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The Best Bookshop in the World: Changing Capitalism with Global Reading¹

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Much talk takes place around iPhones and apps, tweets, and vodcasts. As record shops are replaced by e-commerce and portals of legal and illegal downloading,² the concurrent closure of bookshops is rarely as publicized. Charing Cross Road — once a beacon for international bibliophiles — is a chimera of its former self. Murder One closed, with their website reporting “we are not a bookstore anymore.”³ Silver Moon has been “incorporated” into Foyles. Some businesses like Sports Pages have migrated online. University bookshops are also suffering. Conservative buying practices ensure the purchase of textbooks that have passed through too many revisions and incorporated too little new research. The great works that appear on further reading lists — the “read before you die books” — have disappeared from the shelves.

The impact on readers, writers, and publishers is clear. In the 2009 summer edition of the *Society of Authors'* magazine, a range of articles explored the role of supermarkets in selling books, the shrinkage of newspapers readerships, and the decline of the book review. The most disturbing article in the magazine was written by Sara Nelson. She stated that, “the one thing you hear every day is that ‘publishing is going global.’ But unless we come up with better ideas than these, the only way global publishing is going is south.”⁴ One obvious solution to Nelson’s concerns is to reinvest the local, regional, and national with intellectual and commercial value, rather than making arbitrary and ambiguous statements about globalization, internationalization, and mobility. Good bookshops with informed and enthusiastic staff are part of this strategy to invest a place with a purpose.

Such an agenda is not an attack on the Amazonification of books. The problem is that consumers access Amazon looking for a particular title or author. Rarely do customers browse. Sometimes a fortuitous link will emerge through an automated listing of related titles or similar purchases. The problem with such a shopping system — and the information literacy structures on which it is based — is that readers search for ideas, topics, and authors already known to us.⁵ There is little mechanism to discover unusual or dissenting ideas and information. While appearing to search the World Wide Web,

¹ A podcast of this article is available in the Table of Contents of this issue of *History of Intellectual Culture* www.ucalgary.ca/hic 2008/09 or at <http://www.archive.org/details/TheBestBookshopInTheWorld>.

² Graham Jones, *Last Shop Standing: Whatever Happened to Record Shops?* (London: Proper Music, 2009).

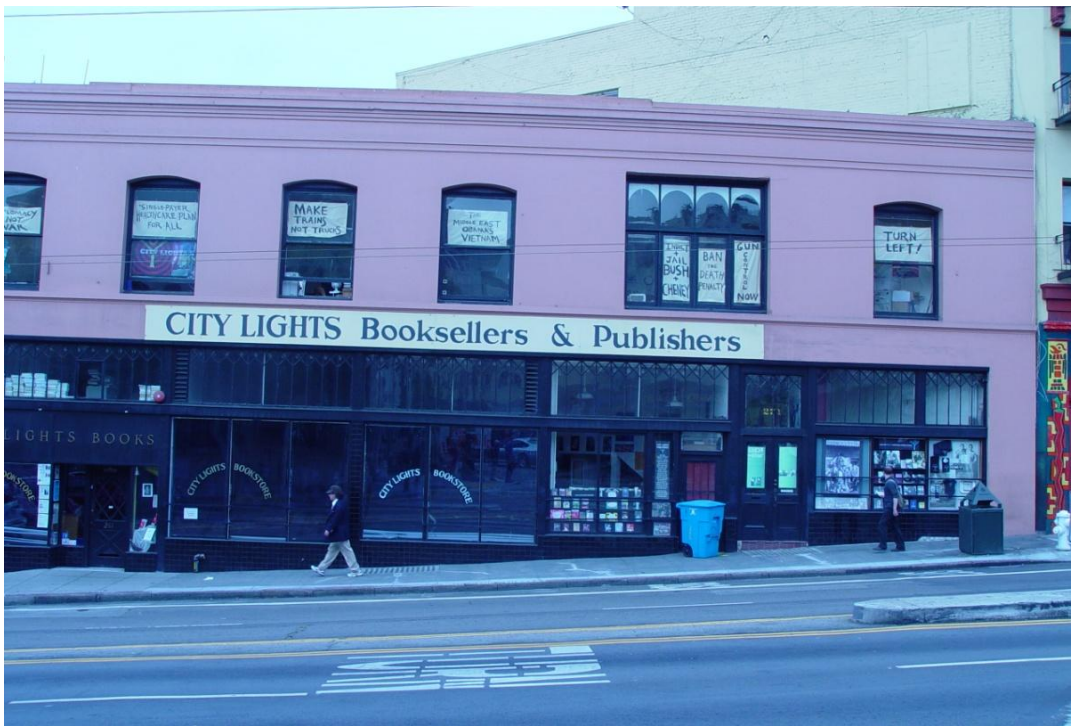
³ Murder One UK homepage, <http://www.murderone.co.uk/> (accessed 3 May 2010).

⁴ Sara Nelson, “The Future of Publishing?” *Society of Authors Magazine* (Summer 2009): 9.

⁵ Tara Brabazon, “The Google Effect,” *Libri* 56, no. 3 (September 2006): 157-67, <http://www.librijournal.org/pdf/2006-3pp157-167.pdf> (accessed 3 May 2010).

too often a shallow, personal shopping basket is filled.⁶ A decreasing number of book reviews reduces the chance of stumbling across a challenging, new, and defiant monograph from a small publishing house and a new researcher.

Important bookshops with experienced buyers and knowledgeable staff hold a pivotal role in contemporary intellectual life. They connect the physical experience of shopping with a wide-ranging expertise that is distinct from our personal biases and imperatives. City Lights has fulfilled this role and is arguably one of the most famous in the world. A political magnet and tourist beacon at 261 Columbus Avenue, San Francisco, the shop is an example of a series of ideas such as city imaging, urban regeneration, and the bohemian index that are fashionable in the creative industries literature. It is a rare example of both a bookstore and publishing house that has remained independent and unchained from an increasingly vertically integrated publishing industry. It is unique, as one of the few examples in the world where a shop — let alone a bookshop — is a hub of intellectual and educational tourism. Alcatraz, the Golden Gate, and the Bay Bridge are spectacular. However, it is the cultural cluster at North Beach that gives the city distinction and fame. Two examples from popular culture — the lyrics of Joan Baez’s “Diamonds and Rust”⁷ and the *Word Wars*⁸ documentary on the competitive scrabble community — mention Washington Square as the community hub of North Beach. This region’s urban history aligns creativity, dissent, commerce, and political progressivism, while melding books into popular culture.



City Lights, San Francisco. Photograph by Tara Brabazon

⁶ This tendency in Google searches is noted in Nicholas Carr, *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, From Edison to Google* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008).

⁷ Joan Baez, “Diamonds and Rust,” *Diamonds and Rust*, CD, A&M, 1975.

⁸ *Word Wars*, DVD, directed by Eric Chaikin (Hollywood, CA: Seven Arts Pictures, 2004).

Most famously, City Lights is known as a home of Beat poets. The literary tour book, *The Beat Generation in San Francisco*, starts at the Bookshop.⁹ This order is for a reason. The Beat Generation was born in New York City but became part of popular culture in San Francisco.¹⁰ Like the narrative of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, the Beats were always heading towards Frisco. While Kerouac lived fast, drank faster, and died too early, Lawrence Ferlinghetti has enacted the greatest revenge on his critics by outliving them.¹¹ He founded City Lights Bookstore with Peter Martin in 1953, as the first all paperback bookstore in the United States. A publishing arm became part of the project. It gained international fame and notoriety in 1956 when Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* was labelled "obscene." Ferlinghetti and Shigeyoshi Murao, the manager of the bookstore, were arrested. While Ferlinghetti and City Lights successfully defended the obscenity charge — and book sales boomed from the publicity — it was a moment of collision between pop and poetry. This judicial decision about *Howl* would influence later obscenity trials for *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Tropic of Capricorn* and *Naked Lunch*.¹²

From the *Howl* trial, City Lights became bigger than the Beats, and remains to this day a hub for a diversity of thinkers, writers, and intellectuals. Lawrence Ferlinghetti became San Francisco's first Poet Laureate.¹³ Even amid this institutional recognition, dissent has always been a key to their project. Importantly, besides moral conservatives, establishment literary critics also criticized *Howl* specifically and the Beats more generally. As Nancy Peters realized, "establishment intellectuals disliked beat populism and the lack of respect for tradition, the latter a complaint that continues in academia today in new guise in the debates over multiculturalism, curriculum, and the canon."¹⁴ While the Beat "moment" at the level of writing collaborations was concluded by 1956 when Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Kerouac left San Francisco, their legacy on North Beach and City Lights Bookstore was important. Their anti-establishment, popular culture-infused intellectualism incited the quirky, innovative, difficult, and defiant cultural history of San Francisco. A range of researchers has realized that a combination of "social movements, policy innovation . . . urban populism and local economic democracy"¹⁵ makes the city unusual in the history of intellectual culture. City Lights' publishing programme continues this legacy by commissioning works on colonialism, South American history, multiculturalism, gay and lesbian politics, and Marxist and feminist theories. They take risks with their publishing list, with a dozen titles being added each year. Besides *Howl*, the courage of the publishing house to commission Charles Bukowski, Georges Bataille, and Sam Shepard is notable.

Festivals have been built on City Lights' foundation, from Litquake to the Bay Area Anarchist Bookfair to the Porchlight storytelling series, and the Writers with Drinks variety show. A wider context of dissenting ideas includes *Mother Jones*, *Salon*, and *Wired*, which are based in San Francisco, along with Current TV. Politics, democracy, resistance, and alternative histories are supported by the books stocked by City Lights Bookshop. The shop's basement not only holds the non fiction collection, but also organizes it through a range of innovative categories:

⁹ Bill Morgan, *The Beat Generation in San Francisco: A Literary Tour* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2003), 1-13.

¹⁰ David Meltzer, ed., *San Francisco Beat: Talking with the Poets* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001).

¹¹ Steve Redhead, "City Light: Lawrence Ferlinghetti at 90," Steve Redhead homepage, papers, http://www.steveredhead.com/publications/Steve_Redhead_City_Light.pdf (accessed 3 May 2010).

¹² Bill Morgan and Nancy J. Peters, eds., *Howl on Trial: The Battle for Free Expression* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2006).

¹³ Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *San Francisco Poems: San Francisco Poet Laureate Series No. 1* (San Francisco: City Lights Foundation, 2001).

¹⁴ Nancy J. Peters, "The Beat Generation and San Francisco's Culture of Dissent," in *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture*, ed. James Brook, Chris Carlsson, and Nancy J. Peters (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998), 209.

¹⁵ Richard DeLeon, *Left Coast City: Progressive Politics in San Francisco, 1975-1991* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 2.

- Muckraking
- Commodity aesthetics
- Topographies
- Evidence
- People's history
- Class war
- Stolen continents

Such a mode of cataloguing stock works against the conventional organization of classics, modern literature, geography, history, and political science. City Lights has productively disengaged from “business as usual” by remaining an unchained independent bookshop that enfolds a publishing house.

Throughout my adult life, City Lights has been a beacon, a confirmation of a way to enact ethical commerce with a political agenda. This article therefore uses a bookshop as a lens to observe reading, thinking, cities, and economic development. This investigation also provides an insight into the intellectual history of San Francisco. No article can capture the scale and scope of the city imaging of San Francisco, being what Helene Goupil and Josh Krist described as “world-class” and yet “very provincial.”¹⁶ The city possesses the checklist logged by creative industries theorists: a well educated population; many universities; a strong transportation infrastructure;¹⁷ the bohemian culture of North Beach; and ethnic, sexual, and racial diversity.

Borrowing from the *Paris Review*, I selected the format of an interview to capture a filament of history of both City Lights and the intellectual history of San Francisco. Author, editor, and event manager for City Lights Bookshop, Peter Maravelis was described by Bill Morgan as having “organized many unforgettable literary happenings.”¹⁸ On a recent trip to San Francisco in June 2009, I interviewed Peter Maravelis at Puccini’s Restaurant in the Bohemian district on Columbus Avenue. He spoke about books, bookshops, and politics.



Peter Maravelis at Puccini’s. Photograph by Tara Brabazon

¹⁶ Helene Goupil and Josh Krist, *San Francisco: The Unknown City* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2005), 9.

¹⁷ This infrastructure includes two airports, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Bay Bridge, Cable cars, and the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit).

¹⁸ Morgan, *The Beat Generation in San Francisco*, 12.

Tara Brabazon: You run many of the events at City Lights. Why are events created by City Lights Bookshop? What is their role in the bookshop's activities?

Peter Maravelis: I think my mission statement, and City Lights' mission statement, comes very, very close. And I take my lead from the work of Marcel Mauss. What do you do with the excess? What do you do with the excess of resources? But to find a way to bring the community together in a celebration of culture has been the mission. We go from the academic community to the arts, to people working with translating languages.

I think that from the punk rock scene initially and having followed the Situationists — and also working with academics who are also on the fringe you might say — I was very much interested in what an event is, what a happening is. And some of the happenings of the sixties influenced me very much, [like] what Fluxus was doing. When I arrived at City Lights there wasn't really anyone doing it. There wasn't an imperative to do it. And I think that the beauty of the place is that people who work there can help shape it and so, you know, I put forth the idea of doing more of these events, and I did have some very specific ideas and it really follows our philosophy.

Our philosophy is in tune with progressive politics, with understanding globalization, and the way that conservatism functions overseas and abroad. We're creating a bulwark for freedom of speech and for all the various movements, whether they are like global liberation movements, ecology, you name it. So we're trying to create a bulwark that at the same time gives voice to a lot of people that have been marginalized.

From the very start, my idea was to create a forum, a place, in the same way that City Lights mission is to create an environment to which people come and create a dialogue, and the dialogue is between reader and writer, and it's a dialogue that follows progressive literature, fiction over the ages. There is a continuum even prior to City Lights' inception. You had the renaissance of literature in San Francisco. Prior to that was the conscientious objector movement of the earlier part of the last century where people were actually protesting against World War One and pointing out what was ill-conceived about war in general. So it's followed the Vietnam War, the WTO in Seattle, and it is current to this very day.

TB: How long have you worked at City Lights and how do you believe the function of bookshops have transformed during your time there?

PM: I've been working there since 1992. When I first started we were lucky if we could do one [event] a month. And I began to curate the series [of talks, readings and debates], thinking [about] what we've released as a publishing house, thinking about how we've curated the books in the various sections of the store. We simply expanded upon that mission statement. What we've done is done more of what we do. Part of it is also because of the internet, so it's helped in that sense of authors being able to help us in marketing them, and sending them to places, and hooking them up with academics or cultural centres that can sponsor them. The internet has been helpful in that way.

TB: Have you found that this function has changed in an e-commerce, online marketing environment?

PM: Well, City Lights takes advantage of as many possible avenues — media avenues — as it possibly can. So because of the internet we've been able to reach people in countries that we never could before. That's obvious. But, I think the death of the bookstore, as they call it, is really a kind of a myth that I think in the next few years you may see shattered because strangely enough even in this kind of an economy in

the United States, new bookstores are opening up. And there are some very savvy young booksellers in much the same way that you see very young and very savvy editors at various houses engaging in some really wonderful work.

TB: How have online book sellers like Amazon transformed the book selling market?

PM: Strangely, I don't think it's affected us very much at all. Yeah, we exist in a completely different realm. And because of who and what we are, we occupy a "niche," and I put that in quotes. I think bookstores that are succeeding are doing much the same thing. Look at St. Mark's [Bookshop], look at Powell's Bookstore, look at Seminary Books, or Quimbies which is a really wonderful little bookstore in Chicago which has a broad range of zines and a fabulous queer theory section. What they've done is taken a close look at who they're serving, the community, and they've attempted to create and curate a selection of books, and also curate a reading series, and it's very much like what we do. I'm not saying that people have copied us. I'm just noticing that the people who are succeeding are doing that very, very well.

TB: I'm loving the use of the word curate. City Lights also has an online portal. Have you noticed — if you will — sociological differences between who comes into the shop and who buys books and other materials online?

PM: No, not really. It goes clear across the board in terms of ethnicity and sex, and there are people that purchase books from all over the world, and people who come into the store from all over the world. It's similar. It's a very similar demographic.

TB: Peter, as an author and editor, what do you think is the role of bookshops in the production and dissemination of books in our digitized age?

PM: I think that working at City Lights, we've discovered that it's important to understand the constituents. It's good to know who the community is composed of, and this goes back to our origins. It's especially important for other bookstores that don't have our particular cultural track record to understand the community they are in and be able to form links to that community.

TB: So that knowledge of the local matters?

PM: Yeah. I think that we're going to see an interesting marriage between the local and the global. It has to be that way because borders have really crumbled and whether it is Mexico and the U.S. or Eastern Europe, it is the same dynamic. People can now communicate with each other across these cultural lines in ways that they never really could before. We're receiving fiction that is blowing our minds right now particularly from the Ukraine, from Eastern Europe. It's a very exciting time.

TB: *How do you feel balancing progressive politics with event management, which is so often co-opted into a particular form of capitalism?*

PM: It's a good question. I cherry pick who I work with. We've never felt the imperative to work with a house because they're offering us co-op money. I think this is the genius of Ferlinghetti, the fact that he created a publishing house and a book store. One hand, in essence, washes the other so that we're not at the mercy financially of any entity. That is why years ago Lawrence refused to take government money for any of his work or for City Lights. The idea is to keep ourselves autonomous and afloat, and that gives us the freedom to be able to pick and choose in terms of who we bring into the store, who we represent, and so for us we don't see much of a conflict. Yes we do have people who are part of bigger houses, but — is there a contradiction? Yes and no. Some of those people like Naomi Klein, who's done a great deal of good, is with a much larger house and they help to disseminate her work across the board.

There are times when I do create forums and I do bring in people who have opposing opinions. But you know generally speaking we only have so many days in the week so we prefer to focus on people who are not being heard.

TB: *What are your criteria for creating a good event for City Lights? Do you have a checklist that you go through?*

PM: Absolutely. It's got to raise my blood pressure a little. It's got to get my blood boiling. There's also got to be a need in the community. When I bring some good writing home and it really excites me, and I share it with my co-workers and it excites them, and then I share it with the community, and then it's obvious that something is happening with some new writer. We generally try to bring them in and often they are writers that aren't even going to be sent out by their [publishing] house, but we try to find a way to bring them out even if it is speaking to universities and attempting to get them a speaking gig at another cultural centre. We have a lot of contemporary fiction, a lot of literature in translation, current events we're very interested in, in terms of political critique, sociological critique that is outside of the norm and the mainstream media, and of course the arts, and then there are our own authors. And that's pretty much how the schedule is designed seasonally.

TB: *Looking back on your career, what do you think has been your most successful event?*

PM: I think the Paul Virilio symposium of last October [2008], which was probably the most ambitious project that we had ever tried. It was simply fantastic. It was flawless and there were so many things that potentially could have gone wrong and everyone was so gracious, the participants, the various venues, and having a really stellar staff to help me out at City Lights. They are people who are extremely knowledgeable, who are very hard workers.

TB: *And using that as an example, why did you choose Virilio and not Baudrillard, Derrida, or Deleuze. Why Virilio? Why was that choice made?*

PM: Some of these people we've already done events with, like Derrida we did a few years back with Stanford and a symposium on the death penalty with Derrida. We arranged this great meeting between Derrida and local poets, which was fantastic. So Virilio we felt had been underappreciated and it was also

Steve Redhead's collection¹⁹ which was really fantastic and made his work accessible for so many different people. There were many different factors that made us feel that it was time. The idea started about four years ago and it was really one solid year of mechanics, and three solid years of talking with people back and forth, and when Steve's book appeared it was sort of now is the time. It was everyone at the right place and time and I also felt like that the fact that Virilio was coming on in years that it was really time to do something for him now. Sylvère Lotringer flew to France and actually interviewed him for us. To bring the two of them together and give Sylvère a chance to really offer him a tribute and the interview that he did with him was a very beautiful tribute.

TB: *Tourism matters a great deal to San Francisco. What do you think is the role of City Lights Bookshop and Publisher in building the portfolio of tourism of San Francisco?*

PM: We're interested in spreading our particular virus above all. But tourism is very important. You can do it intelligently. I don't think you really need to set up chain stores. And I think what a lot of people in North Beach have been doing is keeping out the chain stores for years. So the businesses that have been opening fit with the continuum of businesses and also the ethnicity of the denizens of North Beach for the last century. So you'll see a lot of Italian restaurants still opening up and even smaller shops that are run by people who have lived in San Francisco all their lives. So it's very heartening. It is a very hopeful time for small businesses while the larger businesses are collapsing. We're seeing — slowly — the ebb going the other way.

TB: *Do you see City Lights as a hub or a spoke or a cluster of North Beach?*

PM: I think that, geographically, we look at Washington Square as a kind of hub because it has been there longer than City Lights. It's one of the few places where it is a last bastion of public discourse. You see people flying kites and playing soccer, and the older Italian men and Chinese men sitting on benches side by side conversing. And I think that we're in constellation with a lot of other great businesses. I guess you can say that we were the conscience of North Beach while a place like Washington Square would be a hub.

TB: *We know about the role of music in developing tourism — the Beatles' Liverpool or Haight Ashbury. Do you think that fiction and non-fiction can operate in a similar way in the development of tourism?*

PM: I think they have. I think the fact that Lawrence Ferlinghetti has been releasing CD's on his own. He's been doing these self produced, almost homespun CDs that he sells from the store. They are not even sold online. They are just something that he produces. We're very much aware of that. There's always been a connection. You've got to remember that *Search and Destroy*, which was the first punk rock journal out of San Francisco, was edited in the cellar of City Lights. A continuum has been followed. *Instant City* was about people writing about San Francisco, mostly denizens. Some interviews. Some prose. Some of the people involved in *Instant City* have been involved in bands. So the editor of *Instant City* was a long-time employee of City Lights. There are many journals that come out of City Lights and

¹⁹ Steve Redhead, *The Paul Virilio Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004; New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

there is a very strong connection to the music community, fiction, and non-fiction. We had Daniel Grandbois — who is out of Denver and in various bands like Tarantella, and he just had two books released, one on Boa Press and one on Green Integer — and we did an event with him, and he had members of his various bands from Denver come and perform at the store, and he read afterward. There has always been this marriage of art, of music. They are inter-related.

TB: *Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of physical bookshops? What can we do to protect and look after these institutions in an online environment?*

PM: A book is one of the greatest fetish items in the world. You will never see bookstores go under on account of that, so long as we still have bodies, unless there is a great singularity around and sweeps us all off the face of the planet. Unlikely I think. So I'm actually extremely hopeful for the book. But I think what you will see, though, is that there will be fewer bookstores, and they all may be filling a specific niche in the same way as City Lights is filling a niche. People are going to have to know their constituents very well. They are going to have to bring people into their orbit. I think bookstores are going to take on the function of being community centres. They are going to be great meeting places, in the same way that City Lights is.

TB: *I just wonder if there is something that political progressives or governments could do to protect bookshops, or do you think that it is simply about knowing the market, knowing the consumers? Is there anything top down or bottom up to protect these organizations?*

PM: Certainly there is much that government can do to protect smaller businesses. I have to admit, though, that City Lights is a survivor. Regardless of what is happening in the world, we will march on. It goes both ways. People have to be savvy in this environment. I wouldn't expect a lot from government. I think Mr. Obama is doing the best he can. He doesn't have much to work with, though. So with what he's got, he's going to try. But, yes it would be great if there were certain controls that could be passed on larger businesses. In so far as distribution is concerned, that is a very big issue, and it's a very complicated issue. But I think that the ability to protect the distribution of small publishers and to be able to protect small publishing in general is really, really important. Again, I don't know what I could suggest at a federal or state level. At this point, California is at the point of being bankrupt, so it looks like in this state that we're pretty much on our own. On a federal level, we'll see. Obama's doing it a step at a time. We'll see what happens.

* * *

It is valuable to interview a man who is responsible for developing a creative infrastructure in North Beach. His commentary contained surprises. Significantly, he argued for the importance of small business and independents²⁰ in both social and economic development. This is a quirky, but important, North Beach imperative that has a wider application. His arguments demonstrate that capitalism is a discourse

²⁰ Charles Leadbeater and Kate Oakley, *The Independents: Britain's New Cultural Entrepreneurs* (London: Demos, 1999).

for negotiation, not denial. Richard DeLeon realized that “for many progressives, small business is the answer to building a progressive urban regime in San Francisco.”²¹ Such a commitment ensures an environmentally sustainable commercial environment along with employment for residents. That is why, for Maravelis, the role of government is to “protect smaller businesses.”

The commitment of Maravelis and the City Lights staff in supporting authors, activists, and small publishers is part of the heritage created through fighting the *Howl* obscenity trial. Ferlinghetti remembered: “When Ginsberg first walked into City Lights and handed me the manuscript of ‘*Howl*,’ I saw him as another of those far-out poets and wandering intellectuals who had started hanging out in our three-year-old bookstore, which the San Francisco Chronicle had already started calling the intellectual center of the city.”²² What the City Lights bookshop, publisher, and staff enabled was the movement of bohemia from the underground²³ and into popular culture. They still treat such a project as part of their mission statement, even believing that, to cite Maravelis, “bookstores are going to take on the function of being community centres.”

San Francisco remains the archetypal city for developing a creative economy. A compact city locked into the tip of a peninsula, it welcomes ethnic, racial, linguistic, and sexual diversity. It features a thriving bohemian district in North Beach, a burgeoning range of technological companies and industries, and a diverse and well supported music industry. In short, if San Francisco did not exist, Richard Florida would have to invent it. However, in this easy narrative of Web 2.0, strong transportation infrastructure, multiculturalism, and gay pride, the role of an independent bookstore in developing an intellectual culture may be decentred, undermined, or forgotten. Richard Walker reminded us that “such cultivated urbanity is founded on political economy and political culture more than on natural scenery and urban design.”²⁴ Yet also — and this is the key element that San Francisco’s urban history contributes to international planning — it was the antidevelopment policies that enabled the bohemian district to form, grow, and sustain its influence. North Beach has avoided chain stores, fought for open space and the opening of ‘appropriate’ businesses for its inhabitants, knowing that this specificity would enable the development of a special and quirky cultural tourism.

The history of intellectual culture told by San Francisco stems from not only the story and example of City Lights, but its capacity to be independent and enable innovative solutions to the paradoxes of political resistance in capitalism, while fostering antidevelopment urban polices and economic development. Walker believed that “San Franciscans, particularly intellectuals, have moved in counterflow to mainstream ideas of modernity.”²⁵ Actually — and following on from Bauman, Virilio, and Baudrillard — modernity has been transformed into an argument rather than an epoch, and a clustering of debate rather than a sensibility. A bookshop as good as City Lights is a way to organize, categorize, and feed new theories of politics, capitalism, and modernity. Built from the determination and imagination of Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and continued by City Lights staff like Peter Maravelis, San Francisco has become a city where poetry not only matters, but is part of popular culture and cultural tourism.²⁶

²¹ DeLeon, *Left Coast City*, 154.

²² Lawrence Ferlinghetti, “Introduction: ‘Howl’ at the Frontiers,” in Morgan and Peters, xii.

²³ Herbert Gold, *Bohemia: Where Art, Angst, Love, and Strong Coffee Meet* (Mount Jackson: Axios Press, 1993).

²⁴ Richard Walker, “An Appetite for the City,” in Brook, Carlsson, and Peters, 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁶ James Brook stated that “the city has been hospitable to poets — their presence has even contributed to an aura of popular and rebellious culture to the image of San Francisco,” in his article “Remarks on the Poetic Transformation of San Francisco,” in Brook, Carlsson, and Peters, 1.

Jacques Lacan famously proclaimed, "I think where I am not."²⁷ Perhaps what created City Lights' success is that the staff think, organize, buy, and sell where they are. They understand the potentials and problems of the local, the analogue, the corporeal, the historical, and the liminal. Perhaps Peter Maravelis is right. Bookshops will become our new community centres. Maybe they will create a model for a more intelligent consumerism and event management. Observing the train wreck of the financial sector, these special and specialist bookshops may provide a pathway to a better mode of capitalism.

²⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 166.