible for everyone to adopt aesthetic values as a modus vivendi. This practical

reality represents the main weakness in Marcuse and Schiller's argument. Nevertheless, the essence of their reasoning raises interesting questions concerning the role of the artist in society, especially a society as concerned with personal character as America was in the aftermath of WWII. If aesthetic perception is the key to freedom and the answer to alienation, does it necessarily ensue that the artist is a more autonomous or authentic being? Through his conception of the aesthetic dimension, Marcuse puts forth the artist as a symbol of the potential for a new reality principle, a principle which may be said to take root in the artist's negation of the current order, of the current reality principle. Following this logic, the artist becomes the herald of a new order which has heretofore been "the privilege of geniuses or the mark of decadent bohemians" (157). In this sense, Marcuse's work undoubtedly points to the artist as a figure of both autonomy and authenticity.

Marcuse is, of course, not the only thinker to bring into question the status of the artist and his relation to society. During the 1950's and 1960's, a growing number of intellectuals demonstrated their concern with the rise of mass culture and kitsch, lamenting the fact that creators had become "too isolated or too integrated" (Macdonald 57). In Art and Culture (1961), for example, Clement Greenberg argues that the avant-garde, which he considers the only remaining culture, has "estranged a great many of those who were capable formerly of enjoying and appreciating ambitious art and literature" through its specialization of itself; it has thus yielded to the "rear-guard" or commercial art (8). Similarly, in Against the American Grain (1952), the high-minded leftist Dwight Macdonald pays homage to the old avant-garde but resents the contemporary artist's assimilation into mainstream art. His reaction to the counterculture is partly condemning and partly condoning. He admires their resistance to mass culture,

but finds their work eccentric, "since it lacks contact with the past and doesn't get support from a broad enough intelligentsia in the present" (57). Thus according to Greenberg and Macdonald, the artist, like any individual, runs the risk of being either too marginal or too conformist, of seeking direction from others or defining himself in opposition to them.

With this problematization of the artist in mind, I wish to discuss The Favorite Game as a novel which puts forth Cohen's conception of the artist as a being naturally inclined towards autonomous behavior. However, Cohen portrays Lawrence Breavman's artistic development as one that is not neatly unified. He suggests, rather, how the different conditions of alienation, authenticity and autonomy combine and interact to shape and mould Breavman's identity. As a young Jewish artist, Breavman experiences many of the same self-defining crises as Cohen. But though the novel is often considered a semi-autobiography, Cohen nevertheless maintains a critical stance towards his protagonist. Thus Breavman is at times a mildly sympathetic character who seriously attempts to conciliate social behavior and artistic endeavour, while at other times he comes across as a self-righteous outsider whose belief in alienation as a source of creativity points back to Cohen's own self-criticism. Breavman's attempt to dissociate himself from the past and possess the present aligns him with the writings of Norman Mailer. While Breavman is no full-blown hipster, his desire for mobility and constant gratification, as well as his idealization of madness, all point to his affinities with Mailer's social commentary. In addition, Breavman's ambiguous attitude towards his ethnic identity, mirrored in the troubled relationship he has with his mother, reflects his struggle to attain some kind of autonomy or to preserve Riesman's nerve of failure. His domestic environment, the rich independent borough of Westmount, surrounds him with

Jewish relatives and Jewish friends, and acts as an oppressive organization which Breavman condemns for its hypocrisy and which he can resist only through estrangement. Yet this estrangement is never complete, as Breavman attempts to navigate the hazards of conformity and alienation in postwar society with the aim of consolidating his identity as an individual and as an artist. Finally, Breavman the artist believes in the necessity of dissolving social ties in order to foster creativity. His character cultivates alienation, or the image of alienation, in order to remain as faithful as possible to his aesthetic vision. Yet Cohen does not let his character rest on his artistic laurels. When Breavman begins a serious relationship with Shell, he faces a deeply conflictual self-alienation as Breavman the poet becomes separated and estranged from Breavman the lover. Thus the three defining dimensions of the novel's protagonist make up the three-sided approach I adopt in my analysis of The Favorite Game in the next chapter.

To help support this analysis, I draw on Patricia Morley's treatment of Breavman as an outsider who "stands in judgement over the Insiders, the conventional ones, the social conformists" (Immoral 75). Though I am indebted to her insights on Breavman's sense of alienation, my general approach is less concerned with what she believes is Cohen's indictment of Canadian society; rather, it centers on Cohen's portrayal of Breavman as one whose social interactions are determined by his fear of conformity. I also rely on the critical analyses of Stephen Scobie and Michael Ondaatje to establish Breavman's notion of himself as an artist. Both critics provide pertinent observations concerning the effects of Breavman's artistic vocation on his interpersonal relations.

In my analysis of Beautiful Losers in the final chapter of the thesis, I discuss the novel's engagement with the theories of Herbert Marcuse in order to reassess Cohen's

involvement with the notions of alienation, autonomy and authenticity. I argue that the novel's critique of reason is in keeping with Marcuse's own. This critique provides a context in which Cohen puts forth the notions of the reality and the pleasure principles. Marcuse contends that the shift back from the repressive reality principle to the instant gratification of the pleasure principle is not a socially viable project. But Cohen illustrates one individual's success in reverting to the pleasure principle as a ruling force. The novel's protagonist effectively renounces reason in favour of sensuousness. As a result of this shift, however, this character suffers from increasing alienation, which weakens his individuality and culminates in the complete disintegration of his identity. In such a context, the very notion of autonomy as it appears in The Favorite Game seems irrelevant to Beautiful Losers as the novel illustrates the attempt to revert to the pleasure principle without the use of aesthetics. The concept of artistic autonomy is not altogether irrelevant to Beautiful Losers, however, as Cohen appears to recuperate the notion in order to apply it to himself. Thus a tension emerges between the fate of the novel's main characters and Cohen's own fate as a self-reflexive novelist. Indeed, if the identities of the novel's characters disintegrate or dissolve, Cohen's own identity as a writer is repeatedly reasserted, as he consciously alludes to himself as the creator of a work of fiction.

In addition to the Marcuse-inflected context, I draw on Stephen Scobie's discussion of the importance of systems within the novel. Scobie writes that the destruction of religious, sexual and political systems within the novel prophesies a possibility for growth. My own argument is based on the same assumption, but its conclusion reaches somewhat further. I suggest that Cohen shows how the destruction of various social systems is in fact necessary to the project of establishing a new sexual

system under the rule of the pleasure principle. I also use Linda Hutcheon's important work on Cohen to investigate more closely the implications of the novel's form. Her discussion of Cohen's self-reflexive approach and her application of Mikhail Bakhtin's "carnivalesque" to the novel help support my belief that Beautiful Losers in is fact Cohen's attempt to envision what it means to achieve a state of artistic autonomy.

Chapter Two: The Favorite Game

By the time The Favorite Game was published in 1963, Leonard Cohen was already a minor celebrity in Canada, a "kind of mild Dylan Thomas, talent and behaviour modified for Canadian tastes," like his fictitious counterpart, the novel's protagonist, Lawrence Breavman (Favorite 108). Cohen's reputation as a poet and his reputation as an idiosyncratic individual were already inextricably intertwined; they would become more so as he later made his way through song into pop sainthood. Like Breavman, Cohen grew up in a wealthy family in Montreal, and constantly struggled to reconcile his bourgeois heritage and his artistic sensibility. Furthermore, both individuals share a Jewish upbringing, which played an important role in forming their respective identities. In fact, Breavman resembles Cohen in so many ways that Paul Quarrington is prompted to write, in his afterword to the novel, that "although we should not seek factual, historical connections between the author and his literary surrogate, we may perhaps safely assume an emotional or spiritual one" (237). Thus Cohen's novel is often considered a semi-autobiography. Though it resonates with autobiographical implications, however, The Favorite Game is first and foremost a work of art. Michael Ondaatje writes that "the book has the effectiveness of a long prose poem, with each scene emerging as a potent and enigmatic sketch rather than a full blown, detailed narrative" (23). The novel's style and construction are reminiscent of a poem, for the "silences and spaces, what is left unsaid, are essential to the mood of the book" (23). This artistic form helps create a distance between Cohen and his protagonist. The latter's features and characteristics, as well as the specific social pressures which help define him as an individual, may or may not match Cohen's own.

Because it illustrates a young artist's growth to maturity, The Favorite Game is in the tradition of the künstlerroman, a genre which developed most notably in the German Romantic period and whose archetype, in modern literature, is James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Essentially, the künstlerroman portrays the "development and formation" of the artist as he moves "from subjectivity to artistic productivity" (Seret 6). The protagonist of the künstlerroman, an artist, becomes easily identifiable as either an extension or revision of the author's own personality. One of the defining traits of the künstlerroman, however, is irony. If the protagonist is, to a certain extent, the reflection of the author, the latter's use of irony "creates an artificial distance and dissociates [the author] intellectually from his protagonist" (147). The use of irony also allows the author to "express his opinion without formally committing himself" (148). Accordingly, The Favorite Game is heavily infused with irony as Cohen follows, with a critical eye, the development of a young artist not completely unlike himself. Michael Ondaatje states that "the book is written in the third person, but we are always conscious that it is Breavman writing in order to discover a clearer, more objective, picture of himself" (24). Cohen is therefore twice removed from his protagonist, and is able to judge his character's actions because of this distance. Breavman, as the autobiographer-artist, is more invested in his character's development but does not always endorse earlier phases of himself. This situation allows for a complex rendering of the figure of the artist, as Cohen's ironic stance resists any attempt to put forth a clear conception of what artistic creativity entails. But Cohen does illustrate how the values of postwar North America influence Breavman's development as a young man and as an artist. Thus I contend that by engaging with the notions of alienation, autonomy and authenticity to explore the

meaning and value of artistic creativity, Cohen puts forth his conviction that the artist, though certainly subject to failure, is indeed more likely to achieve and sustain a state of autonomy.

In light of these three defining dimensions of postwar culture, I propose to read The Favorite Game through the lens of the three important figures of the postwar era discussed in the introduction – Herbert Marcuse, David Riesman and Norman Mailer -, each of them concerned with a particular facet of the relationship between the individual and society. Using David Riesman's essay "A Philosophy for Minority Living" (1948) to discuss Riesman's notion of autonomy as it applies to Jewish minorities, I consider Lawrence Breavman as a figure whose Jewish upbringing teaches him the experience of alienation and thus provides him with the psychological fortitude to achieve a state of autonomy. As a result of his "minority living," the child Breavman is capable not only of individuation within society but also, and perhaps more importantly, among the very people who make up the Jewish community: his parents, his extended family and even his friends. As Breavman develops into a young adult, however, his particular mode of individuality tends towards alienation and thus away from autonomy. As he becomes a kind of bourgeois hipster, Breavman exhibits a growing likeness to what Norman Mailer considers, in his essay "The White Negro" (1959), as the locus upon which "incompatibles have come to bed, the inner life and the violent life, the orgy and the dream of love, the desire to murder and the desire to create, a dialectical conception of existence with a lust for power, a dark, romantic, and yet undeniably dynamic view of existence" (342-3). Breavman aligns himself with Mailer's version of alienation through his attempt to suspend himself in the present, through his desire for mobility, as well as

through his idealization of madness and its supposed divine quality. His estrangement is such that it at times reveals something like hypocrisy, as he conforms to the behaviour of rebellion. Breavman's trajectory from autonomy to alienation, however, is made more complex by his vocation as an artist. Indeed, although his pursuit of alienation seems misdirected and almost counterfeit, Breavman seems to find some form of redemption through what Herbert Marcuse describes as the aesthetic perception. Breavman's alienation is counterbalanced by his surrender to the "play impulse," wherein imagination stands "at the core of perception and conceptualization, and is exercised in accordance with the qualities of human originality and freedom" (Reitz 104). Cohen thereby implies that although Breavman succumbs on occasion to the lure of alienation qua authenticity, his aesthetic perception may be a valid path towards autonomy as a state which carries the potential of freedom from the repression of our reality principle.

As discussed in the introduction, when David Riesman appeals to the "nerve of failure," he hopes to inspire people to find courage when facing solitude or the possibility of society's defeat of one's ethical value system. In a broader sense, however, the nerve of failure is also simply "the nerve to be oneself when that self is not approved of by the dominant ethic of a society" ("Minority" 55). It is the courage to be different, aware of the possibility that there may never be a validation of this difference. Riesman's essay "A Philosophy for 'Minority' Living" alludes to many minorities, suggesting that their moral attitude towards isolation and defeat is rendered all the more complex through their need of "protecting themselves in one way or another from the moral impact of power" (56). Most of his essay, however, focuses specifically on the Jewish minority in postwar America and laments their loss of the nerve of failure. Riesman describes the shift that

took place in their relation to the ethos of the majority as a kind of moral assimilation: "many Jews in the main Western countries surrendered their inherited ethical system in return for a chance to participate in the wider world, thus losing their special sources of spiritual strength" (58). Thus, according to Riesman, the Jewish community, which formerly upheld a "quite defiantly Ptolemaic" ethical regime, now translates its fear of failure into self-contempt (56).

Riesman's discussion of the Jewish minority in relation to the nerve of failure exhibits characteristics consistent with his idea of autonomy. Indeed, in many ways, the nerve of failure is the commitment to the state of autonomy, even when the actions posed in its name conflict with a dominant social power. Autonomy is the condition of being which one attempts to cultivate individually and there can be no assurance of success, no barometer to indicate the level of autonomy achieved, though, as previously mentioned, perhaps the questioning itself is indicative of an agency which may be viewed as a sign of autonomy. Similarly, the individual with the nerve of failure is committed to his ethics and must therefore accept the insecurity which comes with standing alone. But his ethical integrity is valid; it stands opposite that which is validated merely by being successful and powerful. Thus, to uphold moral conviction when faced with its possible defeat, like the endeavour to prove oneself autonomous, is to renounce "even the company of misery and take[] the greater risk of isolation – that is, the risk of never rejoining the company" (55).

In The Favorite Game, Lawrence Breavman considers himself a minority within a minority. He repeats what he describes as the "joke around the city" to emphasize the importance of his family within the Jewish community: "the Jews are the conscience of

the world and the Breavmans are the conscience of the Jews" (12). But Breavman modifies the joke in order to include himself as the last upholder of true Jewish ethics: "And I am the conscience of the Breavmans" (12). By adding this last sentence, Breavman sets himself apart from his community and from his very own family. Breavman believes that he is the only individual who truly believes in the sense of destiny which characterizes the Jewish community. He embraces the idea of himself as one of the chosen people, a belief inherent to the Jewish faith which, Riesman notes, has been consistently weakening. Riesman writes that until recently, the Jews "saw through power by observing its blindness in comparison with the vision possible to the weak" ("Minority" 56). This vision, the certainty of being the chosen people, and the resistance to power it presupposes, is a distinguishing feature of Judaism and represents what Breavman seeks so desperately to preserve. As Breavman grows into early adulthood, he continues to value this vision as a sign of the consecration of his identity: "still, and he knew it was arrogance, he often considered himself the Authentic Jew. His background had taught him the alien experience. He was grateful for that. Now he extended that experience to his own people" (Favorite 197).

Breavman is thus taught the "alien experience" twice; this provides him with a better understanding of his relation to society and a certain knowledge of what social alienation entails. As a young boy, his conversation with Lisa is concerned exclusively with entertainment, from "The Shadow" to the "Green Hornet". But the superficiality and naiveté of their conversation are undercut when Breavman asks Lisa if she has "ever been called a Dirty Jew" (28). The question effectively ends the discussion, as both children retreat into thought, no doubt pondering the mechanics of rejection. Cohen again depicts

the minority experience as, some years later, Breavman and Krantz attend a dance at the Palais D'Or. Arguably, both young men exhibit traces of the nerve of failure as they enter the dance hall and soon understand that they are the "only two Jews in the place" (48). They cannot predict the outcome of the evening but they make no effort to conceal their identity from the dancers, who are "Catholics, French-Canadian, anti-Semitic, anti-Anglais, belligerent" (47). When Breavman dances with Yvette, he answers her question "English?" with the assertion of what he considers the most important aspect of his identity: "I'm Jewish" (49). Though they refuse to accept their parents' preconceived ideas about French-Canadians, Breavman and Krantz reveal a deep-rooted set of values: "they wanted to participate in the vitality but they felt there was something vaguely unclean in their fun, the pawing of girls, the guffaws, the goosing" (48). Both young men thus enter the dance hall with the knowledge that they represent a minority whose values do not concur with the social gathering's dominant ethos. Yet both young men remain true to their conception of themselves, though this attitude ultimately causes them to be physically assaulted. In the midst of their losing battle, Breavman rejoices at being so completely himself: "he threw his fist at a stranger. He was a drop in the wave of history, anonymous, exhilarated, free" (51).

Breavman's upbringing and his ensuing experience as an outsider enable him to extend his wariness of others to his own community. Consequently, his attitude towards his extended family is a critical one: "why had the idea of a jealously guarded sanctity degenerated into a sly contempt for the goy, empty of self-criticism? Parents were traitors" (43). This accusation is more than a childish rebellion against his elders. What Breavman laments is the loss of what he considers a crucial feature of Judaism; parents

were traitors because "they had sold their sense of destiny for an Israeli victory in the desert" (43). Breavman's claim implies the loss of self-criticism and its substitution by what amounts to what Riesman famously termed other-directedness, that is, the mode of conformity that arises from the need of others' approval. The agency that lies behind the questioning of self-criticism is the same agency which fuels any attempt to sustain one's autonomy. Breavman's indictment of his parents' generation is thus based on the observation that his people have discarded their own values in favour of the prevailing admiration for wealth and social power. Perhaps the best example of this conviction occurs when Breavman describes his uncles:

> He had thought that his tall uncles in their dark clothes were princes of an elite brotherhood. [...] But he had grown to understand that none of them even pretended to these things. They were proud of their financial and commercial success. They liked to be first, to be respected, to sit close to the altar, to be called up to lift the scrolls. They weren't pledged to any other idea. They did not believe their blood was consecrated. (123)

What Breavman here condemns echoes what Riesman describes as the "cynicism that seeks money and power without the conviction that they represent the fruits of virtue" ("Minority" 61). To Riesman, the pressures of modern capitalism on ethnic minorities allow for their complex relation to power and their vulnerability to other-directedness or loss of the nerve of failure.

Because of his heightened sensitivity to alterity, Breavman develops a desire for autonomy at an early age, but not before succumbing briefly to the pressure of his own generation's other-directedness. Almost a head shorter than his friends, the adolescent

Breavman is initially oblivious to his supposed disadvantage but gradually comes to see himself through the eyes of others: "his friends insisted that his size was a terrible affliction and they convinced him" (Favorite 37). As a result, Breavman accompanies his date Muffin to a party after stuffing his shoes with Kleenex to appear taller, convinced by a rumor that Muffin herself regularly uses Kleenex to stuff her bra. Amid the excruciating pain which comes from dancing with such padded shoes, Breavman experiences what amounts to an epiphany of conformity: "Maybe everyone there, every single person in the bobbing line was wearing a Kleenex prop. Maybe some had Kleenex noses and Kleenex ears and Kleenex hands. Depression seized him" (39). Deciding to come clean, Breavman unceremoniously dumps the balls of Kleenex into the girl's lap: "Don't be ashamed. You take yours out" (40). The girl furiously walks away, but Breavman is curiously unmoved by her rejection. Instead, he sits and observes the city, feeling a chill run through his spine at the thought of being "involved in the mysterious mechanism of city and black hills" and declaring "Good-bye, world of Kleenex" (41).

For critic Patricia Morley, "Kleenex becomes the metaphor for hypocrisy, deception and the imitations so prevalent in our culture" (Immoral 78). Assuredly, but it is also representative of the other-directedness that prompts Breavman to seek open approval and guidance from his contemporaries. For the act of imitation is but a symptom of other-directedness; other-directedness determines the values which motivate the act itself, and therefore defines the individual's very character. The image of Kleenex recurs throughout The Favorite Game, signifying for its protagonist the danger of conformity. Thus Krantz and Breavman, when they prowl the streets of Montreal, are searching for the "right girls. [...] Not Kleenex girls" (Favorite 43). When, at an early age, Breavman

bids farewell to the world of Kleenex, he asserts his intention of rejecting other-directedness and seeking autonomy. But his refusal to conform is not a negation of society itself. On the contrary, Breavman feels all the more connected to his city and its "mysterious mechanism". He embraces the organization but refuses to be absorbed by its overbearing social ethic. This contention is reasserted as he and Krantz later swear "not to be fooled by long cars, screen love, the Red Menace, or *The New Yorker* magazine" (42 italics in original). Certainly, this pledge contains a portion of simple adolescent rebellion, which amounts to another kind of conformity. Breavman's endeavour to be autonomous is bound to fail on occasion, yet the energy he displays through his continuous introspection bears witness to his effort to walk the line between conformity and alienation. Thus Breavman admonishes the working-day crowd when he and Krantz, having not slept, sit at the corner of Mackay and Sherbrooke: "the jig is up. It's all over. Go back to your homes. Do not pass Go. Do not collect two hundred dollars" (107). Breavman reveals his contempt for the corporate drone, revealing as well his own misplaced sense of superiority. He feels entitled to do this because he himself is there with them. Indeed, Breavman believes his effort to attend the morning rush entitles him to be the judge of others' conformity. Cohen, as author, implicitly distances himself from Breavman's youthful vanity by juxtaposing this episode to a description of the "disciplined melancholy" and "calculated display of suffering" Breavman adopts to appear alienated (106). Cohen's emphasis on Breavman's hypocrisy is evident, and indicates that he does not endorse Breavman's false mode of alienation.

As Breavman develops into a budding artist, he begins to isolate himself from his family, friends and lovers. The weight of his father's shadow, full of "Victorian reason

and decency" is increasingly heavy and, believing he is somehow freeing himself, Breavman gives full rein to his estrangement (26). He leaves his overbearing mother and moves into a rented room in order to become more independent. Frequently, he drives with Krantz through the whole night at a frightening speed:

> Back in the city their families were growing like vines. Mistresses were teaching a sadness no longer lyrical but claustrophobic. The adult community was insisting that they choose an ugly particular from the range of beautiful generalities. They were flying from their majority, from the real bar mitzvah, the real initiation, the real and vicious circumcision which society was hovering to inflict through limits and dull routines. (99)

Breavman's flight from his environment is first and foremost an attempt to uproot himself. The families, mistresses and adults he refers to have become oppressive because they seem to dictate what he should be, while he sees in them all that he does not wish to be. Thus his attempt to dissociate himself from them is also the attempt to avoid conformity at all costs. But this self-inflicted alienation is far different from the autonomy he formerly aimed for. It is a radical rejection of everything he considers false in society, and of all that he refuses to become. In others, Breavman sees what he is not, but as a result of this scrutiny, it becomes increasingly difficult for him to assert what he is and to remain faithful to this essence. Cohen seems to suggest that the self-absorption that Breavman feels his artistic development requires in fact obstructs his capacity for autonomous being. The narcissism he displays in his growth as an artist prevents him from envisioning the conciliation of artistic creation and social being. The independence

of spirit Breavman formerly exhibited has shifted its aim. In Breavman's self-imposed alienation, we become witness to his search for authenticity.

Breavman believes that the mobility that he and Krantz embrace during their nocturnal escapades enables him to inhabit a continuous present, thereby separating him physically and psychologically from the past. In the car, he is not bound to anything and can "sample all the possibilities:" the poems he will write, the women he will sleep with, the emotions he will experience (99). And when given the choice between a future and an eternal present, he does not hesitate in his answer: "Let it go on as it is right now. Let the speed never diminish. Let the snow remain" (100). Here, Breavman exhibits a "burning consciousness of the present," one of the most predominant traits of the hipster as Norman Mailer describes him (Mailer 342). He also demonstrates the desire for movement, for the energy of "Go" which Mailer believes is essential to the hipster way of life:

> Movement is always to be preferred to inaction. In motion a man has a chance, his body is warm, his instincts are quick, and when the crisis comes, whether of love or violence, he can make it, he can win, he can release a little more energy for himself since he hates himself a little less, he can make a little better nervous system, make it a little more possible to go again, to go faster next time and so make more and thus find more people with whom he can swing. (350)

According to Mailer, movement is essential for the individual in that it prepares him for the "crisis" of love or violence. But Breavman uses movement to shun or avoid these crises, as if the physical space which separates him from the source of conflict helped

provide the psychological distance necessary for him to pursue his artistic endeavours. When his mother proves to be too much, for instance, he leaves the house and rents a room in which he produces his well-received book of Montreal sketches (Favorite 105). When he feels the city suffocate him, he moves to New York, relieved that "it wasn't his city and he didn't have to record its ugly magnificence" (125). When Shell becomes a threat to his isolation, he moves, again, and when confronted with the death of Martin, Breavman quits his job as camp counselor, boards a bus, and finds comfort in his typewriter. In this sense, it is no coincidence that Breavman is constantly depicted walking the streets, whether it is to flee a woman's bed or to cope with the trauma of witnessing a murder in the New York subway. Moving constantly provides him with a blank canvas, "a place to begin from," for "every free deep breath [is] a beginning" (152).

Thus Breavman's awareness of the present, which takes the form of constant movement, echoes an aspect of Norman Mailer's hipster. So too, I would argue, does Breavman's idealization of alienation as a state which entails a high degree of authenticity. Breavman thus appears to reject the ideal of autonomy as one that does not concur with his artistic project. He believes instead that his artistic project finds its source of creativity in alienation. Mailer writes that the hipster chooses not to take part in society because he refuses "a slow death by conformity with every creative and rebellious instinct stifled" (339). By refusing to conform, the hipster remains true to himself because the "very intensity of his private vision" becomes for him "the reality more real than the reality of closely reasoned logic" (342). Thus the hipster rejects the weight of the past and the prospects of the future because they effectively thwart individual growth. Instead, individual experience becomes the only acceptable authority by which to

measure one's actions. To Mailer, then, the vitality which the hipster displays in refusing to conform to a flawed system is a sign of integrity because it presupposes obedience to the "rebellious imperatives of the self" (339). This belief reveals Mailer's participation in the postwar discourse on alienation, identifying him as a proponent of marginality who believed that "alienation was no longer a problem to be surmounted, but a virtue to be nourished" because amidst the prevailing conformity of the postwar era, it necessarily entailed authenticity (Pells 248).

Breavman's search for authenticity goes beyond the rejection of past and future. Despite his desire be true to his own experience, he, like Mailer, consciously refers to other minorities as an example of what is "real". To Mailer, "it is no accident that the source of Hip is the Negro for he has been living on the margin between totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries" (Mailer 340). Because the Negro understands that life is war, he explains, he "kept for his survival the art of the primitive, he lived in the enormous present [...] and in his music he gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream and despair of his orgasm" (341). Mailer's unmitigated idealization of the Negro experience implies that the latter is somehow truer to himself, to his essence. Breavman adopts a similar attitude when observing the Italian gardeners as they sweep the street. He thinks to himself: "It must be nice to use something that real" (Favorite 72). In Breavman's mind, the "realness" of the worker and the simple, manual nature of his work become intertwined so that the former erroneously seems to be implied by the latter. Similarly, when Breavman becomes a literary figure after the publication of his first book, he claims that the distrusting Gentiles make him "feel as vital as a Negro," thus

assuming, like Mailer, that the Negro somehow possesses more, or "truer" life instinct because of his marginality (107).

Shortly after the publication of his first book of poetry, Breavman decides to do "penance through manual labour" and begins working in a brass foundry, where he punches the clock "every morning for a year" (110). While Breavman may desire penance for his status as minor celebrity, which he feels has somehow affected his personality, Cohen also suggests that Breavman seeks to dissociate himself from his middle-class background. Breavman's discussion of class with Krantz illustrates how self-conscious he is about his family's wealth. He speaks of himself as a "twilight peeper of Victorian ruins. A middle-class connoisseur of doomed union songs" (108). In a way, Breavman's experience at the foundry proves that he is earnestly trying to escape the material world in order to cultivate his aesthetic sensibility. It is, after all, the sheer beauty of melted brass, the "color of gold when he read the word in prayers or poems", which inspires him to take the job (109). Yet Breavman's self-imposed proletarian exile sounds false. The "boredom and penance" he seeks in the foundry seem to indicate that Breavman is somehow trying to recreate and experience the labourer's alienation in order to achieve the level of authenticity he imparts to the latter (110). In the foundry, Breavman's idealization of the labourer and his idealization of the Negro are conflated in the figure of the moulder: "He looked like a monolithic idol. No, he was a true priest" (109). Breavman believes that manual labour will reconcile him to his essence, but his attitude towards the moulder reveals that he feels compelled to look to other, marginal figures to locate the source of authenticity.

This external search for authenticity is perhaps nowhere more apparent and disturbing than in the friendship that unites Breavman and Martin Stark. The young boy embodies the epitome of isolation or non-conformity by virtue of his madness, the ultimate form of alienation. It is thus highly important that his initial encounter with Martin occurs immediately after Breavman awakens to his disgust of campers and counselors alike: "What was he doing with these people?" (191). In many ways, as Stephen Scobie remarks, Breavman sees in Martin "an image of what he himself would like to be" but does not have the courage to become (Leonard 92). Breavman believes in the holy madness of Martin and sees a "blissful mad-child" where others see a "half-nut, half-genius" (Favorite 192-4). While Krantz and Martin's mother desire the child to be integrated, to conform to the microcosm which the camp represents, Breavman willfully encourages him in the opposite direction: "Martin was a divine idiot. [...] He shouldn't be tolerated – the institutions should be constructed around him, the traditionally incoherent oracle" (199). By invoking the image of the oracle, Breavman not only attributes mysticism to Martin's state but also implicitly associates the boy with authenticity, for an oracle always speaks the truth, albeit cryptically. Thus Martin's genuineness is one Breavman admires because it stems from absolute freedom: "I enjoy his madness. He enjoys his madness. He's the only free person I've ever met. Nothing that anybody does is as important as what he does" (213).

Patricia Morley argues that Breavman's attitude towards Martin and his mother represents a good example of "Cohen's criticism of contemporary Canadian society" (Immoral 77). To a certain extent this may be true, but Breavman's stance reaches beyond mere social criticism and becomes what Lionel Trilling indicts as "the prevailing

tendency of radical speculation about personal authenticity" (167). Trilling rejects the belief that insanity is authenticity or that madness contains "some sort of lost truth;" he contends that the valorization of insanity represents an insult to those who truly suffer from "the great refusal of human existence" (170-1). Cohen seems to share Trilling's skepticism. His ironic stance vis à vis Breavman's somewhat naïve beliefs is revealed as Cohen punctuates Breavman's experience at the Jewish camp with visits to his mother, whose condition has degenerated to the point of justifying her hospitalization in the psychiatric ward. Thus Breavman's praise of Martin is often juxtaposed against his feeling of helplessness towards his mother's utter alienation. In one instance, he reads Martin's letter to a fictive brother, and this, he believes, brings him "closer to the boy's anguish" (Favorite 207). But only a few lines later, he is incapable of understanding his mother's own anguish: "He visited his mother, was unable to make her understand he'd been away. Same horror as always" (208). Breavman's admiration for Martin's madness is thereby undercut and becomes almost a parody of his repeated confrontation with actual mental illness. His inability to draw a parallel between both situations further underlines the fact that in his search for authenticity through alienation, Breavman has lost sight of the consequences that such a state entails. To a certain extent, Cohen's dissociation from Breavman through irony serves as a way to judge his own previous actions or beliefs. His indictment of Breavman's simultaneous fascination with and insensitivity towards actual alienation may thus be viewed as a form of self-criticism on Cohen's part for adopting the conviction, earlier in his career, that madness is a "sort of lost truth" (Trilling 170).

This illusion is brutally shattered when Martin is accidentally run over by a bulldozer while indulging his penchant for isolation and mosquito killing, an activity Breavman encouraged him to pursue because it represented an instance of his idiosyncrasy. Breavman writes to Shell: "I can't claim any lesson. When you read my journal you'll know how close I am to murder" (Favorite 225). Yet the guilt Breavman exhibits is proof that he has, in fact, learned a lesson about the popular belief that "alienation is to be overcome only by the completeness of alienation, and that alienation completed is not a deprivation or deficiency but a potency" (Trilling 171).

I am not implying that Breavman is a full-blown hipster. Rather, my aim has been to illustrate how Breavman's desire for authenticity meets Mailer's account of the hipster as a free individual in that they both believe alienation to be a valid path towards self-authenticity. Certainly, the aspects of Breavman's character which I have discussed above align him with the hipster, but there are just as many traits which distinguish him from the "philosophical psychopath" (Mailer 343). If Breavman exhibits traces of hipsterism, he can be no more than a bourgeois hipster, which is in itself a contradiction. Breavman's conflicting values emerge with particular vividness when he attempts to rebuke his colleague, Wanda the camp counselor, for the triteness of her thoughts: "Do you know what the ambition of our generation is, Wanda? We all want to be Chinese mystics living in thatched huts, but getting laid frequently" (Favorite 202). Breavman's statement is certainly an indictment of his "generation," more specifically of the members of the counterculture who exploited aspects of the very concepts they rebelled against. But Breavman fails to realize that he himself is included in this aphorism and embodies the very same contradictions as those he admonishes. He sees himself as an alienated and

therefore authentic artist, but his reaction upon arriving at the summer camp proves that he has no qualms about travestying his art to seduce women: "All the girls were very plain. And this was the joke. He knew what two months in the community would do. He'd be writing sonnets to all of them" (190).

Breavman embodies many such contradictions, and as a result, his complex relation with the past seems to indicate that he both embraces and contradicts Mailer's assertions concerning the importance of the present. As I have previously discussed, Breavman considers mobility as a way to remain constantly in the present by fleeing the past and avoiding the future altogether. But his dissociation from the past is also revealed through the narrative's recurrent film imagery of his childhood and adolescence. In one of the first chapters of the book, Breavman is watching a family movie and stops the film to study his mother, only to destroy the image: "her face is eaten by a spreading orange-rimmed stain as the film melts. [...] Breavman is mutilating the film in his efforts at history" (11). Though this destruction is not deliberate, its very occurrence demonstrates Breavman's inability to come to terms with the history of his family. Entire episodes of his childhood are dissociated from memory by a "black-edged picture frame" or rendered foreign and thus difficult to grasp because the film in which they are replayed is "overexposed" (35,104). Even his first sexual experience with Norma is recounted through the lens of a voyeuristic camera: "The camera takes them from faraway, moves through the forest [...]. Sudden close-up of her body part by part [...]. Camera searches her jacket for the shape of breasts" (76). The objectification of the lens dissociates Breavman from these memories, separates him from his own past. But through this dissociation, Breavman also acquires some control over the history these images

illustrate. As Stephen Scobie points out, "film is a medium which offers a very complete control of time, and Cohen introduces it several times to show Breavman attempting a similar control over his perceptions of himself" (Leonard 81). Thus if Cohen uses ironic detachment to uphold a distance between himself and his protagonist, Breavman the autobiographer attempts to dissociate himself from Breavman the adolescent or young adult through filmic technique, which enables him to shape, focus and select memories. Among other things, film enables Breavman either to diminish or exaggerate the importance of past events.

There is a contradiction inherent in Breavman's detachment from the past. The mere fact that his memories are expressed through film lends them a visible, enduring quality. Accordingly, a tension emerges between Breavman's simultaneous objectification and attempt at the preservation of history. Although his background is a source of oppression, Breavman thinks of himself as the upholder of sacred childhood memories: "I'm the keeper. I'm the sentimental dirty old man in front of a classroom of children" (Favorite 73). Consequently, when he meets Lisa as an adult, he is the only one to remember so vividly the intensity of their childish relationship: "I wish you remembered everything. [...] I don't want to forget anyone I was ever connected with" (115-6). In a way, Breavman's attachment to certain specific details of his past seems to compensate for his tendency towards alienation. The memories of his connection to other individuals become increasingly important as his growing isolation makes communication with others more difficult. This is also what prompts Breavman to accept work as a counselor at the Jewish summer camp. It offers him a chance to become reacquainted with what he remembers of Krantz, for Breavman refuses to acknowledge

that their friendship is weakening as Krantz becomes an adult and begins to conform to "society-as-it-is" (Morley, Immoral 77). Thus, as it is impossible for Breavman to sleep with Lisa the child, so it is impossible for him to connect to Krantz as the childhood friend, for unlike Breavman, Krantz's relationship to the past is quite clear: "I remember everything, Breavman. But I can't live in it" (Favorite 213). Krantz's comment reveals how little he understands his friend. As he asserts his status as a conforming adult, Krantz believes childhood to be no more than a source of good memories; he resents what he believes is Breavman's attempt to re-create it. But Breavman does not wish to live in the past. Rather, his desire is to preserve the intensity of their bond, indeed the intensity of living which he believes only a child can experience. The failure of their communication is proof that they have, in fact, stopped "interpreting the world for one another" (113).

Breavman's ambiguous position towards his personal history is perhaps best explained by his status as an artist. Stephen Scobie remarks that "as an artist, he creates a version of his own world which is separate from the reality, so that he can be in control of it" (Leonard 80). This version, of course, includes the past, so that memories become the basis for works of art, the best example of which is Breavman's own stylized attempt at writing his autobiography. The same is true of the present; Breavman unsuccessfully attempts to control time in real life just as he does in his recollections. In New York, for instance, after seeing Shell for the first time, he makes no effort to find her; indeed, he releases the thought of her, assured that by his glance, her beauty has been guaranteed: "It was the very last time Breavman let go the past and hard promises which he could barely articulate. He did no writing. He suspended himself in the present" (Favorite 164). This may be his intention, but absolute stasis is not possible in life. It is, however, possible in

art. This is why Breavman loves the pictures of Henri Rousseau, "the way he stops time" in his illustration of violence and immobility (61). Inspired by Rousseau's capacity to control the passing of time, Breavman attempts to do the same with the people he encounters by treating them as works of art. As Michael Ondaatje observes, these individuals represent "his raw material and he uses and translates them constantly into art" (28).

Thus Breavman's vocation as an artist somewhat allows for his ambiguous attitude towards the past, present and future. I would also suggest, however, that it also represents a potential source of stability in Breavman's conflicting attitude towards autonomy, authenticity and alienation. Indeed, as my discussion in the introduction of the aesthetic perception demonstrates, the logical extension of Herbert Marcuse's argument is that the artist, because of his ability to engage with the play impulse, is more apt than any other individual to possess the freedom necessary to become both autonomous and authentic. Marcuse explains that the pleasure which accompanies aesthetic perception is in fact derived from our perception of the beauty of an object's "pure form" (161). The representation of this pure form is "the work (or rather the play) of *imagination*" (161 italics in original). The aesthetic imagination is thus not quite passive: "although sensuous and therefore receptive, the aesthetic imagination is creative: in a free synthesis of its own, it constitutes beauty" (161). Like the play impulse which fosters it, the aesthetic imagination is essentially an active force.

Marcuse writes that, like imagination, "the realm of aesthetics is essentially 'unrealistic': it has retained its freedom from the reality principle at the price of being ineffective in the reality" (157). Because aesthetics cannot "validate a reality principle,"

that is, cannot be applied to society as a whole, it is essentially an individualistic process and, Cohen suggests, requires a certain degree of seclusion. Solitude, however, is not necessarily alienation. In fact, Marcuse's conception of aesthetics, though it implies individualism, is rather a solution to alienation. But Breavman tends to conflate the notions of isolation and alienation, believing they are both necessary to fuel his artistic creation. Unable to cope with the normativity of his inclinations, Breavman believes he needs abnormal conditions to stimulate his creativity, a belief which, because it is indicative of a false mode of alienation, suggests his inability to achieve a state of autonomy through aesthetics. Cohen tracks the falseness of Breavman's belief and exemplifies it notably by setting up a parallel between Breavman's artistic ambitions and his ambition to manipulate people.

Breavman's aesthetic imagination is visible from an early age; his self-representation as an artist becomes clear in the novel's very first pages. When Bertha falls from the apple tree after Breavman repeatedly curses God, the latter simultaneously displays incredible callousness and artistic sensibility in being more concerned with the form of Bertha's body than her injury: "her bland Saxon face is further anesthetized by uncracked steel-rimmed glasses. A sharp bone of the arm has escaped the skin" (Favorite 15). Breavman's aesthetic imagination endeavours to represent Bertha's body as a pure form, and therefore as beautiful. But Breavman's concern with the beauty of Bertha's broken body is paralleled by his conviction that he is responsible for her fall: "Krantz, there's something special about my voice. [...] I can make things happen" (15-6). Breavman believes that because it is powerful enough to "make things happen," his voice can exert a form of control over others. His belief is such that he begins practicing

hypnosis. The game, played at first with the neighborhood dogs, climaxes with the hypnosis of the maid Heather, who, in a state of trance, offers him his first experience of the sexual kind. When, three hours later, he hears her laughing hysterically, he panics: "I've driven her insane" (56). The situation is remedied and soon after, Heather runs off with a deserting soldier, although Breavman still likes to think "that she is somewhere in the world, not fully awake, sleeping under his power" (57).

Thus Breavman, even before he is old enough to find his poetic voice, believes in his ability to "make things happen," to move others, both literally and figuratively. The need to control that he exhibits by practicing hypnosis as an adolescent foreshadows the need to control interpersonal relations he feels as a young man. It is the same need that generates his artistic creativity. Indeed, Breavman is conscious that particular situations such as the hypnotism session with Heather contribute greatly to his art. Breavman acknowledges this contribution by designating Heather, or rather her absence, as an artistic inspiration: "Where are you, Heather, why didn't you stay to introduce me into the warm important rites? I might have gone straight. Poemless, a baron of industry [...] (57). Breavman's desire to control people is indicative of his attraction to power, which proves that he in fact conforms to the dominant power-oriented ethics of society. Breavman's attempt to achieve a state of autonomy fails because he is unable to generate enough psychological fortitude to sustain it. His need to control isolates him from society and proves that he unable to function autonomously within a social setting. Paradoxically, though Breavman is an artist, he is unable to simply imagine the isolation he feels he needs to create; he must literally experience it.

Tamara, Breavman's college girlfriend, represents another example of the parallel between his desire to control and his desire to create. As the relationship between them becomes more serious, Breavman finds that his potential for creation is severely diminished: "I can't make things happen so easily these days, alas. Things happen to *me*. I couldn't even hypnotize you last night" (84 italics in original). With this realization, Breavman attempts to leave Tamara, but the thought of her beauty constantly brings him back: "Commitment was oppressive but the thought of flesh-loneliness was worse" (89). Like the fantasized "Chinese mystics living in thatched huts," Breavman needs the sexual contact, but rejects the relationship which, he finds, suffocates him and thus impedes his creative process. The room in which he meets Tamara becomes the room "where he couldn't make things happen" as he meditates on the "miles he would never cover because he could never abandon this bed" (89, 98). Breavman resents his relationship with Tamara because it makes him feel powerless; it keeps him from exercising the same control he possesses through art: "I want to touch people like a magician, to change them or hurt them, leave my brand, make them beautiful" (105). Considering this last comment, it is important to note how often Breavman observes women while they sleep, as if he is unable to cope with their human agency. It is also highly significant that to end their relationship, Breavman asks Tamara to read a short story. The story's two protagonists are named Breavman and Tamara, though they both speak like Breavman himself. Their appearance in the short story indicates that only by substituting the real Tamara for a fictional Tamara does Breavman gain the distance he needs and the control he desires.

Shortly after his rupture with Tamara, Breavman moves to New York, where he meets and falls in love with Shell. Breavman's stable relationship with Shell causes him to experience what he considers the temptation of conformity. Though this experience enables him to pull himself out of a state of self-imposed alienation in order to join the social world, Breavman finds himself incapable of functioning as an autonomous artistic individual. Throughout their relationship, the young man continues writing poetry, but his poetry has become "propaganda," a way to convince Shell that she is beautiful (170). Breavman sees his poetry as a way to "give her back her body" (170). He moves in with her, finds work running an elevator. He develops a conforming alter ego, a "robot lover," a "skilful product, riveted with care, whom Breavman wouldn't have minded being himself. [...] The lover, being planned so well, had a life of his own and often left Breavman behind" (171). Breavman no longer feels alienated from the society which promotes such relationships, but he now believes he has succumbed to a much more serious form of alienation: alienation from himself. Breavman is convinced that his identity as an artist is in danger of giving way entirely to the identity of the lover, his "deputy" (173). What emerges from this self-estrangement is the sense that Breavman believes the artist and the lover to be irreconcilable. Stephen Scobie notes that for Breavman, "there seems to be an absolute choice between the roles of artist and lover; they cannot be combined" (Leonard 87). The lover is Breavman's social persona, the one who can conform and become integrated. The artist, according to Breavman, needs to feel alienated from society, but not from himself, to cultivate his artistic sensibility. Therefore, Breavman's relationship with Shell, because it is "capable of satisfying him in the real world" (Ondaatje 31), represents a threat to his artistic integrity.

The temptation of staying with Shell is strong, but Breavman nevertheless remains convinced that by doing so, he would be "abandoning something more austere and ideal, even though he laughed at it, something which could apply her beauty to streets, traffic, mountains, ignite the landscape – which he could master if he were alone" (Favorite 176). The withdrawal Breavman feels is necessary to reach this ideal becomes clear when Shell surprises Breavman while he is writing at night. Taken aback, Breavman accidentally scrapes skin from her cheek with his pencil: " 'I thought I…' He stopped. 'You thought you were alone!' she cried in pain" (177). Shell's pain is not only physical; she is aware that Breavman the artist can never be as close to her as he is to his art. The space between them is further evidenced as Breavman proceeds to record their dialogue when Shell falls asleep again. Thus Breavman the artist, though he is incapable of taking part in the relationship between Shell and his doppelgänger, is nevertheless able to profit from their rupture. As Breavman the lover fades away, Breavman the artist understands the necessity of leaving Shell: "And now he could taste the guilt that would nourish him if he left her" (179). This guilt will not nourish Breavman; it will nourish his art. In addition, Breavman believes the renewed alienated feeling he will inevitably experience will fuel his creativity, which he feels is the only way to remain authentic.

It is clear that Cohen's conception of the artist does not quite match Breavman's own. Though he acknowledges the pressure of alienation, autonomy and authenticity on the artist figure, Cohen does not seem to endorse Breavman's behavior. Rather, following Shell and Breavman's separation, Cohen portrays Breavman as a selfish being who manipulates the ones he loves in order stimulate his creativity. While he does not deny Breavman's gift for aesthetic perception and creativity, Cohen, unlike Breavman himself,

understands the consequences of Breavman's actions and deliberately registers Shell's justified resentment: "Lawrence, you can't treat people like this" (230). In refusing either to commit to her or reject her definitely, Breavman deeply wounds Shell: "Lawrence had done exactly the same thing as Gordon – the letters, everything!" (226). Breavman's treatment of Shell, which he believes is justified by his art, thereby emerges as an example of Breavman's narcissism which in fact actively produces rather than merely endures the irreconcilability between artistic creativity and social life. Breavman interprets his love life as conformist because he considers his art more important than his relationship with Shell, not because it is intrinsically so.

Cohen's indictment of Breavman's desire to cut off all significant social ties is evident most specifically through his ironic portrayal of the instances in which Breavman's alienation, or rather display of alienation, becomes a mockery of his status as an artist. When he first enters the literary society of Montreal, Breavman makes a show of non-conformity, a false but socially expected artistic identity:

> He gave up conversation. He merely quoted himself. He could maintain an oppressive silence at a dinner-table to make the lovely daughter of the house believe he was brooding over her soul. [...] The world was being hoaxed by a disciplined melancholy. [...] The whole enterprise of art was a calculated display of suffering. (106)

It is clear that through this sort of behaviour, Breavman is being neither authentic nor autonomous, as he is indeed conforming to what he perceives others to enjoy in him as anti-conformist. The irony of the tone, though it may be ascribed to Breavman the autobiographer, is in fact Cohen's own, and prompts Stephen Scobie to write that

Breavman "creates roles for himself and stands back to watch himself playing them (while Cohen stands farther back, to watch him watching). The most fully developed of these roles is that of the artist" (Leonard 78). Though Breavman later loses these false pretensions, he nevertheless remains convinced that his role as an artist demands the isolation and alienation he imposes on himself. Cohen's indictment of Breavman's belief becomes clear when the latter romanticizes Martin's death to reaffirm his vocation as an artist: "All I know is that something prosaic, the comfortable world, has been destroyed irrevocably, and something important guaranteed" (Favorite 225). Breavman is alluding to the death of Martin, but there is no doubt that this important "something" is the very essence of his art. Thus Breavman is somehow convinced that Martin's accident signals a new beginning. He writes to Shell: "I think I love you, but I love the idea of a clean slate more" (225). Clearly, this statement is unnecessarily cruel, and shows to what extent Breavman believes in his need for isolation.

Cohen's treatment of Breavman, then, is often ironic. But it does not necessarily ensue that he disavows the narcissistic artistic figure entirely. On the contrary, the very last page of the novel indicates that though his efforts are often misguided or misinformed, Breavman's aesthetic imagination holds the potential to help him counter alienation with autonomy. As the novel ends, Breavman is utterly alone. His mother retains only brief moments of lucidity, he has left Shell and his fight with Krantz has effectively ended their friendship. Though Breavman attempts to forge a bond of friendship with Tamara, it is a failure. Yet Breavman's last thought is, significantly, the memory of a game. Much has been said about the symbolic value of Lisa's favorite game, but perhaps the nature of the game is less important than its mere presence in

Breavman's thoughts. Indeed, the game illustrates the artist's inclination towards the play impulse, by which Marcuse describes "the play of life itself, beyond want and external compulsion – the manifestation of an existence without fear and anxiety, and thus the manifestation of freedom itself" (171). Breavman's penchant for games is evident throughout The Favorite Game: as children, Breavman and Lisa play their "great game, the Soldier and the Whore;" as an adolescent, Breavman turns to Krantz as the only person he can "joke with;" and later, as a counselor at summer camp, Breavman improvises a dance ritual with Anne, which leaves them "screaming for laughter" (28,106,212). But Breavman's propensity to indulge in play takes on a particular significance as a conclusion to the novel. The goal of Lisa's game, like the objective of the play impulse, is beauty: "of course you would have done your best to land in some crazy position, arms and legs sticking out. Then we walked away, leaving a lovely white field of blossom-like shapes with footprint stems" (234). Likewise, the manifestation of freedom inherent in the play impulse is echoed in the liberating feeling achieved when Bertha let go and you "flew over the snow" (234).

Thus by revealing that he is susceptible to the play impulse, Breavman also demonstrates his longing for freedom and beauty. In his analysis of Marcuse's engagement with art and alienation, Charles Reitz writes that "for Marcuse the beautiful and pure forms of the aesthetic imagination may give humanity a genuinely philosophical awareness of liberation, gratification, and goodness as universally valid truths" (104). Because, as an artist, these aims dictate his conduct, Breavman is more likely to become an autonomous and authentic individual. Indeed, the young man already possesses a notion of autonomy, which he has acquired through the experience of belonging to a

minority. The nerve of failure required to resist power and the success ethos is perhaps not exactly the same as the freedom from surplus repression which Marcuse believes the play impulse to entail, but they are similar in that they both represent an answer to alienation. Breavman's desire for freedom, a prerequisite for autonomy, is informed by his vocation as an artist and in him we thus witness the possibility of art being "educationally and politically enlisted against alienation" (Reitz 105). If Breavman has strayed and betrayed his integrity, there is nevertheless hope that because, as an artist, beauty is his purpose, Breavman is likely to remain faithful at least to his own aesthetic perception.

Chapter Three: Beautiful Losers

In 1966, shortly after Beautiful Losers was published, critic Robert Fulford wrote that Cohen's novel was "the most revolting book ever written in Canada" (qtd. in "Beautiful"). The opinions about the novel were divided; some reviewers hailed Cohen as the new James Joyce while others, like Fulford, balked at what they considered literary fraud or, in terms more appropriate to the novel's tone, "verbal masturbation" ("Beautiful"). While the novel's experimental form and explicit content may have shocked some of its initial readers, Beautiful Losers enjoyed immense popularity from the date of its publication until the mid-seventies. One possible reason for this intense but short-lived success lies in the novel's problematization of contemporary issues. Beautiful Losers is a product of its time and reflects, in its content and form, the concerns of the counterculture, such as the threat of alienation and the promise of sexual emancipation. This engagement with contemporary social issues prompted Sandra Djwa to write, in 1967, that she considered Leonard Cohen to be "more important in Canadian writing for the contemporary movement which he represents than for the intrinsic merit of his work to date" (104). Beautiful Losers is reflective of the historical and cultural context which helped create it. It is, like Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" or William Burrough's The Naked Lunch, a product of the counterculture.

Because Beautiful Losers is so representative of the concerns and preoccupations of the postwar era, its major themes can best be illuminated through the lens of mid-century thought. Particularly relevant to my examination of Cohen's second novel are the writings of Herbert Marcuse and David Riesman. I undertake to demonstrate that through its repudiation of reason, Beautiful Losers seeks to portray a shift back from the reality

principle to the pleasure principle, but without the mediating function of aesthetics. The reality principle, ruled by reason, represents the basis of civilization as its repression of individual desire allows for social unity. Cohen's novel depicts the possibility of reverting to the pleasure principle, which encourages the instant gratification of desire. This project does not represent a socially viable endeavour. It is developed specifically for one of the novel's characters. Ultimately, the project succeeds. Reason is effectively discarded in favour of sensuousness. But as the end of the novel makes clear, this new system, though it leads to freedom from repression, does not imply freedom from alienation. Instead, the rule of the pleasure principle allows the novel's main character to sink deeper into alienation, which here constitutes a mere step towards the complete loss of individuality. In this context, the concept of autonomy is revealed as impossible and, perhaps more importantly, irrelevant for the novel's characters. Though he seems to endorse at least partly the establishment of this new system, Cohen nevertheless illustrates how the freedom of the pleasure principle, like the repression of the reality principle, can lead to alienation and, ultimately, to the dissolution of personality and the destruction of the individual.

Though it does not offer a coherent narrative, Cohen's novel presents the interactions of three main characters. The unnamed narrator of the book's first section is a scholar, a specialist of the A- tribe, who is obsessed with the life of Catherine Tekakwitha. His charismatic and manipulative friend F. is simultaneously a mentor and a rival vis-à-vis Edith, the narrator's Native North American wife. The novel itself is divided into three parts. The first section is narrated in the first person by F.'s friend, whom I will, like Stephen Scobie, refer to as "I" (Leonard 97). As the novel begins, we

discover that the narrator is alone and mourns the death of F. and Edith. The first section emerges as a collage of different literary genres, from comic book advertisements to poetry and song, from articles on phrenology to excerpts of a Greek-English phrasebook. Essentially, "I" attempts to write the story of Catherine Tekakwitha but his efforts are consistently thwarted as he inevitably reverts to the memories that help explicate the intricate relation uniting him to F. and Edith. The second section consists of a letter from F., written in the second person and addressed to "I". The letter is meant to be delivered to "I" five years after F.'s death and represents his "last *written* communication" (Beautiful 155 italics in original). Finally, the third section of Beautiful Losers recounts, in the third person, how "I" and F. merge to form a being who transforms into a "vision of All Chances At Once" and, eventually, into a "movie of Ray Charles" (258).

This tripartite structure seems to indicate that Cohen is not only thematically but also formally gesturing towards the disappearance of his main character. The first section establishes the subjectivity of the protagonist. The narrator retells the "History of Them All" as he recalls it, not as it objectively occurred, and this form of narration necessarily offers the reader a slanted version of the facts. There remains a tension, however, within this very section. The narrator controls the point of view from which the story is told but he is denied a name, a basic component of one's identity. This initial cleft is symptomatic of the subject's dissolution, which the novel continues to foreshadow. Indeed, with the second section, the reader witnesses a shift from a first person narration to a second person narration, as "I" moves from subject to object. Physically, "I" outlives his friend but F.'s letter appears later (both in the chronological sequence of events and in the novel itself) than "I"'s memoir section. Both "I" and F. are then supplanted by the epilogue's

third-person narrator, whom I believe to be Cohen himself. The novel's progressive shifts in perspective thus appear indicative of the growing weakness of the novel's subject, which culminates in his physical termination.

It is difficult to assess Cohen's valuation of the world he's created and portrayed; in fact, it is difficult to assess whether Cohen understands its many implications. One thing is certain, however. Like many countercultural works, Beautiful Losers is, at its core, an attack on reason. The very form of the novel, its incoherent chronology and its almost non-existent plot, seem to support this claim. But more than anything, F.'s appeal to "connect nothing" seems to represent an urgent plea against rationality (17). Douglas Barbour believes that this aphorism represents the main argument of Cohen's novel as it contests our "sense of man as animal rationis, attacks rationality and logic themselves" (136). Yet no reader of Beautiful Losers can resist connecting the recurring motifs and symbols of the novel, the most notable of which are the telephone dance, the goddess Isis, the theme of games and, of course, "ordinary eternal machinery" (Beautiful 35). The novel, then, seems to convey conflicting messages. Either Cohen disavows his character and believes in the necessity to "connect" everything or he sides with F. and is, in a way, tricking his reader into establishing connections that do not exist. There is a third possibility. I believe Cohen attempts to draw our attention to the recurring images and symbols in order to communicate his message more clearly. The message is not exactly "connect nothing". Rather, Cohen entreats his reader to overthrow what he considers the repressive nature of reason, which is the faculty that compels us to constantly search for connections.

By attempting to convey this message, Cohen shows how much his work is indebted to the writings of Herbert Marcuse. As I discussed briefly in my introductory chapter, Marcuse believes that the occurrence of alienation is due, in part, to the rift between sensuousness and reason which enables the latter to subjugate the former. According to Marcuse, reason's tyranny over the senses is repressive and therefore causes a being to be alienated. Marcuse believes the aesthetic function to represent a potential mediating force in reestablishing sensuousness as a ruling faculty:

> The discipline of aesthetics installs the order of sensuousness as against the order of reason. Introduced into the philosophy of culture, this notion aims at a liberation of the senses which, far from destroying civilization, would give it a firmer basis and would greatly enhance its potentialities. Operating through a basic impulse – namely, the play impulse – the aesthetic function would "abolish compulsion, and place man, both morally and physically, in freedom". (165-6)

To Marcuse, the reinstatement of sensuousness through aesthetics represents a possible solution to the problem of alienation as it may lead to freedom from the repression engendered by reason.

In the novel's first section, "I" attempts to come to terms with the suicide of Edith and the death of F. An important part of this process takes place as "I" tries to clarify the nature of his relationship with F. The latter considers himself "a born teacher" and a Moses figure to both "I" and Edith (Beautiful 158, 178). "I" considers F. a friend, a lover and a "rotten wife-fucker," at times willing to believe everything he says and at other times furious with what he considers F.'s "cowardly guru shit" (9,26). One undeniable

aspect of the dynamics which unite them, however, lies in the recurring image of Oscotarach. The Native American legend of Oscotarach is mentioned initially by Catherine Tekakwitha's uncle as he prepares her for his eventual death. Catherine's uncle recounts that when he dies, his spirit will begin a long journey towards a bark hut: "In the hut lives Oscotarach, the Head-Piercer. I will stand beneath him and he will remove the brain from my skull. This he does to all the skulls which pass by. It is the necessary preparation for the Eternal Hunt" (121). After moving into the tree-house bequeathed by F., "I" begins to understand the basis of F.'s teachings: "Is this treehouse the hut of Oscotarach? F., are you the Head-Piercer?" (141). In his letter to "I", F. offers an answer: "Ask yourself. Was I your Oscotarach? I pray that I was. The surgery is deep in progress, darling. I am with you" (196).

The figure of Oscotarach stands as a symbol for the breakdown of logic. His removal of the brain, the seat of reason, is a figurative rendering of F.'s project for "I", which consists in bringing him to embrace sensuousness instead of reason. "I" is a scholar and as such, must depend on the use of reason for his research. But as Douglas Barbour writes, "life overwhelms ["I"] as long as he insists upon trying to organize it all logically, rationally" (136). "I"'s attempt to write the story of Catherine Tekakwitha is often stumped and his writing is constantly interrupted by his own association of ideas: "Somewhere in my research I learned about Tekakwitha's spring. It was a Jesuit speaking sweetly of it in a schoolbook. Il y a longtemps que je t'aime" (Beautiful 71). The writing is, much like the narrator himself literally is, constipated. By using "any damn method to keep ["I"] hysterical," F. aims to make him understand that sensuousness, not reason, should (dis)organize his life (59). His success is recorded in the novel's first section

which, as it unfolds, reveals that "I" increasingly turns away from reason. His writing becomes almost a stream of consciousness and his logic breaks down: "The King of France was a man. I was a man. Therefore I was the King of France. F.! I'm sinking again" (83).

F.'s effort to turn "I" away from reason represents the basis of his project. The project itself consists in shifting from the oppressive reality principle to the liberating pleasure principle by establishing a new, decentralized and therefore less repressive, sexual system. In order to achieve this, however, F. first inscribes himself in the existing social organization. Through "I"'s recollections, we learn that F., though he often appears a marginal figure, in fact wields both political and economic power. "I" distinctly remembers the day F. "bought the factory, eight hundred thousand dollars," thereby identifying him as a member of the capitalist class whose "financial page" celebrates "the brilliance of [his] manipulations (43-5). F. is also a Member of Parliament, a function which demonstrates that he is an important part of the political system (96). Furthermore, F. emerges as an individual whose mental and physical powers extend and come to control physical bodies. A self-made man, F. "gave Charles Axis fifteen minutes a day in the privacy of his room" and developed a perfect body (77). In addition, F. claims to be the "Pygmalion" responsible for curing Edith's acne and sculpting her body: "Her buttocks were my masterpiece. Call her nipples an eccentric extravagance, but the bum was perfect" (142,176,195). In a way, F. comes to represent the different systems which make up society and threaten individuality. His acquisition of the factory, a symbol of alienated labour, not only situates him within the capitalist system but identifies him as a promoter of it. Similarly, as a Member of Parliament, F. belongs to an elite group of

individuals who establish the laws for the populace. The power he exerts over his and Edith's body is a concrete example of the influence he possesses as an operator within the broader social organization.

F., however, does not truly represent the social organization; rather, he represents the disintegration or corruption of this organization. He acquires a factory, but his admitted intention is to "Come in, now and then. Sweep a little. Screw on the shiny tables. Play with the machines" (45). In other words, F. becomes a proprietor in order to let the factory collapse and fall to dust. Similarly, although he is an elected official, he is a disreputable politician, a "thorn in the side of Parliament" (142). Ultimately, F. is placed in a hospital for the criminally insane after he destroys the statue of Queen Victoria on Sherbrooke Street. His parting words to "I" reveal the motivation behind such an act: "it is only a symbol, but the State deals in symbols. Tomorrow night I will blow that symbol to smithereens" (143). The statue, a symbol of Canada's constitutional monarchy, becomes the symbol of the political system itself and the repression F. feels it engenders.

For Stephen Scobie, the concept of the broken or failing system is central to Beautiful Losers as it represents the focus of F.'s teachings. Scobie draws attention to the importance of the System Theatre which, missing two letters, has become the stem Theatre:

> I take this to be the central "signal" of the novel. Systems in themselves are useless unless they are broken, but once they are broken the "stem" appears. [...] The stem is always present inside the system, once it has failed. The book reviews various systems, and as each one breaks,

> something is eclectically picked up from it: some possibility for growth. [...] The major systems which are reviewed are those of religion, sexuality, politics, history and that general area which Dave Godfrey has called the banal [...]. (Leonard 101)

The argument is convincing, but I wish to suggest that Cohen's novel goes beyond the mere destruction of systems to suggest more than a simple "possibility for growth". It is not so much that the stem carries the potential for growth; rather, the stem possesses the capacity to reconstruct itself and become a new, less repressive system. Thus if F. emerges as a catalyst in the destruction of different systems, it is also clear that he is attempting to put forth his own conception of what a system should entail. This is what makes F. simultaneously magnetic and dangerous. Cohen portrays him as a charismatic man whose excesses, perhaps because they are humorously described, are captivating rather than condemnable. As a result, the reader is almost inclined to adopt a line of thought similar to the one Lionel Trilling critiques his contemporaries for adopting. Indeed, the reader is tempted to see F. as one who is taken by "holy madness" and consequently possesses "some sort of lost truth" (Trilling 169-70). But Cohen's endorsement of F. is only partial. The destruction of F., along with the other characters, seems to indicate that Cohen understands the risks of promoting a system in which the individual is free from the repression of society but still a slave to his own desires.

If it is indeed true that "new systems are forced on the world by men who simply cannot bear the pain of living with what is," then F. is perhaps the most tormented character in Cohen's novel, more anguished than even the narrator or Edith (Beautiful 58). His desire to forge a new system stems from a profound dissatisfaction with things as

they are: "I want a country to break in half so men can learn to break their lives in half. [...] I want the State to doubt itself seriously. I want the Police to become a limited company and fall with the stock market. I want the Church to have divisions and fight on both sides of Movies" (199). F. is obviously alluding to the collapse of the political, economic and religious systems which structure Canadian society, but as the quasi-pornographic nature of the novel makes clear, the system over which he obsesses the most is the sexual system. Thus F. attempts to force a new sexual organization upon his friend, one whose aim it is to free the individual from centralized repression. In this sense, F.'s new system is in fact ruled by what Herbert Marcuse would refer to as the pleasure principle.

In Eros and Civilization, Marcuse discusses the shift from the pleasure principle to the reality principle, emphasizing the fact that this shift is not a unique event but rather occurs with every human being. Indeed, Marcuse writes that children adhere naturally to the pleasure principle until "submission to the reality principle is enforced by the parents and other educators" (15). Thus the child's sexual impulses, the most natural forms of sexuality, are "polymorphous-perverse" and intrinsically related to play, as they possess no temporal or spatial limitations (44). They eventually become organized, shaping the child into a social being, for "the organization of sexuality reflects the basic features of the performance principle and its organization of society" (44). The performance principle Marcuse mentions here refers to the socio-economic system we understand as capitalism. Like the repressive society in which it is spawned, sexuality under the performance principle becomes centralized through the "establishment of genital supremacy" and thus achieves a socially necessary desexualization of the body: "the

libido becomes concentrated in one part of the body, leaving most of the rest free for use as the instrument of labour" (44). In other words, capitalism demands the body's desexualization, with the exception of the genitals, which thus become the sole locus of sexual energy, or libido. As previously discussed, Marcuse proposes either the "non-repressive sublimation of the libido" or the mediating power of the aesthetic function as a possible answer to alienation, for he does not believe in the return to the pleasure principle as a socially viable solution (190).

A sexual system ruled by the pleasure principle, however, seems to be the core of F.'s project:

> All parts of the body are erotogenic. Assholes can be trained with whips and kisses, that's elementary. Pricks and cunts have become monstrous! [...] All flesh can come! Don't you see what we have lost? Why have we abdicated so much pleasure to that which lives in our underwear? Orgasms in the shoulder! Knees going off like firecrackers! Hair in motion! (Beautiful 34)

Like Marcuse's child, F. does not believe that sexuality is a teleological process in which orgasm or procreation is the ultimate goal but rather, that polymorphous pleasure is an end in itself. F.'s avowed intention is to bring about the fall of "genital imperialism," a sexual structure which Marcuse specifically refers to as a pre-requisite for the proper operation of the performance principle and its inevitable alienated labour (Beautiful 34). F.'s project, then, though it is expressed in terms of society, is not a public project. It is applicable only to intimate or interpersonal relations. His sexual system, limited to "I", Edith and himself, would necessarily entail grave socioeconomic repercussions if applied

on a wider scale or adopted by a significant number of individuals. Note, for example, that for all its extreme sexual content, Beautiful Losers portrays only barren sexuality; oral, anal or masturbatory, sex in Cohen's novel never aims at procreation.

An important aspect of F.'s project is related to play. I have discussed Marcuse's conception of the play impulse in the previous chapter, but it also applies here to F.'s promotion of the pleasure principle. Marcuse writes that "in a genuinely humane civilization, the human existence will be play rather than toil, and man will live in display rather than need" (171). This concept is taken up by Norman O. Brown in Life Against Death as he stresses the importance of play not only for the child but also, and perhaps more importantly, for the adult: "Play is the essential character of activity governed by the pleasure-principle rather than the reality principle" (32). F.'s project thus involves the development or reinstatement of play as an essential human activity. F.'s intention to visit his newly purchased factory in order to "play with the machines" acquires additional meaning as it provides a hint of how radical F.'s new system is (Beautiful 45). Indeed, he does not wish to modify labour in order to infuse it with a game-related quality; rather, he plans to completely replace alienated labour with play.

F. originally develops the "telephone dance" with Edith as a game (33). This game represents a concrete example of decentralized pleasure. F. describes the details of the dance: "We dug our index fingers in each other's ears. I won't deny the sexual implications. [...] Her ears folded around my throbbing fingers" (34-5). Here the interaction between F. and Edith is suggestive of polymorphous perversity as ears and fingers become erogenous parts of the body. Norman O. Brown writes that the polymorphous perverse components of infantile sexuality include "the pleasure of

touching, of seeing, of muscular activity, and even the passion for pain" (30). Accordingly, F. and Edith invent the telephone dance in a spontaneous fashion; their excitement is akin to the uninhibited physical contact which takes place between children. Indeed, this very scene cannot fail but bring to mind the character of Martin in The Favorite Game, who sticks "his fingers in his ears for no apparent reason" (200).

The telephone dance, which eventually leads F. to understand the world as "ordinary eternal machinery," demonstrates the value of play as a fundamental component of the human experience (Beautiful 35). Far from being limited to children, play is an "essential mode of activity of a free or of a perfected or of a satisfied humanity" (Brown 34). The Iroquois who, though they are not quite idealized by Cohen, represent Beautiful Losers' best example of a free and satisfied people, use the telephone dance to avoid hearing the teachings of the Jesuits. When they withdraw their fingers from their ears, when they stop playing, they become alienated: "a wall of silence was thrown up between the forest and the hearth, and the old people gathered at the priest's hem shivered with a new kind of loneliness. [...] Like children who listen in vain to the sea in plastic shells they sat bewildered" (Beautiful 87). F. understands and emphasizes the importance of play as an essential part of life: "games are nature's most beautiful creation. All animals play games, and the truly Messianic vision of the brotherhood of creatures must be based on the idea of the game" (31). It is thus no great wonder that F.'s teachings are imparted to "I" almost solely through games, simulations and staged situations. As a result, F.'s greatest declaration of love to "I" is an invitation to play: "Play with me, old friend" (159). This appeal is echoed by Catherine Tekakwitha, the object of "I"'s research and desire, as she lies in agony and utters one last prayer: "O

God, show me that the Ceremony belongs to Thee. Reveal to your servant a fissure in the Ritual. Change Thy World with the jawbone of a broken Idea. O my Lord, play with me" (220). Her reference to change spawned by a "broken idea" harkens back to F.'s project of establishing a new system. However, the most noteworthy part of Catherine's prayer is her desire for God to play with her, a desire with clear sexual overtones. Play, then, is an essential component of the new sexual system because it is sexual without being teleological. Achieving what F. aims for so ardently, play succeeds in leading "the fuck away from mutual dialing" (191). In other words, games facilitate the decentralization of sexuality by stimulating polymorphous perversity.

Certainly, F.'s sexual project cannot be established without difficulty. "I" is at times particularly reluctant to embrace his mentor's preaching; he often loses patience when confronted with what he calls F.'s "mystical shit" and initially believes F. has "ruined [his] life with [F.'s] experiments" (8,16). "I" is unable to come to terms with decentralized pleasure and complains to F. about his conjugal relation with Edith, lamenting the fact that his wife's kisses are too "loose, somehow unspecific, as if her mouth couldn't choose where to stay" (25). In his obsessive desire for Edith to perform fellatio, however, "I" fails to realize that he has already adopted at least some of F.'s tenets. Indeed, Marcuse writes that "by virtue of their revolt against the performance principle in the name of the pleasure principle, the perversions show a deep affinity to phantasy" which represents an activity completely isolated from reality and therefore ruled by the pleasure principle only (45). Phantasy is exactly what "I" repeatedly indulges in as he attempts to write about Catherine Tekakwitha, digressing incessantly to address her or to describe in excessive detail her sexual sensations. As the first chapter

progresses, "I" becomes more inarticulate and scattered, as phantasy increasingly encroaches upon his reality. This transition is evidenced by the progressive collapse of "I"'s sentence structure. Though his thoughts are often jumbled, "I"'s syntax is initially logical. Towards the end of his narrative, however, the incoherence of his thoughts is matched by the incoherence of his written word: "Kateri Tekakwitha calling you, calling you, calling you testing 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 my poor unelectric head calling you loud and torn 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 lost in needles of pine [...]" (Beautiful 144).

Significantly, sexual perversions occupy a significant place in Cohen's novel, and they are most often described in relation to phantasy. Perhaps the most obvious example of this occurs when F. narrates his adventure in Argentina with Edith. Here Edith, as a consequence of F.'s "meddling," finds she can no longer achieve orgasm (177). To help her, F. reads first a book on "Auto-Erotic practices" which, proving insufficient, is shortly followed by an account of Iroquois torture practices (179). The entire episode is extravagant to the point of grotesque and culminates as the waiter, Adolf Hitler, joins the couple for a bath, complete with human soap. In this episode, as Patricia Morley mentions, "nothing is sacred" (Immoral 90). Nothing is sacred because the whole scene occurs in the realm of phantasy, and therefore allows for complete freedom of the imagination. In this realm only can a vibrator develop a will of its own and Hitler become a sexualized individual. But F.'s appeal to "I" is to live life as if it were indeed phantasy. F. tells him: "You see, I have shown you *how it happens*, from style to style, from kiss to kiss" (Beautiful 194 italics in original). By describing Edith's eventual release through climax, F. has shown "I" how perversion not only happens but liberates, sheltered as it is

by phantasy. He has also demonstrated, however, how easily phantasy permeates its own frontier with reality.

Ultimately, however, F.'s system does not liberate the individual from the alienation born of repression. On the contrary, as "I" becomes a hermit in the bequeathed tree house, he begins to adhere more adamantly to F.'s doctrine, sinking deeper and deeper into alienation (both mental and social) until he comes full circle and experiences a complete annihilation of individuality. This progression of events echoes Lionel Trilling's argument about the countercultural desire for freedom from repression. Commenting on Marcuse's ideas, Trilling addresses what he considers a point of contention within Eros and Civilization. Marcuse envisions a world free from repression but, as Trilling points out, the repression that provokes a modification of the individual's impulses is a very personal experience, one which leaves scars and helps the individual retain a sphere of "private nonconformity" (Trilling 165). Thus, he argues, it is not alienation itself but the complete freedom from repression which ultimately makes "the person into an exchangeable function and the personality into an ideology" (Marcuse 232). In a world as it is envisioned by F., one's personality in fact fades away as individuals become interchangeable, like so many workers on the assembly line.

Cohen seems to share Trilling's point of view. For when "I" finally climbs down from the tree house, he has become one of the exchangeable figures which make up the protagonists of Beautiful Losers' last chapter. Thus "I" has become, as Stephen Scobie remarks, an "indistinguishable amalgam of 'I' and F." ("Magic" 108)[2]. The old man's hands are "burnt" from the repeated explosions of firecrackers, but he is also missing a

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[2] For brevity's sake, I will henceforth refer to this figure as IF. For a discussion of IF as a saint, or a "remote human possibility," see Stephen Scobie's article "Magic, Not Magician".

thumb, an injury which alludes to the one sustained by F. in the explosion of the Queen Victoria statue (Beautiful 256). Similarly, the female character who offers to drive him into town is also a composite of all the women portrayed in the novel. The figure is clearly Edith, who engages in a sexual relation with IF, but she is also the Egyptian Goddess Isis as she appears to F. during the Danish Vibrator episode. Certainly, she is Catherine Tekakwitha, "naked below the armrest" and sporting only a pair of "moccasins" (250-1). Scobie even argues that she is also the nurse Mary Voolnd because she is wearing white (Leonard 122). Here, all individuality has been lost and the characters, apart from the fact that they retain their gender, become completely interchangeable. The personality of "I", forged through the pain of his existence, has ceased to constitute a concrete aspect of his being.

Stephen Scobie writes that Cohen's novel "describe[s], and perhaps endorse[s] [...] the deliberate attempt to destroy one's own individuality" ("Magic" 106). In truth, the dissolution of "I"'s individuality has, to a certain extent, always been a part of F.'s project. He and Edith stage a fake car crash which takes place while the two men are masturbating. After the fact, F. enquires: "How about that second just before you were about to shoot? Did you sense the emptiness? Did you get the freedom?" (Beautiful 100). F. organizes the car crash in order for "I" to surrender to the irrationality of lust and fear. "I" believes he is going to die but F. knows the crash is without risk; he clearly takes an immense pleasure in manipulating his friend and imagining "I"'s fear. The car crash, though certainly more serious and intense than the telephone game, is nevertheless a game to F. Its theatrical quality underscores F.'s playfulness. Unlike F., however, "I" is

unable to achieve orgasm, an affirmation of individuality. F.'s manipulations have effectively weakened "I"'s subjectivity.

The vulnerability of "I"'s individuality becomes more apparent when "I" and F. join a demonstration of Quebecers protesting against the visit of Queen Elizabeth. Overcome by the general upheaval, "I" spontaneously and unreasonably exclaims: "Fuck the English!", though this indictment clearly includes himself (126). He becomes a "joyful particle" of the mass as he is engulfed in the crowd's sexual energy (127). Though "I" once again fails to achieve orgasm, F. insists that he has "passed the test" (131). F. is convinced that "I" has succeeded because he has momentarily forfeited any pretension to reason without being tricked or manipulated into doing so. In this state, "I" is able to take part in the decentralized sexual pleasure of the crowd. The narrator describes the scene:

> I swear that we were Plastic Man and Plastic Woman, because I seemed to be able to reach her everywhere, and she traveled through my underwear effortlessly. We began our rhythmical movements which corresponded to the very breathing of the mob, which was our family and the incubator of our desire. (128)

"I" is able to surrender to the pleasure principle and indulge in polymorphous perversity. His unity with the crowd enables him to feed off the sexual energy of others even though it does not ultimately lead to orgasm. But by doing this, "I" is significantly divested of his individuality. He loses himself as he becomes one with the mob and forgets that he is, after all, an Anglophone demonstrating in favour of a "Québec Libre" (125).

Thus "I"'s progression from reality principle to the pleasure principle is a step towards the loss of personality which F. seems to view as a form of transcendence. F. writes to his friend: "here is a plea based on my whole experience: do not be a magician, be magic" (175). In this sense, F. almost seems to be resorting to a Neoplatonist notion of alienation, which understands the condition as the process by which an individual passes beyond himself to become "submerged in God or in the One" in order to participate in "the fullness of infinity" (Rotenstreich 4-5). Thus F. urges "I" to "go beyond me," encouraging him also to go beyond his own self and thereby implying the existence of something beyond both of them (Beautiful 169). "I" himself supposes the existence of such an entity, as he repeatedly invokes God in his capitalized prayers: "O God, Your Morning Is Perfect. People Are Alive In Your World" (57). This invocation appears to contradict Stephen Scobie's argument, according to which, for "I", "there is no 'higher' cause for which the self is lost: the cause *is* the loss of self" ("Magic" 107 emphasis in original). As in the case of Catherine Tekakwitha, the reader supposes that "I"'s transcendence is in fact the moment in which he enters "the eternal machinery of the sky" (Beautiful 224). Yet there is something profoundly anticlimactic about "I"'s disintegration, as he quickly reassembles himself "into a movie of Ray Charles" (258). "I"'s performance is not a cognitive or psychic process by which he passes beyond his body; it is transubstantiation. The fact that he transforms himself into an entertainment medium (a movie) as well as a popular icon (Ray Charles), however, completely subverts any notion of God or the One. Rather, "I" is literally absorbed into the mass, into popular culture. He becomes a symbol of postwar society's destruction of individuality, be it through assimilation or alienation.

Significantly, all the secondary characters in Beautiful Losers also disintegrate or dissolve. Edith's body is crushed into an unidentifiable mess while F.'s flesh and brains become corrupt and rotten. Although her body is preserved in a perfect state, Catherine Tekakwitha appears to Anastasie "in a blaze of light, her lower body beneath the belt dissolved in the brilliance" (229). Finally, the A--- tribe, on which "I" is a respected "authority," has become almost extinct through incessant defeat (4). Thus all the characters, whether actively or passively, avoid having to come to terms with their relation to society. In this context, autonomy as it is understood by David Riesman ceases to be a viable option for the characters. Indeed, they do not have to navigate the line between alienation and conformity because they die or disappear. As Sandra Djwa remarks, they escape "the human predicament" (104). In Beautiful Losers, the loss of self within a social organization appears as the desired outcome for "I", one willed by the novel's prophet F. For all the figures, however, this dissolution of character appears not as a "voluntary loss of self for some higher cause," as Desmond Pacey argues, but as a great refusal of both individuality and community (88).

At this point, it is pertinent to note that all the major characters in Cohen's novel are orphans, a fact which, in a way, grants them a greater ease to break free from history. Edith is raised by foster Indian parents because her father and mother were "killed in an avalanche" (Beautiful 63). The singular friendship between "I" and F. begins during their shared stay in the orphanage (73). Catherine Tekakwitha, present only insofar as she is kept alive by those who tell her story, loses her family during the 1660 plague and is raised by her aunt and uncle (24). As orphans, the characters of Beautiful Losers do not possess the "internal psychic gyroscope" which motivates the inner-directed person and

which, Riesman explains, is "set going by the parents" ("Saving" 101). And yet they no longer love "society as only an orphan can" (Beautiful 108). One cannot argue that these characters are other-directed, as they never strive to "live up to the group's expectations and to wrest popularity from it" (Riesman, "Saving" 105). In fact, Edith, "I" and Catherine are depicted as living on the margin of society, never fully integrated yet never quite following a deep-rooted impetus. They never strive towards autonomy because they do not recognize themselves as social beings, as socially constituted individuals. Thus Catherine is rejected by her tribe for refusing to marry and subsequently runs away. But the religious community she joins also pressures her into wedlock. When faced with no other option, Catherine simply wastes away and dies. Similarly, Edith gravitates around "I" and F. but is never quite a part of the group, nor does she seem to possess a will of her own. She moves between the two friends like "a package of mud" until she commits suicide (Beautiful 231).

In the novel's first chapter, "I" casts himself as utterly alone, yet he retains a certain sense of self. The pain he feels following the loss of F. and Edith is real, and this endows him with personality: "His troubles with constipation, his masturbation, his narcissistic problems are all physical parallels of his mental state, his inability to get out what he wants to say" (Ondaatje 47). His complete withdrawal from society does not allow us to properly speak of autonomous behaviour, for autonomy is a state of being the individual must sustain within a social context. But in "I", we witness the struggle of a man to come to terms with the forces of reason and sensuousness and the intricate teachings of his friend, who seeks to direct him towards a specific mode of living. The self-consciousness he displays in questioning everything (his dedication to Catherine

Tekakwitha, his relationship with Edith, the meaning of F.'s maxims) proves that though he suffers, or perhaps because he suffers, "I" is showing signs of autonomous behaviour in debating whether to follow F.'s advice or not. "I"'s personality is evidenced through the first-person voice which narrates the novel's first Book. Certainly, the prose is bewildering and often verges on incomprehension but the mere fact that it is written from "I"'s perspective demonstrates that he is not yet IF, a third person construct. Though this may represent a certain display of individuality, however, it is clear that "I" ultimately forfeits any claim to autonomy by renouncing his condition as a social being.

Perhaps the character in Beautiful Losers who possesses the most potential to achieve a state of autonomy is F. Like Lawrence Breavman in The Favorite Game, F. sees himself as a magician. We can easily imagine F. appropriating one of Breavman's most revealing statements: "I want to touch people like a magician, to change them or hurt them, leave my brand, make them beautiful" (Favorite 105). F., like Breavman, wants to leave his mark and make "I" and Edith beautiful in failure. As Cohen's novel demonstrates, however, there is no clear artistic endeavour at the root of F.'s project. Certainly, insofar as F. self-consciously refers to himself as a magician, we cannot help but recall Breavman's relation to others as works of art. And to a certain extent, F. does mould Edith (by sculpting her body), "I" (by manipulating his mind), and Catherine (by reinventing her story) according to his fashion. F., however, is not Breavman. Breavman believes in the power of creation, by which aesthetic perception may be a guiding principle towards autonomy. F. considers himself a magician, but he also considers himself "the Moses of our little exodus," a "born teacher" and leader of men (Beautiful 158,178). His project is paradoxically one centered on the individual and power, but

which leads, as we have seen, to the loss of identity. Where Breavman seeks identity through art, F. aims towards absence of identity by all means possible.

Edith, "I" and Catherine are all losers; they are beautiful but they are, nevertheless, losers. What makes them beautiful, to F., is their capacity for failure. Thus Edith is repeatedly shown in close bond with broken individuals, often strangers, as she cradles their head against her breasts (195). "I"'s concern with the A--- tribe reveals his predisposition for defeat: "My interest in this pack of failures betrays my character" (5). Catherine's self-mutilating acts, which no doubt cause her death, are also a form a self-defeat. Edith, "I" and Catherine find some form of comfort in the certainty of failure, but F. seems to possess the nerve of failure by displaying the moral courage to commit to his set of values, though they are often opposed to society's own. F. has the potential to achieve what society considers greatness, and could have been a brilliant politician or investor but chooses to direct his energy towards "I". Thus he tells his friend: "I envied you the certainty that you would amount to nothing" (163). F. must live, faced with "aloneness and the *possibility* of defeat" (Riesman, "Minority" 55 italics mine). F.'s undeniable attraction to power, however, proves that he in fact does, to a certain extent, embrace modernity's success ethics. Though he remains committed to his new system, F.'s desire for power leads him to adopt the triumphalist, power-oriented ethics of the very system he seeks to destroy. Moreover, though F. moves in different social circles, he is never a functioning part of the organization; he is either a leader or a disruptive force. Ultimately, then, for F. as indeed for all the main characters, autonomy is irrelevant (thus the nerve of failure is too) because his project is not a socially oriented one. F. never means to take part in the new system he seeks to establish, and he ultimately avoids

having to face the possibility of defeat by delving deeper into mental alienation, in the hospital for the criminally insane, until he too disappears.

F. attempts to manipulate "I" into shifting back from the reality principle to the pleasure principle without the use of aesthetics. His project, as I have demonstrated, renders the concept of autonomy irrelevant for the characters of Cohen's novel. But perhaps the idea of autonomy cannot be discarded entirely in relation to this novel. Indeed, it is worthwhile to consider how Cohen, as author, formally recuperates the idea of aesthetic creativity which he explored and affirmed in The Favorite Game, but which, in the form of play, gets overwhelmed by self-destruction in Beautiful Losers. In his afterword to Beautiful Losers, Stan Dragland writes that the novel represents "a breakthrough in fiction" and that it is "perhaps the fist post-modernist Canadian novel" (261). Critic Dennis Duffy remarks that "from Cohen, we have the contemporary *avant-garde* novel" (29 italics in original). Many critics describe the novel's form as experimental and, if not new to the literary world, new to Cohen's own style. By adopting such a surrealist, avant-garde, almost post-modern style, Cohen may very well be striving towards a form of art which falls neither into artistic alienation (the novel does, after all, depict a sustained project) nor into artistic conformity. Beautiful Losers, then, would represent Cohen's own attempt at achieving a state of artistic autonomy.

Though Linda Hutcheon hesitates to describe Cohen's novel as "postmodern", she insists that it represents an example of metafiction:

> Beautiful Losers is [...] self-consciously aware of the artist as persona in relation to the process of creation. But it is more in the form than in the thematized content of the novel that is manifest the auto-referential nature

> of what today is being called metafiction, fiction about fiction, fiction that contains within itself a first critical commentary on its own narrative or linguistic identity. (8)

Indeed, Cohen repeatedly reminds the reader that the novel is a construct for which he is responsible. Thus in the midst of his account of F.'s wart removal, "I" suddenly exclaims: "O Reader, do you know that a man is writing this? A man like you who longed for a hero's heart" (Beautiful 108). Certainly, "I" is referring to himself, but the reader is simultaneously reminded that the person "writing this" is not "I"; ultimately, it is Cohen. The author constantly hints at his own existence behind the narrative, but his presence becomes undeniable in the novel's last page, which has been "rented to the Jesuits" (259). As these examples make clear, Cohen deliberately inscribes himself into the writing process. The resulting self-reflexivity of his work is an affirmation of his artistic creativity, for the reader is repeatedly reminded of the artful nature of the book. This emphasis on artistic creativity is further evidenced by the novel's portrayal of sterile sexuality: "'Ordinary' sex, which could lead to conception of another order, is eschewed by Cohen's characters. The only creation permitted in the novelistic universe is the author's own" (Hutcheon 13).

Cohen's creation consists not only in depicting the interactions of his various characters but also in amalgamating and, to a certain extent, parodying different literary forms such as drama, religious texts, the epistolary novel, the comic book, the pornographic novel and the memoir. Whether Cohen's playfulness with these genres succeeds in helping him achieve a state of artistic autonomy is subject to debate. Linda Hutcheon argues that because it parodies literary forms through its use of intertextuality,

Beautiful Losers presents the "same kind of inversion of the official social and literary norms [as] Rabelais' work" and therefore also belongs to what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the "carnivalesque of the folk tradition" (15). Hutcheon writes that Bakhtin envisions the carnivalesque as a reversal of norms characterized by an "obsession with bodily apertures and sexual organs" which leads to "recurring images of eating, drinking, defecating, and various forms of sexual encounter" (16). Applying Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque to Beautiful Losers, she argues that the obscene language of the novel, which mirrors the novel's scatological content, in fact indicates that Cohen is exploiting his artistic liberty: "Here again, the carnivalesque ambiance operates. This kind of language is not merely abusive; it is also a sign of irrepressible linguistic vitality and freedom" (16). To Hutcheon, then, Cohen's subversion of language through obscenity is representative of his artistic freedom, which could be interpreted as a sign of autonomous behavior. But Hutcheon also writes that with Beautiful Losers, Cohen presents a "strong individualistic reaction against rationalism, against what Bakhtin calls 'official, formalistic, and logical authoritarianism'" (17). If Cohen is in fact reacting against linguistic or literary authority, he is by the same token succumbing to a form of inverted artistic conformity; he is defining his work *against* an established order rather than presenting it as an authentic work of art. As a result, though Beautiful Losers may be indicative of Cohen's use of aesthetics as a means to achieve a state of artistic autonomy, it is rather unclear whether his endeavour proves successful. As mentioned in the introduction, even mid-century theorists of autonomy such as Riesman and Whyte found it difficult to identify specific examples of autonomous behaviour

Beautiful Losers portrays four individuals who either refuse or are refused the possibility of sustaining a state of autonomy. Edith, Catherine and F. die and "I" becomes ever more deeply alienated as he loses his grip on reality. "I" ultimately dissolves as he transforms into a symbol of pop culture and becomes assimilated into the masses. By depicting the interactions of these characters, Cohen's novel describes the very similar consequences of both absolute alienation and utter conformity. The two extremes inevitably imply the loss of personality and individuality. It appears, however, that the very form and language of Beautiful Losers contradict this claim. Refusing to disappear behind the narrative, Cohen never lets the reader forget that he is constantly maneuvering behind the characters. The obscene language he uses and the different genres he incorporates into his narrative seem to indicate that Cohen considers his artistic creativity as a form of autonomy or authenticity and therefore, as an affirmation of identity. The result is an ongoing tension between the content and the form of his novel. Indeed, while his characters voluntarily, almost eagerly disappear into oblivion, Cohen willingly inscribes himself in the reading/writing process. Because it is highly self-conscious, his work serves as an attempt to consolidate his identity as an active part of the creative process behind Beautiful Losers.

In Beautiful Losers, as in The Favorite Game, Cohen illustrates the possibility of mobilizing aesthetics against alienation. Cohen thereby asserts his conviction that the aesthetic existence is not a marginalizing one; rather, it enables the individual to function as an autonomous member of society. Marcuse provides the ground for Cohen to affirm that to live with aesthetic values is not necessarily "the privilege of geniuses or the mark of decadent Bohemians" (Marcuse 157). Indeed, Cohen suggests his own engagement

with these values in the gesture of his two novels and, in general, through their content. Both novels underline the aesthetic value of play, especially the play of imagination, whose creative potential gives pleasure through beauty and therefore reconciles "sensuousness and intellect, pleasure and reason" (158). Cohen's fiction also emphasizes the freedom of play, suggesting its liberating quality as an answer to the repression which engenders alienation. In The Favorite Game, Breavman becomes representative of the misguided young artists who believe that to live with aesthetic values, one must perforce feel alienated from the social world. But the playfulness he exhibits is portrayed as redemptive. Beautiful Losers also stresses the importance of games by pointing to their fundamentally sensuous purpose as an indication of their liberating value. By stressing the liberating quality of play, and its connection to aesthetics, Cohen suggests that an aesthetic existence may also be an autonomous one.

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