

Be Kind to This Place: Allen Ginsberg and the First International Poetry Incarnation

The First International Poetry Incarnation took place at the Royal Albert Hall in London on 11 June 1965. It attracted an estimated audience of seven or eight thousand, which makes it one of the largest poetry readings in living memory. It also became known as the UK's first ever happening, and was recognized as an important early episode for London's 'cultural revolution' during the 1960s.¹ As a consequence, the performance is often cited as a key event in the histories of both British poetry and the UK's countercultural underground. Examples of such references include Lesley Wheeler's assertion that the event "galvanized" the city's poetry scene (165), as well as the introduction to Robert Hampson and Ken Edwards' *Clasp*, where the Incarnation is described as an early indicator that London was developing an oppositional undercurrent to mainstream culture (8). The significance of the Incarnation is also intimated in Sheppard's explicit identification of the performance as one of the events he wishes was more firmly pegged into history (*When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry* 215). But Sheppard's wish also begs the question: if the Incarnation continues to enjoy such popular renown, why is this 'pegging into history' still necessary?

A plausible explanation for Sheppard's position is that although the Incarnation is widely chronicled in various memoirs and biographies, these reports frequently involve ornate descriptions, which yield surprisingly little in terms of information and analysis. For instance, in a short statement by the Austrian sound poet Ernst Jandl, the event is characterized as a moment where "no-one was one, but we each were the thousands,

re-shaped in one beautiful body of voices and echoes, with Allen Ginsberg on our soul” (qtd. in *POT! Anthology* 11). While Jandl’s comments may capture the event’s intended ambiance, they also epitomize a form of register that has mythologized the Incarnation as a moment of “common dreaminess in which all was permissive and benign” (Nuttall 183). Some commentators have claimed that, in this permissive atmosphere, the audience witnessed hours of poetry that resonated with “mind-expanding ripples of empathy” like “uncut and precious stones in a translucent pool” (*Children of Albion* 337). More recent recollections have been less poetic in their descriptions. In these reports, the Incarnation is depicted as an “incredibly long-winded” event, which felt “kind of foreign” and seemed like “one of the worst poetry readings” of all time (qtd. in Green 70; 73; 71). Thus, our current understanding of the Incarnation faces a predicament: although its sheer scale alone undoubtedly makes it a prominent performance, its history is fraught with contradictions and inconsistencies. What is therefore needed is an account that seeks to negotiate between these discrepancies in order to arrive at a more specific understanding of the event and its significances.

The Incarnation was undoubtedly a key event in the history of poetic innovation within the UK. At the same time—and as I indicated in the latter sections of the Introduction—it would be impossible to produce such an account without addressing Allen Ginsberg’s role in the event: Ginsberg was the evening’s headlining performer and—as the subsequent sections of this chapter demonstrate—his presence in London was a catalyst for the event’s initial organization. With this in mind, then, while this chapter is interested in the Incarnation itself—as well as in negotiating the contradictions and discrepancies within the responses to it—Ginsberg’s performance inevitably occupies a central position in these discussions. Any other approach would be a misrepresentation of what transpired that night. However, it should be stressed that this chapter does not seek to depict the Incarnation from a strictly Americanist perspective. The extent to which the British Poetry Revival was influenced by American post-war poetry has of course been a subject of debate; however, Ginsberg’s position in this chapter should not be read as a conscious contribution to such arguments.² I am principally interested in the Incarnation as an event, and examine Ginsberg’s reading in order to consider how his performance interacts with the aspirations and actualities of that event. The discussions about Ginsberg that appear in this chapter are—in other words—a component of a larger picture that also involves analyses regarding the Incarnation’s social

contexts, the event's relationship with its regal venue, and its afterlife within the Revival.

In light of Ginsberg's crucial role within the Incarnation, it may be helpful to begin with some observations on his longstanding relationship to performance. While Ginsberg was by no means the only American poet who saw breath as a key unit of composition, his conception of the line as a "single breath unit" was physically embodied in his performances (*Deliberate Prose* 230). For instance, a young Ginsberg could recite the entirety of "Howl" in 20 or 22 min; however, by the early 1980s, he would require 27 min to deliver a full rendition, as his decreased lung capacity had limited "the long breath of his youth" (*Allen Ginsberg: A Life* 495). Due to the physical nature of this delivery, it is easy to understand why Middleton identifies the poet as a central example of the performance of authorship. As *Distant Reading* observes, Ginsberg's charismatic performances relied heavily on his substantial presence, which imbued the poet's prophetic pronouncements with a sense of power and authority (33). This reliance on the poet's physical presence has led others to suggest that there was a tension between Ginsberg's performances and his written work. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, for example, has noted that Ginsberg's latter works display a "shocking decline in the quality of his poetry on the printed page", which was primarily due to Ginsberg being "more and more successful as a performer" (qtd. in Vale 206). Theodore Roszak goes a step further by describing Ginsberg as a "vagabond proselytizer", whose poems are simply a "subsidiary way" of promoting the "countercultural life" that Ginsberg also embodied with his hair, his beard and his "mischievous grin" (129). Such analyses may not be entirely inaccurate: the technical achievements of poems such as "Hum Bom!" do not necessarily match the complexities of "Howl" or "Kaddish", and it is conceivable that Ginsberg's popularity in the 1960s reached further than his poetry alone. However, these comments tacitly assume that Ginsberg's performances and public appearances were auxiliary activities, which eventually superseded his writing. This seems erroneous, as these two practices had been closely interlinked from the very beginning of his career. For instance, when Ginsberg performed the first part of "Howl" at the Six Gallery in San Francisco in October 1955, the strange and ecstatic intensity of his delivery left the audience "standing in wonder, or cheering" (McClure 15); although Ginsberg had been relatively unknown in San Francisco up to that point, his performance made such an impression that it soon led to the publication of *Howl and Other Poems*.³ In other words, performing his

authorship was not an extraneous practice for Ginsberg; his embodied and impassioned testimonies catalysed his arrival as a poet (*Distant Reading* 62).

Accounts of the Six Gallery reading have been a stable component of the mythos surrounding Ginsberg's career, as seen in the first-hand accounts by poets such as Michael McClure, in biographies of Ginsberg, in studies of the San Francisco Renaissance, and in monographs dedicated to the composition of "Howl"; furthermore, the reading has also been reimagined in both fiction and film.⁴ Consequently, a broad consensus about the proceedings of the event has been reached. Less is said about the Six Gallery itself. As recently as 2011, Jonah Raskin claimed that the Gallery was significant only for its insignificance, as it hosted no noteworthy events or exhibitions apart from the reading in 1955 ("Howl and the Six Gallery Reading" 23). Yet this view disregards the intriguing history of the space itself: according to McClure, the Gallery was a former "automobile repair shop" that had been converted to a cooperative space for the arts by a group of young artists, and it regularly housed various avant-garde performances (12–13). True to the cooperative ethos of the Gallery, the décor and set design for the reading in October 1955 were both sourced from local artists. These included splintered and weeping sculptures by Fred Martin, whose designs were based on deconstructed orange crates that had been swathed in muslin and dipped in plaster; and the podium for the evening had likewise been built from former fruit crates (McClure 13).

At first, these features may not appear particularly notable. As Middleton notes, most poetry readings tend to take place in temporary locations such as pubs, lecture halls and galleries, all of which primarily serve other social purposes (*Distant Reading* 30). But while such descriptions coincide with many aspects of the Six Gallery reading, the event also formed a more nuanced relationship with its venue. The space of the Six Gallery demonstrates how any material, once appropriately challenged, can be made to perform. The podium and Martin's sculptures were both found objects that were subsequently remodelled into entirely different artefacts. Their transformations are therefore similar to Stephen Fredman's descriptions of contextual practice, whereby the artist uncovers "new energies and images through juxtaposing found materials or by directing aesthetic attention to an existing but previously ignored context" (3). That context, in this particular instance, is especially significant. As Walter Ebeling observes, California's citrus industry had been a contributory force to the state's economy since the early nineteenth century (352–361); therefore, the

splintered deformities of Martin's sculptures act as a visual chorus to the monstrous commodity forms that arise in Ginsberg's descriptions of neon fruit supermarkets, as well as his apocalyptic tracts against the monetary horrors of Moloch (*Collected Poems* 136; 131).⁵ In other words, while Ginsberg may not have performed these particular passages during the evening in question, the visual chorus of Martin's pieces nevertheless echoed his cries about the "the tobacco haze of Capitalism" (*Collected Poems* 127).

These reverberations between the Six Gallery reading and its location can be extended even further, as the venue's former life as a garage suggests a serendipitous but strangely profound connection with Ginsberg's writing. Because cars recall Ford's pioneering modes of mass production, they are intrinsically connected to the factories and smokestacks that "Howl" associates with Moloch; however, these vehicles are simultaneously a source of liberation for the poem's protagonists, who drive across the country on their quest to find visions of eternity (*Collected Poems* 129). To paraphrase concepts from Michel de Certeau, the *dramatis personae* of "Howl" utilize cars as subversions from within; they operate these symbols of the dominant order in another register, and thus divert that order without leaving it entirely (32). A similar shift is also enacted via the Gallery's conversion from a commercial space into a cooperative arts venue. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre provides a brief description of events that occurred at Halles Centrales—a former wholesale market in Paris—between 1969 and 1971: this space, which was originally "designed to facilitate the distribution of food", was briefly transformed into "a gathering-place and a scene of permanent festival—in short, into a centre of play rather than work" (167). Lefebvre explicitly identifies these transformations as a type of *détournement*, a concept he derives from Guy Debord's Letterist and Situationist publications. Although the aesthetic understanding of the term pertains to the use of pre-existing artistic elements in a new ensemble, Debord and Gil Wolman also assert that it is possible to "detour entire situations by deliberately changing" one of their determinant conditions (14). Lefebvre's discussion builds upon this assertion and argues that any space, irrespective of its original purpose, can outlast its primary functions and be diverted—or reappropriated—by being utilized in a role that differs from its original use (*The Production of Space* 167). The reappropriation of the site for the Six Gallery reading is broadly analogous with the *détournement* of Halles Centrales: both the space and Martin's fruit crates were consigned to new roles that resisted their original

governing functions. These diversions, in turn, corresponded with the symbolic actions of Ginsberg's performance. "Howl" is ultimately a poem of empathy, as evidenced by the declaration that the speaker cannot be safe if Carl Solomon is not safe (*Collected Poems* 130). In this context, Ginsberg's efforts to "recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose" are articulated in an attempt to divert the 'lacklove' of Moloch and reappropriate language to a more compassionate use (*Collected Poems* 130). Therefore, if Ginsberg's poem sought to enact a temporary halt to the dominant cultures of 1950s America, the space and the décor of the Six Gallery resonated with comparable aspirations.

The manifold *détournements* that form the serendipitous background to the Six Gallery reading are worth noting, as they provide an important context for the spatial significations of the Incarnation. Before this, however, it is important to outline the details of the proceedings themselves.

What actually happened on 11 June 1965? Although the Incarnation arose from a nexus of activities in London, much of the available literature places Ginsberg at the event's inception. The poet arrived to London that summer after facing deportation from Prague, where both his presence and his sexual theories had attracted unwanted attention from the authorities. On Ed Sanders' advice, Ginsberg visited Better Books and performed an impromptu reading there (*London Calling* 145). The bookshop is also credited as the place where the concept of the Incarnation was first formulated, although disagreements exist over the persons present. Michael Horovitz claims that he hatched the plan together with Ginsberg and Alexander Trocchi (Green 67); others, however, remember that the idea came to life when Ginsberg—together with Barbara Rubin, Barry Miles, Sue Miles, Daniel Richter and Jill Richter—realized that Ferlinghetti and Gregory Corso were also due to be in London that summer.⁶ The planners were additionally excited by the prospect that Andrei Voznesensky, Pablo Neruda and Pablo Fernandez might also be available to perform—although ultimately none of them was.⁷ Most accounts agree that Barbara Rubin booked the venue, while the Richters were responsible for financing the booking deposit (*In the Sixties* 57). The event's publicity and administration were coordinated by the Poets Cooperative, a haphazardly formed loose grouping of artists that included Ginsberg, Horovitz, Ferlinghetti, Trocchi, John Esam, Harry Fainlight, Simon Vinkenoog, Dan Richter and Julie Felix. As a part of the promotional campaign, John Hopkins photographed the poets beside the statue of Shakespeare on the Albert Memorial, located near the venue; the performance was also mentioned in

major newspapers such as the *Sunday Times* (*London Calling* 146). Clearly, the Incarnation was put in motion with considerable aspirations. If, as Michael Schumacher puts it, the organizers intended to stage a “poetry breakthrough” that was comparable to the Six Gallery reading, they approached the occasion on a much grander scale (446).

Despite being credited as a happening (which would imply that it involved a great deal of collaboration and improvisation), the proceedings of the Incarnation primarily consisted of individual poetry readings. Trocchi hosted the affair, where everyone involved with the Poets Cooperative—except for Felix, the group’s only female member—performed, as did Corso, Jandl, Adrian Mitchell, Anselm Hollo, Paolo Leonni, Pete Brown, Christopher Logue, George Macbeth, Spike Hawkins and Tom McGrath. During the intermissions, the audience also heard taped recordings of William Burroughs; and the guitarist Davy Graham closed the evening with an improvised song. A full recording of the event was captured on the BBC’s fixed live feed from the Hall, while the filmmaker Peter Whitehead shot brief segments of the performances. According to Miles’ recollections, the poets performed from a “centre dais” positioned where a “boxing ring” often stood, while the seats immediately next to the stage were primarily occupied by the readers, organizers and their friends; however, “there was no real division between the audience and poets” and the crowd was free to share bottles of wine, as well as “three-paper joints” (*London Calling* 148). Miles also notes that the floor of the Hall was decorated with flowers that were “salvaged after the Floral Hall at Covent Garden Market closed for the day” (*London Calling* 148).

The film produced from Whitehead’s footage provides a similar impression. As the title *Wholly Communion* suggests, the director presents the Incarnation as an iconic moment for the UK’s emergent counterculture, with its separate audiences all in the one place at the one time. The film opens with an image of the sun above a statue, before moving to a panoramic shot of the Hall, accompanied by a voiceover of Ginsberg chanting. When filming the performances, Whitehead follows the poets as if he were another observer in the crowd. Thick clouds of smoke drift onto the screen. At one stage, Ginsberg is shown reclining on Barbara Rubin’s lap, smoking and enjoying a drink. In another scene, Brown and Horovitz join Jandl for a performance of “The Furore of Sneezing” by Kurt Schwitters. While Ginsberg reads, Whitehead focuses on a woman in the audience, who dances along to the rhythms of the poem. These images instil a compelling portrait of the sense of connection and liberation that is frequently

associated with the Incarnation. Even the more incongruous moments, such as the point where Vinkenoog—under the influence of mescaline—interrupts Fainlight’s reading by screaming ‘love’ repeatedly, appear demonstrative of the event’s free and festive spirit.⁸ As Trocchi tells the audience after Vinkenoog has calmed down, such incidents are unavoidable when one puts a crowd of thousands “in a hall with a few poets trying to be natural” (*Wholly Communion*). The performance—as mediated through Whitehead’s film—is ultimately akin to a Bakhtinian carnival, during which “life is subject only to its laws, that is; the laws of its freedom” (Bakhtin 7).

This carnivalesque spectacle would cohere well with aspects of Ginsberg’s activities during the summer of 1965. While in Prague, the poet famously participated in the May Day celebrations, where he chanted mantras to the crowds and was ultimately chosen as the King of May (Morgan 408). Likewise, Horovitz’s commitment to promoting the arts “as a public festival” often valorized similar carnivalesque practices (Nuttall 182); indeed, Horovitz’s *Live New Departures*—a travelling circus of poetry and jazz events that he launched around 1960—aspired towards a comparable festival atmosphere. Irrespective of these resonances, it seems limiting to frame the Incarnation as a carnivalesque expression of freedom in a “utopian realm of community” (Bakhtin 9). Due to the prohibitive price of film, Whitehead was forced to shoot frugally, and only captured less than 1 h of footage from the 8 h event (*Gathering of the Tribes*). This already limited resource was subsequently reduced further to the 32 min runtime of *Wholly Communion*; therefore, while the film is an invaluable document of the occasion, it presents a carefully orchestrated sequence of events. A wider survey of the evening depicts the proceedings as a site of multiple conflicts and confrontations. At one level, there was a great degree of suspicion and resentment among the poets present. For instance, Jeff Nuttall was so displeased about being excluded from the roster of performers that he and John Latham made plans to interrupt the proceedings by charging at the stage covered in paint.⁹ Similarly, while the recording of Jandl’s performance reveals that his sound poems were extremely well received by the audience—so much so that the crowd joins in—Pete Brown later dismissed Jandl’s work as a “throwback to the bohemian artistic crowd of the 50s and the early 60s” (qtd. in Green 73). Later on, when Brown and Horovitz decided to join Jandl on stage, the recording captures several voices from the background objecting to this, and even commanding the two to sit back down (“The First International Poetry Incarnation”).

Confrontations also occurred between the poets and the audience. Miles notes that Ginsberg was privately suspicious about many of his fellow performers, and particularly doubted whether any of the British poets on the stage were good enough (*London Calling* 142). In fact, the recording of Ginsberg's reading evinces that the poet was unable to maintain his discretion during the performance. Early on, while he is leafing through his poems, Ginsberg drunkenly complains about having to "re-navigate through all this bad poetry" read by others; moments later, when the audience applauds after the word 'shit' is read out during Ginsberg's rendition of "The Change: *Kyoto-Tokyo Express*" he furiously orders everyone to shut up, before exclaiming that they have heard enough shit already ("The First International Poetry Incarnation"). The audience responds to these exclamations with derisions against Ginsberg. The first part of his reading is frequently interrupted by protests from the crowd: not all of these are clearly audible on the surviving recordings, but some—such as "may I have some poetry, sir?" and "bring back Christopher Logue"—directly attack Ginsberg and his work ("The First International Poetry Incarnation"). Such derisions hardly seem apposite to the poet's original wishes to stage a "great spiritual event" (*In the Sixties* 61). Evidently, the communion was not wholly achieved. The myriad tensions among the participants, as well as those between the audience and some of the performers, indicate that the Incarnation involves a more complex set of relations than those of a carnivalesque spectacle.

How might these relations be mapped out more specifically? Earlier in this chapter, I examined the resonances between the Six Gallery reading and its immediate surroundings. If the Incarnation aspired to be a comparable poetry breakthrough, as Schumacher has claimed, perhaps this event also presents a certain serendipitous mutuality with its locus. For instance, an argument could be made that the Albert Hall was hired in an attempt to emulate artists such as Bob Dylan or The Beatles. In 1963, the Albert Hall had hosted a rare concert from The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, and Dylan had performed there for two nights in May 1965; moreover, Ginsberg and some of his fellow poets—including Horowitz and Brown—are known to have coveted the scale of celebrity enjoyed by these musicians. Yet these comparisons do not seem adequate: the Royal Albert Hall, as its name suggests, is a space encoded with particular representations, which suggests that the Incarnation should be paralleled with these broader contexts and histories. Named after the deceased Prince Consort by Queen Victoria in 1867, the Albert Hall is historically, materially and

symbolically intermingled with the memorial that faces the entrance to the Hall.¹⁰ Indeed, if the Hall was built to fulfil the intentions of Albert Prince Consort, as the inscription on the building's terracotta frieze declares, the venue itself acts as a kind of monument.¹¹ Consequently, it performs certain duties: as Deleuze and Guattari note, a monument's "action is not memory but fabulation" (*What is Philosophy* 168), and the Albert Hall does indeed emanate a myriad of narratives. Although the Hall may have been initially funded through the profits of the Great Exhibition in 1851, which is generally portrayed as an egalitarian occasion, the building itself signifies discourses of privilege and power. Its neo-classical architecture is a conscious allusion to the arenas of the Roman Empire, and Queen Victoria's only recorded comments about the building stated: "it looks like the British Constitution" (R. Williams 10). In other words, while its design recalls the empires of antiquity, Queen Victoria's comments tacitly associate the Hall with a nebulous doctrine of a more recent imperial power.¹²

In Lefebvre's theories, monuments represent both the prestige and the power of the State, as well as the "artificiality of empty celebrations, ceremonies and rituals" (*Critique of Everyday Life* vol. 1 232). Yet Lefebvre nevertheless identifies these constructions as sites of ambivalence and conflict: they simultaneously promote the labour of those who built them—thus condemning the rulers for whom they were built—and they often involve such diverse purposes that no "functionality can characterise them, or exhaust their social function" (*Critique of Everyday Life* vol. 2 309). Such tensions can also be associated with the history of the Albert Hall, as it occasionally hosted events that opposed its symbolic discourses of power. The suffragettes held several meetings there from 1907 onwards, and would often disrupt other political gatherings in the Hall as a form of protest; on one such occasion, one campaigner even planned to hide in the pipes of the Hall's organ in order to project their message (R. Williams 47). In the 1920s, the tabloid *Sunday Graphic* expressed its exasperation over the fact that this memorial for royalty was used for pro-Bolshevik meetings, where the Russian Revolution was celebrated and excited cheers echoed across the Hall whenever Lenin's name was mentioned (R. Williams 47). At the same time, it would be a mistake to read these incidents as an indication of unbiased permissiveness on the part of the Hall's authorities. Restrictions on its uses were also in place, both before and after the Incarnation took place. Earlier in this chapter, Miles' description of the venue's layout alluded to the boxing matches that were at times held there; such events had, however, been banned from the premises until 1908, as a

result of Edward VII's distaste for the sport (R. Williams 45). In 1972, amid concerns regarding the profanities in his lyrics, Frank Zappa was asked to present a script to the venue's management in advance of his approaching concert. His refusal to abide by these orders ultimately led to the cancellation of the event; moreover, this incident was followed by a prolonged ban that prohibited all 'pop groups' from performing at the Hall. This restriction was in force until the 1980s (R. Williams 117).

To recapitulate, the space of the Albert Hall signifies discourses that often privilege one form of cultural practice while suppressing others; concurrently, the history of the venue also includes occasions that—to one degree or another—oppose its dominant modes and representations. These instances may not result in the kind of *détournement* that can be found in Lefebvre's analysis of Halles Centrales, or perhaps even at the Six Gallery, but they nevertheless exhibit comparable characteristics. In de Certeau's terms, the "cautious but fundamental inversions" of objects and practices are enacted through maintaining their difference in the space of the dominant culture (31–32); as such, these diversions can form a set of 'tactics' that potentially change the organization of a space without designating a new and discrete locus (38). In this context, the oppositional events in the Hall's history can be understood as occasions where the venue's function was momentarily diverted from the fabulations of its spatial narratives: the suffragette's interventions rendered the Hall's majestic musical instrument to an organ of protest, while the pro-Bolshevik gathering inverted the Hall from a royal monument to a centre that partly celebrated an overthrow of royalty. Therefore, by diverting some of the venue's determinant circumstances, perhaps these occasions also performed a temporary halt to the Hall's cultural discourses.

There are some plausible grounds for drawing parallels between these developments and the proceedings of the Incarnation. Trocchi had been connected to Debord's Letterist International since 1955 and remained a member of the Situationists until the mid-1960s; thus, it is likely that he was aware of the movement's writings about concepts such as *détournement*. Many of the Incarnation's participants also recall that their antics seemingly disturbed the personnel of the Hall: although Horowitz was permitted to hire the venue for his Festival of the New Moon in 1966, the Hall's management eventually attempted to ban the participants from ever performing there again (Green 74). It is also likely that the event influenced Ginsberg's understanding of visual spectacles in political actions. When the poet advised a group of activists in Berkeley to arm themselves

with masses of flowers for a protest in November 1965 (*Deliberate Prose* 10), it seems conceivable that—given the proximity between these two events—he derived this idea from the floral décor of the Incarnation. In this respect, perhaps the event’s carnivalesque performances could be seen as an attempt to divert the Hall, which represented a space of establishment culture, to a countercultural space of play that celebrated individual freedom from conservative traditions and conventions, and consequently fostered a temporary sense of liberation from the existing systems of formalized power.

However, as we have seen, these carnivalesque practices may not demonstrate the full scope of the event. As such, it is important to also consider the other forms of diversions and tactics that may have emerged during the Incarnation. For instance, the event was not without explicit political statements. Vinkenoog, who was the first to read, opened his performance by declaring that the evening presented the world’s poets on peace alert (*Gathering of the Tribes*). Later on, Trocchi’s introduction to McGrath’s reading included a statement that *Peace News*, which McGrath edited, had become a particularly pertinent publication during the previous 3 months. Both of these asseverations refer directly to the Vietnam War, where US ground units had first been deployed in March that year. Although Harold Wilson’s Labour government—which supported the American foreign policy—did not commit troops to Vietnam, the UK’s younger generations nevertheless felt a growing discontentment about the escalation of the war (Moore-Gilbert & Seed 34). Such sentiments resonated within some of the performances during the Incarnation. The poems read by McGrath and Ginsberg feature unfavourable references to the war, and one of the biggest ovations for the evening was given to Mitchell’s “To Whom It May Concern”. Given the poem’s apparent lack of nuanced prosody—as evidenced by couplets such as “I smell something burning, hope it’s just my brains./They’re only dropping peppermints and daisy-chains”—the applause it received was most likely inspired by a commonality of sentiment based around the refrain “Tell me lies about Vietnam” (*Children of Albion* 222). In the Introduction, I noted that Kershaw defines the politics of performance as an ideological transaction between the performers and the audience; specifically, the two constituents share a collective and interactive ability to recognize the signs that are used during the event (*The Politics of Performance* 16). Mitchell’s reading confirms that the Incarnation featured several moments of similar transactions, which revolved around statements of dissent against the war in

Vietnam. As a consequence, it is possible to regard the performance as an event that attempts to temporarily divert a space encoded with signs of bygone imperial powers, and instead utilize it as a place of protest against a war that was considered a symbol of “American corruption, interventionism and neo-imperialism” (Moore-Gilbert & Seed 57).

If the Incarnation is understood as a protest against the war in Vietnam, the event could be regarded as one of the first of its kind within the UK: staged so quickly after the war had commenced in full, the performance preceded both the 1966 and 1967 demonstrations organized by CND—the acronym for Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, a peace organization first formed in 1957—as well as the emergence of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in 1968 (Moore-Gilbert & Seed 34). However, such a view might be difficult to assert confidently and uncritically, as the messages of the event appear somewhat muddled. Although individual performers at the Incarnation vocally abhorred the war, several others made no references to the conflict. Furthermore, the invocation that the Poets Cooperative prepared as an announcement for the event makes no reference to the conflict. If anything, its allusions to ‘poet-epiphanies’ and ‘new consciousness’ seemingly place its emphasis on personal, rather than political, change (*POT! Anthology* 9). As a result of these ambivalent messages, the Incarnation has previously been criticized for squandering its intended “natural indignation at global inhumanity” by merely forming an uneasy consolidation of a “self-congratulatory community” (Coupe 167).

Perhaps the Incarnation’s ambivalent stance on the Vietnam War can be better understood through its social and cultural contexts. Critics such as Kenneth Westhues have noted that the earliest sociological studies of the counterculture did not always develop a clear and analytic definition of the movement’s ideologies (8). For instance, while Roszak makes no distinction between the countercultural penchant “for magic and for exotic ritual” and “the youthful political activism of the sixties” (124), subsequent scholars—such as Jack Whalen and Richard Flacks—have been more careful in noting the aspirational differences between the counterculture and the New Left. Specifically, Whalen and Flacks argue that although both movements were characterized by anti-establishment principles, the former was more focused on expressive and personal retreatism towards liberty and autonomy, whereas the latter emphasized revolutionary action in the name of equality and democracy (12–14). In the context of American politics, Whalen and Flacks identify the Vietnam War as a rare point of convergence between these distinct movements. Both aggressively

opposed the draft policy: the New Left did so as part of their broader resistance to the governmental war machine, while the counterculture objected to it on the grounds of its imposition on personal freedom and self-expression (Whalen & Flacks 15).

These draft policies were not in force in the UK, but many of the concepts outlined in Whalen and Flacks are nevertheless relevant to the Incarnation. Since its emergence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the New Left in Britain saw itself as a participatory and spontaneous movement that was committed to a range of political endeavours (Moore-Gilbert & Seed 27). These included direct involvement with the “anti-racist action in Notting Hill and Kensington in the aftermath of the race riots” in 1958; the peace campaigns organized by CND; and the marches against the Atomic Weapons Establishment near the Berkshire village of Aldermaston in 1958 (Moore-Gilbert & Seed 27). This kind of direct activism seems less prominent within the first issue of *International Times*—the underground newspaper founded by Miles in October 1966 and first edited by McGrath—which is often identified as the formal arrival of the counterculture in England (Nelson 45). Instead, the issue is broadly more focused on artistic and cultural matters: alongside a poem from Mitchell, the contents include a review of Yoko Ono’s exhibition at the Indica Gallery; discussions of the Destruction in Art Symposium—a gathering of artists, poets and scientists that was held in London earlier that year; and information about the use of cannabis and LSD. The only article that explicitly discusses foreign policy and politics is Alex Gross’ report on the Red Guards in China (8). In other words, although it would be unfair to suggest this issue of *International Times* is entirely devoid of politics, its articles nevertheless seem primarily motivated by a desire for a more autonomous and creative life as an artist or artisan.

At the same time, although the British counterculture claimed to shun ideologies and politics, they were not entirely unaffected by the ideals and activities of the New Left (Nelson 11). Even as it focused on cultural topics, the first *International Times* made gestures towards political statements; for instance, its review of The Royal Shakespeare Company’s production of *US* contains a condemnation of the Vietnam War as “organised and accidental mass murder, systematic torture, brazen deceit and chronic duplicity” (Marowitz 1). As the publication developed, its discussions about political activism became increasingly explicit—especially in the aftermath of May 1968. Eventually, some of the paper’s contributors appeared to eschew retreatism in favour of direct action:

An alternative society cannot exist. An alternative is something alongside but independent of something else. Will our existing government permit a part of the community to break off and live outside its laws? No. The laws have got to be changed. The new society must be made out of the one we've got. (Hammerton 8)

These tensions are mirrored in certain aspects of the Incarnation. Although many present that night would later contribute to *International Times* and other underground presses, several participants—including Nuttall, Miles, Hawkins, Brown and Horovitz—had also taken part in direct actions such as the CND campaigns and the marches at Aldermaston (Nuttall 181). In other words, the community that gathered for the event was formed of convergences between countercultural individualism and more direct forms of political action. This helps to explain why it is difficult to configure the Incarnation's diverted space explicitly as an imitation of rock concerts; or as a carnivalesque celebration of countercultural freedoms; or as a protest against the war in Vietnam. All of these aspirations are present simultaneously, each colliding with the others. These collisions can in turn be understood according to the theoretical perspectives of poetry performances outlined in the Introduction. Like Whitehead's analysis of Cleopatra's Needle as an event that is actively produced through a nexus of intersubjective encounters, the divergent aspirations of the Incarnation are simultaneously unique to a particular contingent of its participants, while also connected to the event's collective experience as a whole. The ambivalences within the event's significations can therefore be understood as a result of its cacophonous collectivity, which involves myriad acts of intersubjective 'authorship'.

Ginsberg's performance ultimately epitomizes the myriad aspirations of the Incarnation. At the beginning of this chapter, I noted that Ginsberg's charismatic presence often made his readings appear as a paragon of the performance of authorship. To a certain extent, this also characterizes Ginsberg's behaviour at the Incarnation, where he consciously occupies the first person and seemingly closes "the gap between author and text" (*Distant Reading* 62). This relationship is noticeable from the very start of his reading: when Trocchi announces that it is "about time Allen Ginsberg came on stage", his voice carries a hint of anticipation, and the poet's entrance to the dais is greeted with rapturous applause ("The First International Poetry Incarnation"). It almost sounds as if the entire event becomes centred on Ginsberg's celebrity; such a welcome gives some

credence to Roszak's claim that the poet only needs to present himself as a visual spectacle, without any reference to his poetry, in order to make a statement to his audience (129). Indeed, it is tempting to identify these moments as early adumbrations of Schumacher's view that Ginsberg shifted from a literary figure to a public prophet during the second half of the 1960s (445). But how accurate are these preliminary impressions?

Ginsberg originally envisioned the evening as a "public incarnation of a new consciousness" (*London Calling* 151), which matches the scenes of his reading that were included in *Wholly Communion*. As I observed earlier, Ginsberg both opened and closed the evening with a Tibetan mantra; in addition, while he reads Hollo's translation of Voznesensky's "Three Pears/America", the film depicts the poet gesticulating and contorting his body according to the poem's cadences. The aforementioned footage of the female audience member dancing along to the reading of "The Change" similarly recalls the trance techniques, magic rites and healing ceremonies that were frequently incorporated into avant-garde performances during the 1960s (Berghaus 132–136). The performed text amplifies these representations. Schumacher argues that the poem marked an ending to the visionary quest that Ginsberg had pursued since 1948, after he allegedly heard William Blake's voice in his apartment (442). The poet himself recounted this change of heart in a journal entry from 8 January 1963, where he identifies death as a natural sign that instructs him to "shut up and live in the present temporary form", as the "Body" is only capable to be "what it at present is" (*Indian Journals* 154). This acceptance of the present bodily form is reiterated within the poem. Its early stages recount a passage through "the portals to what Is"—which amounts to an embodied reality comprising sheets, skin and hair—where Ginsberg can identify both tears and laughter as "allright", before concluding that "I am that I am" (*Collected Poems* 324). But while the poem recounts a moment of personal change for Ginsberg, the recordings from the Incarnation reveal that it was not performed with confessional tones. Instead, many of its lines are vocalized almost as if they were imperative commands, through which Ginsberg intends to guide his audience to experience the selfsame transformation ("The First International Poetry Incarnation"). Likewise, the references to both tears and laughter as being 'allright' appear to inform the listeners of the potential responses to the poem's illuminations; Ginsberg himself claimed to have wept while he composed the text (Morgan 376). Thus, some of the documentation leads us to see Ginsberg's reading as a shamanic ritual: like Schechner's

descriptions of ritualistic performances specify, the poet presents himself as a spiritual healer who has experienced a vision, which he must convert into song so that its message can be delivered back to his community (42).

Such impressions would cohere well with Roszak's analyses of Ginsberg, in so far as they construe the poet as being transformed by the visionary powers of his work, which he subsequently presents as an example to his generation (128). But this is not the complete picture, as the early part of Ginsberg's performance was a strangely paradoxical affair. As the aforementioned interruptions and taunts from audience indicate, Ginsberg's asseverations did not necessarily inspire transcendent experiences throughout the Hall; in fact, it might be more accurate to suggest that his phantasmagoria of shamanic rituals collapses during the performance. Bill Morgan argues that "The Change" was structurally modelled on the traditional mantric-pranayamic-belly-breathing cycle, so that a vocal performance of the poem would replicate this pattern in order to produce a temporary physical change for the reader (376–377). Yet the recordings from the Incarnation do not convey these impressions. Although the second section of the poem was intended to be vocalized as one long sigh, Ginsberg aggressively snarls his way through lines such as "like a baby crying Fuck/me in the asshole" or "so that I do/live I will die" (*Collected Poems* 325; 329). The overriding impression from the recordings of this section is hostility rather than spiritual change: Ginsberg veers away from the cathartic and therapeutic rituals that are associated with shamanic performances, and his reading begins to resemble a debate between an evangelical orator and his audience. A few days after the Incarnation, Ginsberg wrote an unpublished letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*, where he deeply regretted his conduct. In it, he explains that by the time he began his performance, he was too drunk and too disappointed in the other participants to read as he had intended to, which resulted in a hysterical rendition of his material (*London Calling* 151). Behind this sombre confession is a sense of failure: while some in the crowd may have experienced a sense of elation during the Incarnation, Ginsberg's performance itself fell short of his grand aspirations of a shamanic ritual that would offer his audience forms of hope and survival.¹³ The event eluded the intentions of the poet-performer.

Nevertheless, I do not believe that Ginsberg's performance was a wholly disastrous occasion. When the poet closes the evening with a reading of "Who Be Kind To", the tones of his delivery appear to shift. At this stage, the tumultuous confrontations between Ginsberg and the audience had

subsided, and he is able to read uninterrupted (“Poetry Reading: Allen Ginsberg”). The receptive ambiance is fitting, as “Who Be Kind To” is ineradicably connected with the Incarnation: Ginsberg had composed it specifically for the occasion on 8 June. The recordings also indicate that the poet felt a palpable yearning to read this text. Before he commences, voices from the crowd request both “Howl” and “Sunflower Sutra” but Ginsberg declines these suggestions and questions the value of reading something old (“Poetry Reading: Allen Ginsberg”). Here, the poet forgoes his renowned works—and, to an extent, his status as a celebrity—in order to perform material that directly addresses his present situation.

In some respects, the poem traverses the event’s myriad aspirations. Although early lines refer to the devastations of napalm during the Vietnam War, the poem does not dwell upon such imagery; instead, it shifts to enthuse about the joyful voices of The Beatles, which are followed by depictions of Thelonious Monk playing piano in a nightclub (*Collected Poems* 360–361). The reference to Monk recalls the well-established connections between the Beats and jazz, but the inclusion of The Beatles bears a more specific connection to the Incarnation. As I observed earlier, Ginsberg coveted the group’s phenomenal popularity, and in the early 1960s his admiration verged on idolatry. The poet would often tell friends and associates that this music could change society once and for all (Morgan 394); he even tried to demonstrate the band’s ‘melopoeia’ to an elderly Ezra Pound during a visit to Rapallo in 1967 (Carpenter 897–899). Furthermore, in the weeks that preceded the Incarnation, Ginsberg had travelled to Liverpool and spoken highly of the city’s rock ‘n’ roll scene as a new centre of consciousness in the human universe (Schumacher 446). In this context, the poem’s references illustrate a distinct claim. If Liverpool and The Beatles are presented as exemplars of a kindness that is capable of creating societal change, perhaps Ginsberg wishes to perform a comparable ideological transaction with his audience. This might even explain the proximity between the poem’s imagery of Monk and its references to The Beatles performing in the Cavern nightclub. By conflating the soundtrack of the new human consciousness with the music that inspired the Beats, Ginsberg situates his generation as the precursors of the 1960s’ zeitgeist.

From these extracts, it would seem as if the transformations depicted in “Who Be Kind To” are primarily expressive and personal. As Ginsberg reads on, the poem progresses to an explicit and carefully articulated vision of orgiastic liberation: the soul blesses and kisses its mortal and corporeal form, while an array of body parts—including necks, thighs, vaginas,

‘cocks’ and ‘asses’—all come together in a desire to make love in London “as if it were 2001 the years/of thrilling god” (*Collected Poems* 361–362). Thus, despite the poem’s early allusions to napalm in Vietnam, it does not utilize the full force of its fervour to remonstrate the war. Instead, these lines endorse the countercultural ideals of expressing intimate needs and desires irrespective of the established institutions and relationships that restrict personal freedom (Whalen & Flacks 13). That is to say, Ginsberg’s concluding remarks seemingly augment the Albert Hall as a carnivalesque place of play: to paraphrase de Certeau again, “Who Be Kind To” performs within a terrain that is organized by establishment culture, and seeks to create surprises in the cracks of its proprietary powers (37). Indeed, if the poem intends to invoke the ‘new consciousness’ arising from Liverpool, Ginsberg’s call to make love in London seemingly urges the audience to claim the Hall as one of the giant auditoriums of the planet where the “peaceful kiss of sex” might manifest itself (*Collected Poems* 361).

Despite these countercultural asseverations for liberty and autonomy, it would be reductive to understand Ginsberg’s performance of “Who Be Kind To” as an eschewal of politics. More accurately, the poem flickers between the Incarnation’s carnivalesque antics and its natural indignation over a global inhumanity. Through this process, the poet articulates a more nuanced analysis of the war in Vietnam. An earlier excerpt from the poem, which follows soon after Ginsberg’s aforementioned reference to the napalm deathbed of Vietnam, unfolds as an immense panorama of urban isolation, alienating technologies and an overarching fear of a nuclear apocalypse. The imagery of this section traverses from references to radar towers and flowers in an ancient brook to the worm infestations and mushroom clouds on the ears of “Sleeping Dr. Einstein” (*Collected Poem* 360). Ginsberg catalogues lonely neighbours spending their evenings weeping by televisions; disappearing fathers and mothers; as well as “aged, large nosed” and “angry” politicians in various centres of power—including Whitehall, the Kremlin and the White House—all nervously dialling a “bald voice box” that is connected to “electrodes underground” and converging via “wires vaster than a kitten’s eye” (*Collected Poems* 359–360). In this context, “Who Be Kind To” identifies Vietnam as a symptom of a larger malaise that—together with the amalgamation of these subsequent images—represents a cold war that is being carried out against humanity. Like the nightmarish Moloch in “Howl”, this conflict, which is both symbolic and actual, is the fundamental target of Ginsberg’s critique. The violent realities of this war also permeate the body: throughout the

passage, Ginsberg fixes upon isolated physical fragments such as tears, eyes, large noses and ears; in fact, as these features are all associated with one solitary part of the anatomy—that is, the head—this dismemberment is effectively twofold. First, the head is isolated from the body and itemized as individual components. Second, as the bald voice box demonstrates, speech is also disassociated through telephones and wires. Here the ‘cold war’ of the poem is enacted with such brutal techniques that, under its over-powering forces, the body fragments. The consequences of this fragmentation are particularly significant for the poem’s political figures: instead of voicing their policies in public, the politicians remain secluded in their galleries of power, where they feed their mandates into a vast underground network of wires; through this disassociation, the fragmented statesmen abdicate all responsibility for themselves and their actions. If we consider this via Lefebvre’s concepts, “Who Be Kind To” ultimately rages against cultures where the body “disappropriates” itself in multiple ways (*The Production of Space* 166).

Correspondingly, perhaps the orgy of tenderness in which the poem culminates acts as a counterpoint to these cultures of disappropriation. Like the imagery of the politicians described in the previous paragraph, the orgiastic moments of “Who Be Kind To” focus upon details of the body: thighs, vaginas, mouths, hands, cocks and asses are all identified within this section. Yet these somatic features escape the alienation associated with the disappropriated politicians. As the dismembered statesmen resign their bodies to an underground convergence of wires, they eventually exist only as sadistic noises on the radio, which are without physical form (*Collected Poems* 362). By contrast, the organs in the orgy of tenderness are shown to be in harmony with their souls and bodies. It could therefore be suggested that while these body parts are itemized individually, they are in fact being converted—or *detoured*—into something else (Debord & Wolman 13). Deleuze and Guattari have criticized Freud’s study of the “Wolf Man” Sergei Pankejeff, as his psychoanalytic process ignored the fact that wolves are pack animals and reductively interpreted crowds as a single person.¹⁴ Instead, *A Thousand Plateaus* argues that becoming-wolf relies upon the individual subject’s relationship to the wolf-multiplicity of the pack, specifically in terms of “how the subject joins or does not join the pack, how far away it stays”, and how it does or “does not hold the multiplicity” overall (32). A comparable becoming is signified by the poem’s orgy of tenderness. Ginsberg’s call to make love in London is an invocation for becoming a multiplicity. In this respect, the carnivalesque tones of the

poem are not a representation of a simple *joie de vivre*; more appropriately, they are the *jouissance* of a “people who are continually growing and renewed” (Bakhtin 19).¹⁵

Consequently, perhaps the performance of “Who Be Kind To” resonates with some of the diversions and *détournements* that were present during the Incarnation. The first volume of *Critique of Everyday Life* argues that the eroticism of advertising is devoid of genuine sensuality, by which Lefebvre means a sensuality that implies beauty, charm, passion and fulfilment; instead, the superficial appearance of adverts presents a weary and mechanical image that can only lead to dissatisfaction (35). These mechanical qualities, in turn, parallel the alienating techniques that are shown to disappropriate the body in *The Production of Space*. Although Ginsberg’s poem is also laced with eroticism, the orgy it depicts symbolizes an act of resistance against such dominating forces, as the body is reappropriated and its sociality is realized as a subject within a multiplicity. Therefore, while Ginsberg does not distinguish between bodies and sexuality in accordance with Lefebvre’s writings, the two share a comparable understanding of the body and *détournement*.¹⁶ If the Incarnation sought to reappropriate the representational space of the Albert Hall, Ginsberg’s concluding performance served as a reminder that any revolutionary change must also include the reappropriation of the body as a part of its agenda (*The Production of Space* 167).

In the end, Ginsberg’s performance does not delineate clear distinctions among the myriad aspirations of the Incarnation, as it instead traverses the complex intersubjective network of these ambitions. The evening as a whole is ultimately a site of manifold ambivalences. Although the occasion seeks to enact a *détournement* of the Hall’s representational space, these attempts are almost exhaustingly incongruous. As the early parts of Ginsberg’s reading demonstrate, some of these aspirations may at times derail others: because the event’s carnivalesque practices generated a non-hierarchical space, Ginsberg’s shamanic phantasmagoria struggled to present the poet as a spiritual leader who presided over the crowd; and his own intoxication further impinged on this particular mode of performance. Likewise, the evening’s countercultural indulgences sometimes diluted its protest against the war in Vietnam. In this respect, the performed diversions can be read as behaving similarly to de Certeau’s tactics—that is, as operating in “the chance offerings of the moment” without the advantage of “planning [a] general strategy” (37). Indeed, the Incarnation’s *détournements* are seemingly only enacted through isolated occasions.

Nevertheless, perhaps the performance of “Who Be Kind To” represents one such moment of convergence: Ginsberg manoeuvres through celebrations of countercultural autonomy and a nuanced critique of the Vietnam War, which he eventually identifies as another component of the lacklove of Moloch and the tobacco haze of capitalism that he howled against in San Francisco a decade earlier. In this respect, the reappropriated bodies in the poem’s orgy of tenderness not only resonate with the reappropriated space of the occasion, but also with the calls for empathy that echo throughout Ginsberg’s career. Without this poem, the Incarnation might only have amounted to an inebriated mimicry of an atavistic healing ritual. It is through “Who Be Kind To” that Ginsberg extends beyond his individuality as a speaker and instead enters into a dialogue with the active production of intersubjective social relations that were occurring across the Albert Hall, as well as the multiplex of historical contexts from which the event emerged. In a quasi-paradoxical process, the performance of this poem simultaneously asserts the presence of the author-poet as well as the cacophonous collectivity of a multiplicity.

As such, these multifarious facets of the Incarnation indicate the unexpected eventualities that may occur within the intersubjective authorship of a performance. It seems as if the organizers themselves were unprepared for the proceedings: when Trocchi first entered the dais, he expressed his enormous surprise over the scale of the audience (*Gathering of the Tribes*); 8 h later, he unexpectedly brought the evening to an abrupt close with a simple ‘that’s all folks’ (“Poetry Reading: Allen Ginsberg”). But did the event’s reverberations continue? Today at least, the Incarnation’s countercultural optimism might be difficult to consider without a degree of cynicism. As Nuttall explained:

There was a shift between ’66 and ’67 from poetry and art and jazz and anti-nuclear politics to just sex and drugs, legalise pot. It was the arrival of capitalism. (qtd. in Green 223)

Given the Incarnation’s proximity to Nuttall’s chronology, Green’s own speculations of the event as an early symptom for this arrival of capitalism seem unsurprising (viii). However, for others the immediate aftermath of the event was an incredibly vibrant period. Miles valorizes the performance as a catalyst that created a community and a framework for London’s emergent counterculture (*London Calling* 151). This catalytic force seemingly spread to continental Europe as well: Vinkenoog was so moved

by his participation that he organized a similar event in Amsterdam a year after the Incarnation; more recently, critics such as Gaston Franssen have identified Vinkenoog's *Poëzie in Carré* (Poetry in the Carré Theatre) as "the breakthrough of performance poetry" in The Netherlands (36).

In addition to countercultural publications such as *International Times*, the reverberations of the Incarnation can also be seen in one of the earliest anthologies that collected poets associated with the British Poetry Revival in one volume. Admittedly, the scope of Horovitz's *Children of Albion* is much broader than the performance that inspired its editor. Many of the 63 contributors—such as Andrew Crozier, Tom Raworth, Ian Hamilton Finlay and Lee Harwood—had very little direct involvement with the proceedings of the Incarnation. Nevertheless, the anthology is self-consciously presented as a scion of the event: it is dedicated to Ginsberg and its epigraph is sourced from "Who Be Kind To". It features many of the poems that were performed during the evening, including Mitchell's "To Whom It May Concern" and McGrath's "The Evidence"; and Horovitz's afterword—which describes the occasion as "the greatest stimulus for poetry this century" (*Children of Albion* 339)—is an early example of the accounts that mythologize the evening through ornate descriptions. A similar tendency can be seen in Edwin Morgan's "For the International Poetry Incarnation". Written as a tribute to the event, Morgan's poem seemingly derives its inspiration from the invocation that the Poets Cooperative prepared in advance of the Incarnation; at the very least, Morgan's punctuation—especially with his frequent use of exclamation marks—and his astronomical imagery of "spacebreakers", "starmen", and the "blue white" curves of the earth are highly reminiscent of this earlier piece (*Children of Albion* 229). "For the International Poetry Incarnation" therefore acts as an extension of the invocation's calls for cosmic poetry visitations, planet-chant carnivals, and cosmonaut poets (*POT! Anthology* 9). In other words, if the initial announcement in 1965 sought to imagine the event as an extraterrestrial occasion of personal change, Morgan's poem reaffirms this impression by adopting a comparable imagery and tone. A contrasting view can be seen in McGrath's "Before You Sleep", which reflects on the Incarnation in a more critical manner: the poem openly expresses doubts about the political efficacy of poets, whom McGrath deems to be mostly "gross egotists" incapable of delivering social change or revolutions "of love and flowers and poetry" (*Children of Albion* 203).

The two poems from Morgan and McGrath therefore represent the event's competing aspirations of countercultural play and protestation against the Vietnam War. While these ambitions may have been brought together momentarily during Ginsberg's performance of "Who Be Kind To", the conflicting views presented in the anthologized poems indicate that these tensions continued after the event had concluded. In addition, *Children of Albion* did little to redress the disparities of the Incarnation's all-male line-up: with only 5 women featured amongst the 63 contributors, the volume contains substantially more sons than daughters.¹⁷ As such, despite the egalitarian rhetoric that appears in his afterword, Horovitz's editorial preferences nevertheless established "an elite of his own" that hardly appeared "hospitable to women" (Booth 73; Buck 101). Ultimately, perhaps the internal contradictions and contestations within *Children of Albion* are a better representation of the Incarnation's legacy than the self-consciously valorizing accounts therein.¹⁸

Some of the event's further reverberations might be more difficult to quantify through material objects, as the performance also provided a social nexus where poets could meet. For instance, the Scottish poet Hayden Murphy has expressed his gratitude over the new friendships he forged that evening. After meeting the concrete poet Dom Sylvester Houédard that night, Murphy began corresponding with him; eventually, Houédard invited Murphy to join him at a performance in Gloucestershire in 1966 (Murphy 2). During the same event, Jandl, Cobbing and Brown collaborated in a reprisal of Schwitters' "The Furore of Sneezing", which Jandl had also performed at the Albert Hall (Murphy 2). Likewise, Cobbing—who had already published a pamphlet from Ginsberg in 1963—is seen sitting close to the American poet during *Wholly Communion*. *Children of Albion* also includes further indications of similar creative correspondences: for example, Harwood dedicates a poem to Houédard; Hollo dedicates one of his to Raworth; and Raworth writes another for Harwood. Such relations correlate well with the event's manifold social situations. If Ginsberg concluded his reading with an invocation for becoming a multiplicity, these ideological transactions throughout the audience—as well as those forged in the event's nebulous aftermaths—effectively respond to his call.

Nonetheless, these transactions should be considered with caution. The Incarnation was not a unique progenitor for innovative poetry and performance in post-war Britain. Wheeler's brief discussion of the event—which I alluded to at the beginning of this chapter—comes dangerously

close to asserting this view: she describes Ginsberg's 'galvanizing' reading as a metaphoric "return" of the gift "Charles Dickens and Fanny Kemble gave to the United States" with their reading tours in the nineteenth century, which overemphasizes the Incarnation's impact (165). Although poets such as Nuttall felt that Ginsberg's arrival was a healing wind for London's artistic community, the years that preceded the performance on 11 June had already experienced an acceleration of small press publishing and performance events (228). In addition to Horovitz's aforementioned curatorship of *Live New Departures*, Cobbing had started his workshops and publishing ventures with Writers Forum as early as 1951 (*Poetry Wars* 215).¹⁹ Thus, when Ginsberg arrived in London in 1965, the city's poetry scene may have been rhizomatically scattered, but it was nevertheless incredibly active:

When Cobbing [...] and I were putting on our shows in hired rooms, exclaiming our poetry in public parks, swinging the duplicator handle throughout the long Saturday afternoons of 1963 we had no idea the same thing was happening all over the world. (Nuttall 161)

In other words, the social multiplicities that occurred during the Incarnation are not unique attributes of a singular event. Rather, as Fisher's comments in the Introduction demonstrate, poetry readings frequently enable their audiences to join a nexus of people; as such events are actively produced by all of those in attendance, these physical interactions of bodies with each other are a crucial component of the event's sociality. Of course, as Ginsberg's early clashes with the audience reveal, these convergences may not have occurred across the entirety of the Hall; nor did they take place consistently throughout the event's duration. However, in the brief moments when the Incarnation managed to conjoin subjects within a pack, it facilitated a social situation that can potentially take place in any event of this nature.²⁰ The distinguishing factor of the Incarnation is that its monumental space encouraged these multiplicities on a considerably larger scale.

To summarize, the Incarnation's iconic status might make it appealing to regard the performance as a *sui generis* occasion that is quite unlike anything else. This chapter has instead endeavoured to resist such perceptions. Although I have attempted to 'reconstruct' and analyse the event in its specificity, I have also placed it in dialogue with a plurality of other contexts and events. These have included the parallels between Ginsberg's performance at the Albert Hall and his earlier howls at the Six Gallery; the

Incarnation's relationship to carnivalesque spectacles; the broader history of *détournements* within the Hall's representational space; UK-based protests against the war in Vietnam; and the different aspirations of the counter-culture and the New Left. All of these dialogues suggest that the event—and Ginsberg's performance there—cannot be fully configured through concepts such as the performance of authorship. Instead, Ginsberg's utterances are at times undermined by the intersubjective aspirations of the crowd, and his reading instead forges new relations in the non-hierarchical spreading of communal convergences and cultural discourses that populated the event. These relations may not have been what Ginsberg—or any of his fellow organizers—initially intended, but they nonetheless form a part of the active perceptions that 'authored' the Incarnation. The chapters that follow will also explore similar themes. However, while the Incarnation was examined through a panoramic scope of historical, socio-political and theoretical contexts, the following chapters will—in varying degrees—investigate how similar discourses might be more consciously present within the proceedings of a particular event. The first of these will focus on Denise Riley's reading at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1977.

NOTES

1. For a more detailed account of these contexts, see Hewison, especially Chaps. 3 and 4.
2. For further discussion and examples of the debates concerning post-war American poetry and the British Poetry Revival, see Hickman 81–108; Clive Bush's contribution to *Clasp* (Hampson & Edwards 15–20); or *Poetry of Saying* 40–47.
3. For a more detailed description of these events, see Miles' *Allen Ginsberg: A Life* 197; for a slightly different account, see Morgan 203–204.
4. In addition to the aforementioned texts, see Schumacher's *Dharma Lion*; Michael Davidson's *The San Francisco Renaissance*; John Suiter's *Poets on the Peaks*; Raskin's *American Scream*; Jack Kerouac's *Dharma Bums*; and the film *Howl*.
5. Also see Marx's description of capitalist value as a "live monster that is fruitful and multiplies" (189).
6. More than one account seems to support this latter version of events. See for, example, Green 66; and Miles' *In the Sixties* 57.
7. Voznesensky was present in the audience, although he did not read. Some have suggested that he declined to take part as he was not enamoured with

the Incarnation's chaotic atmosphere, although others maintain that Soviet authorities pressured the poet not to take part. See Green 66–71.

8. In actuality, the reading was a disastrous experience for Fainlight, who remained deeply scarred by it for the rest of his life. See Miles' *London Calling* 149, or Green 71.
9. The full idea was to conduct the interruption as a happening, where he and Latham would be covered in paint and pages of books, and stage a fight with one another, ripping these pages off in the process. This never took place, however, because Latham had blocked his pores by spreading the paint too thickly, and passed out before they were able to get on stage. Ultimately, Nuttall had to bathe Latham in order to scrub off the paint (*Gathering of the Tribes*).
10. After Prince Albert's death, some of the funds that had originally been earmarked for the construction of the Hall were diverted towards the memorial. Queen Victoria attached Albert's name to the Hall when she laid the building's foundation stone on 20 May 1867 (R. Williams 10).
11. In full, the inscription reads "This hall was erected for the advancement of the arts and sciences and works of industry of all nations in fulfilment of the intention of Albert Prince Consort" (R. Williams 10).
12. Unlike countries such as the USA, British law has never adopted a written constitution. Consequently, the notion of a 'British Constitution' is more accurately defined by practice and convention.
13. For testimonies that depict audience members enjoying a moment of elation during the Incarnation, see the interviews in *Gathering of the Tribes*. For an analysis of Ginsberg's performances as events that offer forms of hope and survival, see Mottram's *Allen Ginsberg in the Sixties* 12.
14. For Freud's original analysis, see Freud 400–426.
15. I am using *jouissance* in a broader sense, and do not wish to exclusively associate it with the different theories about the term developed in the writings of Barthes, Cixous or Zizek.
16. For more on Lefebvre's writings on bodies and sexuality, see *The Production of Space* 166–167.
17. The expression 'more sons than daughters' is frequently used in critiques of the gender disparity in *Children of Albion*. See, for example, *Poetry Wars* 37.
18. Further discussions regarding *Children of Albion* are available, for example, in *Poetry of Saying* 40–47.
19. More examples of the activities that were taking place in London can be found in the reflections collected in Hampson & Edwards' *Clasp*.
20. For Middleton's views on the sociality of poetry events, see "How to Read a Poetry Reading".

Poetry and Performance During the British Poetry
Revival 1960–1980

Event and Effect

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