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Lawrence Ferlinghetti: Images of the City
Lawrence Ferlinghetti: Obrazy města

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Děkuji vedoucímu práce doc. Justinu Quinnovi, PhD za cenné připomínky, inspiraci a čas, který mi věnoval. Také bych chtěla poděkovat svému příteli, mamince a babičce za podporu, kterou mi poskytovali po celou dobu studia.

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V Praze dne 5. června 2012/ Prague, 5th June 2012

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

Abstract

The thesis provides three distinct perspectives on the representations of urban spaces in poetry of Lawrence Ferlinghetti. While they are dissimilar in terms of poetic style, employed literary devices and concepts and themes they explore, one important aspect is shared: the images of the city serve to discuss themes that transcend the urban domain. Ferlinghetti uses the city as a framework for his reflections on subject matters that have been categorized as follows: intertextuality, memory, critical urban discourse.

The first perspective regards the city as a text and an intertext composed of various sorts of texts such as architecture, visual arts, literature, sculpture or music. These texts may enter the relation with the urban text when they are “read” in the context of actual physical location. A juxtaposition of two dissimilar texts may trigger production of new meanings, which has the character of continual process: it is the intertextual flux. As a result, the perception of one or both codes suffers modification; one text contaminates the other. The examples of these influences and interferences between urban and other texts are analyzed on the background of the study of intertextuality in reception and critical theory.

The second perspective presents the city as a mnemonic space where both individual and collective memory are stored and rooted in specific locations. Various attempts to retrieve individual, family and collective memory are carried out within spatial-temporal and social structures of the city in hope to ground thus one's identity. These include returns to once familiar places and confrontation with one's youth, but these journeys back in time often result in great disillusionment, for there is an uncrossable gap between the present and the past. The discrepancy between recollection and reality manifests itself in many different manners. Blurred indistinct vision, under which solid structures dissolve and which causes the cityscape to adopt liquid character, is characteristic for cities conceived as reminiscence images. These are often also depicted through conventional imagery that deprives the city of its realistic elements and converts it into an idealized picture. A sense of temporal remoteness is enhanced by emphasis on spatial distance. Ferlinghetti's reflections of

memory center chiefly around its absence: ephemerality, loss and oblivion.

The third view offers an overview of numerous issues that concern the whole nation and which are exemplified within urban space. The critique is exerted over particular urban spaces associated with certain more general concepts: the suburbs with conservative values, social and political conformity, cultural homogeneity and “American way of life”; marginal urban spaces with chaos, refuse and emptiness; Macy's department store with consumerism, false substitutions of true values, and a sense of alienation. Besides larger national issues, also the psychological impact of the dehumanized urban environment is explored. In particular, feelings frequently experienced by urban dwellers like apathy, anonymity, alienation, solitude or a sense of rootlessness are described.

Keywords: Lawrence Ferlinghetti, city, intertextuality, memory, critical discourse

Abstrakt

Tato práce si klade za cíl představit tři základní pohledy, jimiž je nahlíženo město v poezii Lawrence Ferlinghettiho. Tyto perspektivy se vzájemně liší básnickým stylem, použitými literárními prostředky i tématy, které zpracovávají. Sdílejí ovšem jeden zásadní aspekt: obrazy města slouží k úvahám, které přesahují rámec témat specifických pro městský diskurz a zasahují do obecnějších rovin. Otázky, jimiž se Ferlinghetti takto zabývá, byly rozčleněny do tří skupin: intertextualita, paměť a kritický diskurz.

První pohled chápe město jako text a intertext, jenž je složen z mnoha různých druhů textů. Pojetí textu se zde neomezuje na text literární, nýbrž jsou jím myšleny i texty architektury, výtvarného umění, sochařství, nebo hudby. Jsou-li takové texty “čteny” v kontextu určitého místa ve městě (a tedy skrze takové místo), dochází k určitému setkání, které může dát vzniknout novým významům skrze paralely a kontrasty mezi odlišnými kódy těchto textů. Taková setkání se podílí na procesu kontinuální tvorby významů skrze intertextuální tok. Výsledkem je změna ve vnímání jednoho nebo obou textů, jeden je kontaminován druhým, a naopak. Příklady takové intertextuality hojně se vyskytující ve Ferlinghettiho básních jsou analyzovány na pozadí recepční a kritické teorie.

Druhá perspektiva pojímá město jako mnemotechnický prostor, kde je uložena a zakořeněna individuální a kolektivní paměť. Její znovunalezení je nutné k ukotvení identity jedince, který se proto snaží odhalit zasuté osobní, rodinné i kolektivní vzpomínky. Navrací se na známá místa, kde dochází ke konfrontaci s jeho vlastní minulostí. Bohužel, tyto pokusy o cestu zpět v čase často končí těžkou deziluzí, protože současnost a minulost odděluje nepřekročitelná propast. Održenost od minulosti se projevuje jako nesoulad mezi vzpomínkami a realitou. Pro města, která jsou v básních koncipována jako vzpomínky, je typické například jakési neostré vidění, které rozpouští pevné kontury městských objektů. Tento způsob zobrazení často souvisí se záměrně konvenčním podáním, které zbavuje město všech realistických prvků a předkládá idealizovaný obraz. Pocit dlouhé časové odluky je umocněn důrazem na

prostorovou vzdálenost. Ferlinghettiho úvahy o povaze paměti se zaměřují na způsoby, jimiž je možno paměť obnovovat, ale tyto úvahy ztroskotávají na poznání o pomíjivosti, nenávratnosti a konečném zapomění.

Třetí způsob zobrazování města se zaměřuje na kritiku obecných společenských a politických problémů tehdejší doby. Městský prostor zastupuje celý stát a jeho jednotlivé části jsou spojovány s určitými koncepty. Předměstí je například dáváno do souvislosti s konzervativními hodnotami, společenskou a politickou konformitou, kulturní homogenitou a “americkým způsobem života.” Dalším příkladem mohou být marginální území, spojována s chaosem, přemírou odpadu a, paradoxně, také s prázdnotou, nebo obchodní dům Macy's, který reprezentuje konzumní životní styl, falešné náhražky skutečných hodnot a z toho pramenící pocit prázdnoty. Pocitům obyvatel je tedy také věnována pozornost: město je koncipováno jako odcizený prostor, ve kterém lidé zakouší pocity anonymity, nezájmu, samoty a vykořeněnosti.

Klíčová slova: Lawrence Ferlinghetti, město, intertextualita, paměť, kritický diskurz

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Introduction

The theme of the city fascinated Lawrence Ferlinghetti since his youth and became a major source of inspiration for his poetry. Living in various cities in the United States and Europe – most notably New York, Paris and San Francisco – he gathered a considerable personal experience with these places. He also explored the subject theoretically: for his doctoral degree at Sorbonne, he wrote a dissertation entitled “The City as Symbol in Modern Poetry: In Search of a Metropolitan Tradition” which provided him with a solid theoretical foundation because the research involved extensive study of works of authors like T.S. Eliot, Walt Whitman, Hart Crane, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Federico García Lorca, Francis Thompson, André Breton and Djuna Barnes.¹ He also contributed to the volume *Literature and the American Urban Experience: Essays on the City and Literature* (1981) and delivered a speech at the conference on literature and the urban experience held at the State University of New Jersey in 1980.² His inclination towards urban themes sometimes manifests itself already in the titles of his poems and poetry collections that often refer to specific locations, for example his famous *A Coney Island of the Mind* (1958) or *A Far Rockaway of the Heart* (1997). His work as a publisher and bookseller is even more closely associated with the urban environment, in particular with the city of San Francisco where City Lights Bookstore (whose name again refers to the urban space) is located.

The aim of this thesis is to analyze representations of the city in Lawrence Ferlinghetti's poetry. I will argue that these representations despite their elaborateness, emphasis on detail and a considerable space dedicated to them, are never the ultimate objective of the poems; they serve as a framework for the discussion of matters that transcend the domain of urban themes. Nevertheless, these representations of city spaces, which vary in form and function they perform, play essential role there. I will

1 Alistar Wisker, “An Anarchist Among the Floorwalkers: The Poetry of Lawrence Ferlinghetti,” *The Beat Generation Writers*, ed. A. Robert Lee (London/Chicago: Pluto Press, 1996) 79.

2 Wisker 79.

suggest three distinct perspectives on the city that correspond to three different approaches characteristic for Ferlinghetti's poetry: first, the city as an intertext or a space where a multitude of different texts is stored; secondly, the city as a mnemonic space where individual and collective memory is preserved; and thirdly, the city as a framework for critical discourse. Each perspective and its specific patterns such as associated themes or characteristic means of expression will be discussed in separate chapter.

My primary source for the analysis will be Ferlinghetti's book of poems *These Are My Rivers: New & Selected Poems 1955-1993* (New Directions, 1993). Secondary sources include theoretical works about urban representations in literature such as the study of Czech literary theoretician Daniela Hodrová *Citlivé město: Eseje z mytopoetiky* (2006) that touches upon a number of minor themes discussed in the three chapters, material on the Beat Generation, and finally works related to particular themes discussed in each chapter, such as intertextuality or memory.

Chapter I – Intertextuality

The aim of this chapter is to present the city as an intertext and explore the intertextual aspects of the city in attempt to identify the features that are shared by literary and urban texts and the intersections between these. In particular, the ways the urban text enters into literature and how the literary text enters the space of the city and mutual interrelation of these. Furthermore, other types of texts that belong to the text of the city will be discussed in similar manner: visual arts, sculpture, architecture, music and so forth. The theoretical and practical demonstration of the shared properties will be analyzed through Lawrence Ferlinghetti's selected poems *These Are My Rivers* (1994).

In order to explain why the city may be considered a text (and intertext) some essential concepts of the understanding of the term text in the context of study of intertextuality shall be introduced first. The concept of the text had been long discussed only in relation to literary theory. From the traditional point of view, the text was identified by words, phrases or sentences, forming together a coherent discourse fixed in writing.³ Since it was captured in a graphical form the text itself was analogously regarded as something fixed. Later, however, the term started to be perceived differently, partly due to the spreading use of electronic technologies and partly it was literary theoreticians and literary practice that played role in the re-interpretation of its meaning; the original definition was questioned in all of its aspects, many of which were adjusted for the current needs. Most notably, the emphasis was placed on the fluid character of the text which manifests itself in the relations a text maintains with external reality and/or other texts, while remaining, at the same time, autonomous and self-contained.

A complete self-sufficiency is deemed practically impossible, because in order to become a meaningful unit, the text must be organized by means of the inner coherent and cohesive structure. In addition, the theory of intertextuality maintains that

3 Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991) 106.

every text also contains an outer coherence, by which it is intertwined in a network of other texts, where each work refers to a different one, or more of them. Hence, a twofold coherence occurs: an intratextual one, which is responsible for the integrity of the individual unit, and an intertextual one, which ties more text units together.⁴

The meaning of the term text was thus re-defined, even though the two interpretations – the traditional and the newly established – still co-exist and are used according to the context: the traditional way of seeing the text is still far more common in daily use of the word, leaving the other one for scholarly purposes. Therefore, we should rather speak about a clarification because the former interpretation was not dismissed completely, but the restricted meaning was substituted by a broader outlook.

Another concept that has been surpassed is that of a text as a mere verbal occurrence; its meaning extended beyond the border of linguistics. This shift towards a less restricted use allowed that also non-literary systems started to be considered a text. Regarding the scope of such systems, there is no general agreement; Julia Kristeva speaks about the possibility to study as texts also art and the unconscious, Yuri Lotman then about texts of culture, visual arts, architecture and similar ones.⁵ Other texts of art share an important function with the literary text – they convey meanings, therefore we can speak about these in terms of a language of its own, consisting of a system of signs. Furthermore, their structure and organizing principles tend to be identifiable; the presence of these features guarantees internal coherence. Since literature and texts of art other than literary share these most basic principles, it is valid to use the term for all of them.

Regarding the urban space: one of the significant characteristic of the intertext is that it is composed of a multitude of other texts of various types. The text of the city stores the architectonic texts, texts of visual arts, sculpture, music and many other, therefore it works as a framework or “container” in which the individual texts are integrated in a network of connections and relations. The juxtaposition of these provides an endless source for new meanings to be created, as the following

4 Heinrich F. Plett, “Intertextualities,” *Intertextuality*, ed. Heinrich F. Plett (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991) 5.

5 Daniela Hodrová, *Citlivé město: Eseje z mytopoetiky* (Praha: Akropolis, 2006)10.

proposition of Hodrová suggests:

Město je textem [...] který se neustále tvoří a neustále odkazuje někam mimo sebe, k jiným textům a systémům, zahrnuje je do sebe a propojuje se s nimi. Město je právě tak jako text literární mnohoznačným prostorem, v němž vyvstávají a kříží se, proplétají četné významy, je pohyblivou hrou významů a odkazů. Stejně jako literární text je město polem, v němž dochází ke konstrukci, ale také k destrukci, dekonstrukci a rekonstrukci a jako každý text je intertextem.⁶

What is essential in both literary and urban texts is therefore the eternal process of creation and production of new meanings – semiosis – which is analyzed in Kristeva's intertextual theory, where this ability to construct new meanings at the border or in between two texts is called “productivité.”⁷ Barthes also claims that “[...] the text is experienced only in an activity, in a production.”⁸ This guiding principle applies both for the literary text as well as for the urban one, which might be demonstrated on the fact that the city is a constantly changing system, never completed as well as the meaning of the literary work. And it is this constant process of creation – “writing” – that prevents the intertextuality from being merely a fashionable term for allusion, use of quotation or influence. These markers of intertextuality seem to be somewhat static whereas the “intertextual flux” is, on the contrary, an unstable stream, which as Plett remarks is difficult to analyze systematically because in order to do so a scholar would need to arrest it. That would however contravene the intentions of the originator of the text.⁹

Before proceeding further to the practical analysis of the texts, I would like to explain why is the chosen approach appropriate for the evaluation of Ferlinghetti's poetry. Like many other post-WWII writers Ferlinghetti also connected critical urban discourse with the experimental aesthetic forms of his poems. In poems of these

6 Hodrová 27.

7 Plett 6.

8 Barthes qtd in Plett. Plett 6.

9 Plett 6.

writers, Robert Bennett holds, the architectural and urban spaces were “read” as a kind of a language, approaching thus a form of a “politically charged work of art” or “a species of ideologically laden poetry written in glass, steel and concrete,” the consequence of which was that no clear boundaries were delineated between the city and the arts.¹⁰ And not only there were no clear boundaries in between the urban spaces and the poetic expressions of them, but this production could be characterized by forming “intricate webs of multiple interart influences.”¹¹ It can be seen in Ferlinghetti's poems that show his interest in experimental interart fusions that blend different artistic media. He exerted the connection of visual art and poetry as well as that of music and poetry, as demonstrates for example his project of oral messages – poems conceived for jazz accompaniment. In my analysis, I will discuss the realization of different intertextual relations between various kinds of texts in Ferlinghetti's poems, focusing primarily on the mutual influence and interference of urban and literary code.

The poem “Reading Yeats I Do Not Think...” demonstrates how even an unintentional perception of the reader's surroundings may interfere with the subject of the literary text, even if these two were completely unrelated, the result of which is a unique mental connection established between the two types of text. Reading Yeats, the speaker realizes that instead of the images of rural setting of the poems – the woods of Arcady and Ireland – he recalls the images of the place where he once sat reading Yeats for the first time. Scenes depicting idyllic country landscape are substituted by those of dirty and noisy elevated public transit roaring through midsummer New York. In one of its peculiar neighborhoods, he passes by third-story apartments situated near the tracks of the “El,” therefore he has a chance to observe the faces of the inhabitants who live there and the speaker becomes for a moment a witness of their daily activities: an old dame watering her plant, a youngster preparing himself to go out and putting a

10 Robert Bennett, *Deconstructing Post-WWII New York City: The Literature, Art, Jazz, and Architecture of an Emerging Global Capital* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 18.

Together with the shift in the meaning of the term text, also the meaning of “reading the text” broadened its original use. Hence, it may be applied for any kind of system that is regarded as a text; architecture, works of visual art or music may be “read.”

11 Bennett 22.

stickpin in his peppermint tie, and a guy in his undershirt rocking in a rocking chair and contemplating the “El” passing by. The onward movement of the train becomes in his mind associated with a ride on the horse-back (so dissimilar in fact), which would be an appropriate means of transport in rural Ireland, as suggests the sentence someone had written in the book – the epitaph of Yeats that reads “Horseman, pass by!” In addition to the juxtaposition of two strikingly different environments and modes of transport, there is also a clash between two forms of language and the messages they convey: the text of a sign in the interior of the train that announces “SPITTING FORBIDDEN” mingles ironically with Yeats's poem “The Song of The Happy Shepherd.”¹² It seems therefore that the personal experience of reading Yeats in this particular environment modifies the author's message and enriches it with new meanings that arise from the encounter between the urban text of New York and Yeats's poetry.

The poem analyzed above shows how the code of an artwork alters when it enters a relationship with a code of different text, which is, as I understand it, the basic functional principle of intertextuality. A similar influence occurs in the poem “In Paris in a Loud Dark Winter,” where once again two environments are juxtaposed: the text of a huge and loud city in wintertime versus a quiet soothing rural place – the area of Vaucluse in Provence in hot summer. In spite of the unpleasant urban surroundings, the reader is submerged into the pleasant atmosphere of the world of René Char's poetry, the impression being evoked by images like singing crickets, “a summer of sauterelles,” “fountains full of petals” or “the almond world.”¹³ At first, the impression of the hostile urban environment is suppressed by the poetic imagination, but then again it is slightly contaminated by a tint of Parisian depression as the following lines suggest: “I saw/ no Lorelei upon the Rhone/ nor angels debarked at Marseilles/ but couples going nude into the sad water.”¹⁴

What I find innovative in these two poems in relation to intertextuality is a

12 Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *These Are My Rivers: New and Selected Poems 1955 – 1993* (New York: New Directions, 1994) 75.

13 Ferlinghetti 63.

14 Ferlinghetti 63-64.

different conception of contextual reading of the artwork. The traditional proceedings of literary and history-oriented approaches in a contextually-oriented study would be the classification of texts according to their form and content in order to place them in genre groups, philosophical currents, art movements – the “-isms,” and thematic groups etc. Attention would be also paid to extra-literary influences, in particular historical events, the author's biographical details and so forth. Such research would help to find all the possible information and connections that would serve as a basis for the most accurate interpretation possible. This traditional approach holds on to the diachronic perspective, where the order in which the individual texts were written is fundamental for their placement among the related works according to the causal relations. The advantage of such method is obviously its objectivity and accuracy.

Such a contextual reading excludes, however, the role of the reader, whose perception of an artwork is frequently more of a synchronic one, allowing for more subjectivity as well. Even with a knowledge of literary history, the reader would predominantly relate the content or message of the artwork to his own life experience, incorporating it in some way into his worldview. This type of interpretation that is carried out by the reader instead of a mere passive acceptance of the meanings is the essential concept of the Reception theory which states that the meaning of a text is not inherent in the text itself but is formed as a relationship between the reader and the text. According to Wolfgang Iser, the text originates in permanent dialogue with the audience, the text is concretized and re-created by the reader.¹⁵

This different contextual reading I am referring to, which is presented by Ferlinghetti in these two poems, is concerned with the immediate spatial context – not with the setting but the actual physical location or the surroundings, in which the text is read. The subjective perspective of the reader is stressed as well as his active role in the re-creation of the text. In that case, the subjectivity of such interpretation is desirable because, as Hodrová says, the relationship between the reader and text is what makes the text more dynamic than the relationship between the work of art and its author.¹⁶

15 Iser qtd in Hodrová. Hodrová 13.

16 Hodrová 13.

The arbitrariness of such a text-to-text relation does not prevent new relations from being established and new meanings discovered, which may help to alter the reader's interpretation; on the contrary, it enhances the potential of the text. This is one of the possible ways how the urban text enters the literary one, apart from such evident ways as direct references to cities in literary works.

Similarly, the context of urban reality influences other types of texts as well, as illustrated in a jocular manner in the poem “Matisse at the Modern, Magritte at the Met.” The color transformation of one of the Henri Matisse's paintings is claimed to occur as a consequence of the specific light conditions of the place where it is exhibited.¹⁷ The figures from Matisse's painting *The Dance* are “changed by the bright/American light” in the Museum of Modern Art situated at Manhattan, but in the Hermitage of St. Petersburg they “turned pale red.”¹⁸ The qualities associated with the two countries are represented by different colors; the red color would most likely symbolize the communist regime of the Soviet Union, while the bright light attributed to the piece during his presence in the United States may refer to the idea of America as the Promised Land or it may perhaps point to the origins of Abstract Expressionism and its characteristic palette of radiant colors. Ferlinghetti seems to suggest that the context causes the work to be literally “seen in a different light.”

The subject of intertextuality was discussed even earlier: in relation to the poetic methods of modernist writers who employed a great number of references to other literary texts in their works. Ferlinghetti alludes to this by reproducing a famous image of T.S. Eliot of “women coming and going in the room” (talking of Michelangelo) from “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” in the poem.¹⁹ T.S. Eliot strongly influenced the concepts of New Criticism; in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” he insists that a work of art must be created in the context of the existent tradition in order to be truly contemporaneous, and also understood in that context. Not only that the tradition shapes the newly created texts, but also the new

17 Matisse has painted two versions on the same theme, which differ in the color palette he used. The bright one is titled *Dance (I)* (1909), the reddish one *Dance* (1910).

18 Ferlinghetti 9.

19 Ferlinghetti 10.

ones alter the previously written ones and have therefore more responsibility because of their consciousness of the past that cannot occur in the past's awareness of itself.²⁰

The substantial difference in the approaches towards intertextual reading is, according to my opinion, that while Reception Theory emphasized the role of the reader in re-creation of the meaning of an artwork, Critical Theory focused on the close reading analysis and tried to exclude the reader's response and other "external" factors such as historical and cultural context, the author's intention etc. Both therefore operated with the idea of intertextuality: New Criticism operated with intertextual relations pointing to other literary texts and the Reception Theory allowed also other than literary relations to enter the text.

This turn of mind in the understanding of intertextuality may be compared to the the discussion of the clash between artistic creation that follows the tradition and the attempt to "subvert the dominant paradigm" expressed in the poem and illustrated through the comparison between two painters – Henri Matisse and René Magritte. While Henri Matisse, the son of prosperous merchant, conservative both in his appearance and strict work habits, who after his first Fauvistic period returned to the classical tradition in French painting, embodied according to Ferlinghetti the bourgeois vision of reality, Magritte – "the surreal subversive," sought through his work to subvert that bourgeois stance by questioning its values represented by "a dinner table with the/ white tablecloth of ennui" and the character of reality in general by challenging the preconditioned perception employing themes such as the (im)possible, the (in)visible, the (un)imaginable and the (in)explicable.²¹ What is also significant is his way of treating ordinary objects; by placing them into an unexpected context he provokes questions about their seemingly ordinariness, promotes new connections and creates other meanings.

Any text through the process of "endless ars combinatoria" may interact with the urban text, not only the works of art which deal directly with the subject of some particular city.²² As we have already seen, Ferlinghetti frequently draws unexpected

20 T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919).

21 Ferlinghetti 10-11.

22 Plett 25.

parallels and relations between two dissimilar texts. This is also the case in the poem “Moscow in the Wilderness, Segovia in the Snow” that describes the effect that the music of a Spanish classical guitarist Andrés Segovia played on the radio in the night bus heading towards Moscow has on the listener, and how the images of Spanish landscape evoked by his music influence the perception of Russian snow plains and its metropolis. The two visions, as dissimilar as they might be, blend in the traveler's imagination and he starts to spot the connections: the guitar sound bursts violently just as the furious snowdrifts which cover the bare land of the vast taiga reminiscent of the deserted plains of La Mancha, both of them sharing hostility caused by extreme weather conditions, the entangled birch branches bring about the image of the tracery in the windows of the Alhambra palace, the trills of blackbirds may remind one of the strumming sound of flamenco guitar. As the bus proceeds, one image after another connects these two worlds, the imagination being triggered only by the music.

However, the intertextual relations in this poem are not exhausted by the influence of Segovia's music on the perception of the city as expressed in the lines “Segovia warms his hands/ and melts Moscow,”²³ but also in its interaction with the minor texts embedded in the superordinate text of the city. Segovia communicates with great Russian writers such as Vladimir Mayakovsky as the bus passes by his statue. Despite the fact that Mayakovsky is present as a stone sculpture and Segovia as a radio signal, they maintain an extremely vivid communication, as proves the line “Segovia hears his stoned cry.”²⁴ This communication is based probably on the inspirational source, which for both of them were the notions of Romanticism. A similar contact is made with Nikolai Gogol through the harsh stories of his characters' lives: “Gogol's Dark People/ stark figures/ in the white night streets/ clotted in the snow/ He listens to them as he goes along.”²⁵ Finally, the musician walks into the Soviet Writers' Union office where he tries to teach this rigid institution “open-tuning,” but as it might be expected, he does not succeed. The concept of a dialogue between two texts, embodied here by Segovia's communication with Russian writers, is the essential feature not only

23 Ferlinghetti 142.

24 Ferlinghetti 142.

25 Ferlinghetti 142.

of intertextual relations, but it is a constitutive element of any text, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, because he asserts that no utterance exists alone but all of them are dialogic.²⁶

Of course, a combination of two unrelated texts is not the only way of producing a complex intertextual relationship. The poem “Returning to Paris with Pissarro” shows the encounter of two different texts of Paris: the first is Paris in the year 1898 captured by a French Impressionist painter Camille Pissarro in the painting titled *Place du Théâtre Français, Rain* (1898). The second one is Paris fifty years later, in the year 1948, when Ferlinghetti at the age of twenty-eight moves to Paris to continue his studies. This later scene is only an image preserved in his memory. The two texts are so close to each other that they are almost indiscernible, distinct only in details like the presence/absence of horse carriages and the Métro entrance. What connects these two cities separated by a lapse of time is “the same eternal feeling/ sad and elated.”²⁷ The typical features that pertain to the Parisian text and that became eventually its “trademark” after being used countless times in works of art as well as for the purposes of tourist propaganda and thus perhaps worn out to stereotypical images are: pearl tone of sky, the gray Paris light which looks as if the city was covered by a light gauze veil, wet mansard roofs with dark chimneys, glimmers on the wet pavings and the smell of Gaulois. The expectations were formed by these previous images, therefore when the speaker first entered Paris, it was as if he returned to a place he already knew. Consequently, his experience was governed by that “original” image created by Camille Pissarro.

This poem therefore shows that while the city contains and is composed of various texts which exist and are realized in its realm, for someone who has never been to some particular city it exists only in these texts.²⁸ Hence, the city is perceived through the prism of an artwork and either the entire idea about the city is constructed on the basis of information and images from various sources such as photographs, films and novels, or, when there is already some image in one's mind, it might be

26 Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2000) 19.

27 Ferlinghetti 258.

28 Hodrová 40.

modified, re-constructed or perceived differently.

As suggested in the poem, Ferlinghetti is fascinated by the unique quality of light in Paris, which he considers to be pearl gray, soft, feminine and muffled whereas that of New York is described as bright, strong, masculine, and aggressive. He argues in his novel *Love in the Days of Rage* that these unlike sorts of light originated the development of the Impressionism and Abstract Expressionism respectively. The question to be asked is whether these lights are really an inherent part of the urban text of the two cities, or whether it is quite the reverse, that they are only perceived as such thanks to the visual texts produced by these art movements. The poem does not answer that question, rather it seems to imply that the text of the painting and that of the city are inseparable. The technique of “jumping” from one temporal dimension to another, back and forth, from one Paris to another, only stresses their interconnection. While such total union of two texts can probably exist in the human mind and is reproducible with some limitation in works of visual art, I believe it is not as easy to represent it in the literary text because it does not provide the whole picture at once but is linear in structure. The techniques to overcome this obstacle are for example fragmentary composition or polyperspectivism.

The same “now and then” principle in comparison of two different texts of the same city is also applied in the poem “Paris transformations,” the main theme of which is the return to Paris. Despite the fact that the city has undergone a significant change during the time when the “clay somnambule” was absent, he tries to recollect the city he was familiar with – “the map of Paris/ stamped upon my brainpan” – and together with that, his youthful self.²⁹ The text of the city was however re-written, some parts of the layout of architectonic space were erased and also the sculpture of Lady Justice he once knew has disappeared. The fruitless effort to discover the text of the city the speaker knows instead of the unfamiliar one by which he is surrounded now is analyzed in the following chapter in relation to urban memory retrieval processes.

In the seventh part of the same poem, the reading of the urban text through one's own native city can be traced. A barge man on a boat that is passing under the

29 Ferlinghetti 251.

Pont Mirabeau looks up at the huge sculpture of a mermaid with a golden torch, with which the bridge is decorated, in exactly the same way as he looked up at the Statue of Liberty. The evidence for the fact that the man really observes the mermaid through the text of his home city lies in Ferlinghetti's transformation of one of Apollinaire's poems: "Et sous le Pont Mirabeau/ coule la liberté."³⁰ In the original version what floats under the bridge is not liberty but the Seine.

Finally, I would like to discuss the role of another recurrent element/text which belongs to the text of the city and participates in the web of intertextual relations: sculpture. Hodrová notes that sculpture is on the one hand closely related to the architectonic structures because of its relative stability, while on the other hand it has certain narrative potential, thus it stands at the border between the static and dynamic aspect of the urban environment.³¹ The narrative potential may be observed especially in the statues, which represent important events of history. This might be illustrated through the example of the poem "Sherman's March Reglitterized," where the controversial figure of General Sherman on his stallion, whose monument is placed in New York's Central Park, is brought to life by the poetic invention of the author, triggered probably by the posture of the sculpture which then starts out in the city traffic and even further, towards downtown and Wall Street. The sculpture that represents the infamous march, which caused damage in infrastructure and industry, is thus confronted with the "gelty pumping heart/ of the beast" within the urban space.³² Similarly, the statue of the French poet Tristan Corbière is walking along the quai in the town of Roscoff in the poem "Triste Corbière."

It is a frequently used technique in Ferlinghetti's poems to bring artworks to life, to let the characters break free from the circumscribed space of the media employed, by which they are usually firmly separated from the external physical world in order to let them act independently in its "reality." Although it is more probable that this technique will be used in relation with the text of sculpture due to reasons explained above, it is by no means the only text to which this technique is applied. A

30 Ferlinghetti 254.

31 Hodrová 164.

32 Ferlinghetti 33.

good illustration is the models portrayed by Matisse in “Matisse at the Modern, Magritte at the Met,” who come out of the realm of the picture and leaving the canvas, they enter the space of the gallery and accompany the painter himself. Despite the fact that Ferlinghetti here might be referring to “Saturday evenings” at Gertrude Stein's Paris salon where Matisse's work was collected and exhibited and where he used to invite colleague artists, his models and other people, it is, in the poem a representation of the union of the two worlds – that of artistic creation and the external one as the following lines about Matisse and the models strolling through the rooms show: “He does not question their existence/ He merely reaches for his scissors/ and cuts a couple/ to paste up on his walls/ back home.”³³ Once again, these examples present the city as an intertext where various kinds of texts, such as painting and sculpture in this case, enter the text of the city and a connection is established between these two different sorts of text.

This chapter focused on the analysis of intertextual relations between different sorts of texts which pertain to the text of the city. The evidence was provided that these texts, namely poetry, architecture, music, sculpture and painting, in Ferlinghetti's poems do not only not only intersect within the urban space, but also influence and “contaminate” one another and that this process of leads to the production of new meanings that would not arise otherwise. Thus, the assertion that intertextuality is an inherent feature of Ferlinghetti's urban spaces, as it is of the literary text, was corroborated.

33 Ferlinghetti 9-10.

Chapter II – Memory

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the themes of individual and collective memory within urban space and their literary representations in Lawrence Ferlinghetti's poems, focusing on both processes of remembering, memory retrieval, re-construction of the past, and continual change, forgetting and loss. Despite the complexity of the subject, two general types of memory will be distinguished in the analysis: the individual autobiographical memory based on personal experience, and collective memory that surpasses the individual experience. These two are related in many ways, one dependent upon each other which may be demonstrated by the simple observation that collective memory, in spite of enduring in a coherent body of people, depends upon the recollections of individuals – the members of the group who remember a certain fact, event or person.³⁴ And conversely, individual memory of a member of a society cannot exist isolated from collective memory because by learning from others via written materials or oral transmission one not only broadens one's knowledge of matters that do not directly affect the individual but also finds one's place in society by relating oneself with contemporaries and predecessors. Due to the fact that no strict dividing line can be marked between individual and collective memory, I will focus on various areas from which the individual derives his individual memory and identity: personal recollection, family memory and collective memory of the society.

In this section, analysis of the patterns of individual remembering in the context of urban space in Ferlinghetti's poetry will be carried out. The first is the retrieval of memory that occurs as a response to the return to a city where one has lived for some time or which one had visited before. This occurrence takes place due to the associative character of remembering process: two temporal points – now and then, and possibly also two places – here and there, connect as if through a virtual tunnel

³⁴ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992) 22.

through which a distant piece of past reality might be spotted.³⁵ When one sees the familiar places again, the almost forgotten memories may re-appear; the physical return is apt to trigger a psychological one.

Another related aspect of memory expressed in some of the poems is that the image of a city embedded in our mind always falls behind actual reality. The conserved information may be of visual character but also delivered by other senses such as the olfaction as the example of the unmistakable smell of Gaulois cigarettes that is closely associated with Paris in Ferlinghetti's poems. Such data is then compared with the current or the most recent state. As a result, the two never correspond entirely, no matter how much or little time has passed, even if the only change were a position of a dry leaf on the ground blown by wind a few meters further. This clearly indicates that the conserving effect of memory can be best experienced after a long-term absence because it enables a comparison of the two stages of a constantly changing city.

Such re-encounter is described in the poem that expresses the idea of memory recuperation in many different manners in each of its thirteen parts titled "Paris Transformations." The third part describes how the promise of recognition of an intimately familiar place remains unfulfilled which results in the lamentation: "That lovely balcony is gone/ in the Impasse Danton/ and with it the lady/ with the scales/ who sat there once/ (the blind one in the classic frieze)."³⁶ The desperate tone reveals the personal attachment of the speaker to that particular corner, affected by the demolition of the building and the loss of the statue of Lady Justice. His discomposure can be understood better if we consider that the motivation for his journey was not a simple wish to see the place again; rather it is an almost ritual journey back in time and back to one's own old self during which the speaker unconsciously seeks to turn back the course of time as the opening lines of the poem suggest: "Clay somnambule returned/ after many years away/ walking and walking/ through once/loved Paris/ [...] Strode through the streets/ thirsty and sad/ (yet exultant!)/ carrying nothing/ but

35 Daniela Hodrová, *Citlivé město: Eseje z mytopoetiky* (Praha: Akropolis, 2006) 375.

36 Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *These Are My Rivers: New and Selected Poems 1955 – 1993* (New York: New Directions, 1994) 252.

youth.”³⁷ The balcony and the statue are therefore pieces of his memory that belong not only to the image of the city but also to himself and his past; with their loss he loses part of his personality as well.

Nostalgia for the old times and the disillusionment caused by the comparison of the actual aspect of the city with memories attached to the place is described in the poem “Firenze, A Lifetime Later.” A couple returns to Florence where they had spent most beautiful times and the speaker recalls that period with nostalgia. In spite of being aware that the past is irrecoverably gone he still hopes for the opposite. This poem will be analyzed in detail later in this chapter.

The theme of the speaker's confrontation with his youth in the city of Paris also appears in the poem “Plan Du Centre de Paris à Vol D'Oiseau.” This time, a different situation occurs: the return does not provoke the longing to be young again, instead the speaker experiences a mixture of various emotions, mostly wonder and mockery of his youthful naivety: “And was that myself/ standing on that far corner/ Place Saint-Sulpice/ first arrived in Paris –/ seabag slung –/ (fancying myself some seaborne Conrad/ carrying Coleridge's albatross?)”³⁸ This bohemian period of life, in which he could not do without Gauloises, books by Proust and Apollinaire and other such props, is now looked upon with a derisive laugh mixed with certain tenderness for that “callow stripling” he had been once, expressed by a Boy Scout hand-shake, by which he greets his old self.³⁹

The three poems describe transformations where the main factor of change is time. An experience of returning to an utterly transformed, strangely unfamiliar environment that does not coincide with one's recollection may also occur as a result of changed perception. An altered state of consciousness is described in the poem “Mock Confessional” written as a result of Ferlinghetti's first LSD experience.⁴⁰ The effect of the drug prevents the speaker from recognizing the hotel in Paris where he stayed as a student long time ago; instead he perceives it as transformed into a bleak and hostile,

37 Ferlinghetti 251.

38 Ferlinghetti 272.

39 Ferlinghetti 273.

40 Neeli Cherkovski, *Ferlinghetti, a Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1979) 191.

windowless mattress factory where he experiences solitude and a sense of disconnection. This depressing and frightening experience makes him describe the place as “a street whose name I'd rather not remember.”⁴¹ This allusion to the opening line of Cervantes' masterwork suggests to view the speaker as a quixotic character because he is stretched between two extremes of idealism and realism, between high ideals and their practical realization, in the latter of which he usually fails as the following lines summarize: “which is not to say I'm without ambition/ Sometimes I feel a fluttering in me/ and I may sometimes fly into the sun/ wearing wax wings.”⁴² Therefore, in spite of having some potential, something, probably lack of self-confidence, keeps him back from achieving his goals and this internal conflict between the ideal and its unsatisfactory realization makes him perceive himself as “somewhere between a centaur/ and Sancho Panza's ass.”⁴³

Aleida Assmann holds that Cervantes' novel is “a manifesto for 'the basic dissociation of mind and memory'” by which she means that in spite of his frequent encounters with sober, earthbound reality that only brings him painful beating and disdain, Don Quixote still struggles to escape the crude reality, bad experience and painful memories by transforming it by forces of imagination into a fantastic world of noble knights-errant, malign giants and princesses in need.⁴⁴ The speaker also wishes to escape the ordinary reality in which he is “drinking out of desperation” because of reasons he summarizes in the following manner: “I have strange dreams sometimes/ but they're not half as weird as/ what I see walking down the street.”⁴⁵ The clash between realistic and fantastic seems to be inverted because his drug visions do not amount in weirdness to daily reality; he is not allowed to forget.

In each of the poems above there is some sort of change of urban space, either an objective external transformation or one that only takes place in one's mind. Two different images of the same place are confronted – the recollected image and actual

41 Ferlinghetti 155.

42 Ferlinghetti 154.

43 Ferlinghetti 154.

44 Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 2.

45 Ferlinghetti 155.

reality. In Ferlinghetti's poems these two "stages" are always strictly separated: there is no continuum of memories that would track the continual process of change, quite on the contrary, he juxtaposes the two extremes. Hence, a space or a gap is created in between which serves the purpose of expressing one of the essential concerns that permeates all of his work but gains special significance in relation to the theme of memory: distance, separation, disconnection.

Not only is there a distance between past and present experience as the poems suggest but chiefly between an experience itself and the recollection of it. Due to the fact that we do not have direct access to the past experience, the very idea of comparing the two of them is misleading; we can only compare the actual impression of the city with our reminiscence that may differ significantly from what the place really looked like. This suggests that while memory can in some cases serve to reconnect with one's past, here it only enhances the sense of remoteness. This sense of distance results in a characteristic poetic style that can be best described as nostalgic, perhaps even sentimental. It is used to depict urban spaces conceived as memories – European cities, Paris and Rome in particular. This style converts real urban space into an aestheticized, idealized, perhaps even cliché picture by employing a limited set of particular recurrent motifs. The following section is an attempt to identify these common elements that pertain to this imagery and characterize thus this poetic style by analyzing poems "Plan du Centre de Paris à Vol d'Oiseau," "Paris Transformations" and "Returning to Paris with Pissarro."

The employment of various techniques that convey the impression of blurred or indistinct vision marks most characteristically this style. Diverse sorts of hindrances impede crystal clear vision. Most typically they are various liquid or gas substances that fill the air – dew, mist, drizzle, smoke. A frequent motif that appears in four poems is the formation of a thin fabric that lays over the city: "a grey scrim behind the river," "the veil of days," "a light gauze veil," "a transparent scrim," "curtained air."⁴⁶ This relates to the peculiar appearance of Parisian light that can be described as muffled, soft, often in pearl and gray hue.

46 Ferlinghetti 252, 258, 272, 281.

Various metaphorical visualizations of light or its absence again communicate the idea of indistinctness, light is often ascribed liquid character. For example in the fourth part of “Paris Transformations” where heavy silk drapes that darken the bedroom (and echo the figurative air curtains in previous section) are drawn in the morning and what comes in through the open French door is not a transparent colorless light but tinged liquid-like light: the room is flooded with “dry white wine of dawn.”⁴⁷ The fifth part describes how after the morning inebriation the city passes into slumber in the sleepy atmosphere of midday that induces general inertia. Only asphalt of sidewalks melts under the hot sun: “The white sun of Paris/ softens sidewalks.”⁴⁸ The sixth part describes the advance of nightfall that makes all the objects unrecognizable and seemingly as remote as if they almost ceased to exist: “The sidewalks like flat escalators/ roll away into the night.”⁴⁹ The effect of darkness into which Paris submerges also “liquidifies” the city: “Trees, fountains, statues/ the café and the church itself/ melt in total darkness.”⁵⁰

Various kinds of shadows, glimmers and reflections also contribute to the liquid character of the city because they dissolve the solid and motionless appearance of the city by creating an impression not only of intangibility but also of movement. It may be illustrated on the example of the previously mentioned poem where in spite of the complete stillness in the streets at noon the subtle interplay between soft light and light shadows is an active element as the verbs in the following lines suggest: “The white sun of Paris/ *softens* sidewalks/ *sketches* white shadows on skylights/ *traps* a black cat/ on a distant balcony.”⁵¹ It is even more evident in the poem “Returning to Paris with Pissarro” where moisture of the rain converts ordinary cobble-stone streets into a scenery full of twinkling reflections of lights.

While poetic invention makes solid structures lose their solidity, the reverse process also takes place: less tangible sensations are given a more solid form. The example of light depicted as transparent fabric has been already mentioned. Other

47 Ferlinghetti 252.

48 Ferlinghetti 253.

49 Ferlinghetti 254.

50 Ferlinghetti 254.

51 Ferlinghetti 253. my emphasis.

substances include smoke, music, sounds and even feelings, such as melancholy, nostalgia or sadness. It is well expressed in the poem “Plan du Centre de Paris à Vol D'Oiseau”: “it was all 'solidified nostalgia'/ houses monuments and streets/ bare trees and parks down there/ fixed in time (and the time is forever)/ exactly where we left them years ago/ our bodies passes through them/ as through a transparent scrim” and later “solidified nostalgia indeed – / the smell of Gaulois still hangs in the air/ And in the cemetery of Père Lachaise/ the great stone tombs still yawn/ with the solidified ennui of eternity.”⁵² This solidification is made possible through the capacity of memory to convert past into frozen panorama, which solidifies both the ephemeral smoke of a cigarette, the smell of which still hangs in the air, and the solid stone tombs.

All these techniques that invoke blurred impression of the city serve to express the idea that the described scenes pertain to the past; they are inexact memories of the gone times. This is expressed in the poem “Paris Transformations” through a metaphor that compares the gray tone of Parisian light to dark stains on old mirrors. These may be seen as shadows of time cast upon the speaker's experience: “I left my memory in hock/ on the rooftops of Paris where grey light of Paris lies/ like the shadow at the back of old mirrors.”⁵³ The haziness of the speaker's memories is also accentuated in two similar images where Paris drifts in free space or floats down the stream: “the whole city sleeping drifts/ through white space/ like a lost dirigible” and “Paris itself a floating dream/ a great stone ship adrift/ made of dusk and dawn and darkness.”⁵⁴

There is another reason why I argue that Ferlinghetti employs this imagery to stress the character of memories of these poems: it is an omnipresent sense of distance. Temporal distance characteristic for all the poems dealing with the speaker's memories is often reflected by spatial distance between the speaker and the city. This is often achieved through an alternative viewpoint that allows a different perspective: the spectator observes the city from the position high above the streets, typically from a balcony or window in high floor, but also from an airplane. The most exemplary use of spatial distance that points to temporal distance between the present and the moment

52 Ferlinghetti 272-273.

53 Ferlinghetti 251-252.

54 Ferlinghetti 253, 273.

described can be found in the poem “Plan du Centre de Paris à Vol D'Oiseau” where the perspective of bird-eye view is suggested in the very title. The speaker flies away to Milan and in the airplane contemplates the city that he leaves behind as he goes through his memories; he looks “down and back at Paris.”⁵⁵

The perspective shifts the usual idea about the close and the remote in the poem “Voix Glaque” where the streets of Les Halles are overlooked from the fifth floor balcony. Pedestrians that stroll in the depths below seem to be immensely far away and therefore resemble “stick figures lost below.”⁵⁶ However, they are not remote only in spatial terms but also psychologically for they are seen as “the mute singers and the walking dead.”⁵⁷ Conversely, birds and sky seem to be closer than usual and even closer than the speaker's own species. From near he observes a pigeon that walks about silent and others that fly through the air below the low heavy skies “made of lead.”⁵⁸

A great part of the city is also overlooked from this perspective in the poem “Roman Morn.” Though different in particular details, the style that describes Italian metropolis is very close to the poems about Paris reminiscences: at the break of the day, the speaker opens shutters and contemplates the city as it changes from complete stillness of early morning to noisy daily rush. He observes silent roofs with eaves, terracota tile chimneys, rooftop gardens and a weathervane far off, church copulas, fluttering pigeons and doves. Also in the fourth part of the poem “Canti Romani” an Italian city is viewed from a balcony, and once again, very similar images are used to describe it: at the dawn the air fills with the sound of wings of swallows fluttering over the rooftops, tiled balconies and marble terraces.

The images of rooftops, birds and fragments of sounds and voices that rise to the ears of the observer belong to another set of conventional imagery that describes the city. Paris has its own set of images as well: besides those already mentioned (fog, mist, shadows, glimmers etc.) it includes such cliché images that invoke an atmosphere of romantic gloominess such as “pearl skies,” “dark chimneys,” “wet mansard roofs,”

55 Ferlinghetti 272.

56 Ferlinghetti 263.

57 Ferlinghetti 263.

58 Ferlinghetti 263.

and “dark figures under umbrellas.”⁵⁹

One might assume that the reason why Ferlinghetti uses these conventional images is that he, as an American writer, does not have a thorough knowledge of the city, therefore his impressions are those of a tourist. Another explanation of their lack of authenticity is that they are too much influenced by works of visual arts. The latter is certainly true, because the majority of Ferlinghetti's poetry has a strong visual character that draws upon his passion and knowledge of fine art. The poem “Returning to Paris with Pissarro” admits the influence of French impressionism in the very title, and indeed the city is seen through the eyes of impressionist painters obsessed with numberless nuances in light conditions, dim and hazy light, reflections, shadows and penumbras. It certainly does not reflect the poet's direct experience captured immediately afterward.

However, the idea that Ferlinghetti is dependent upon conventional imagery because he lacks personal experience and does not have deep knowledge of the city can be easily refuted. The fact that French was his first language because he was raised by his French aunt after his mother suffered a nervous breakdown as a consequence of his father's death, and that he later studied at Sorbonne, wrote his doctoral thesis in French and was interested in French poetry which he also translated (most notably Jacques Prévert) should suffice as an evidence of his competence.

My opinion on that is that he intentionally uses these particular images as another technique to emphasize the sense of pastness; the city that only lives in his memories has by now gained almost imaginary character and is therefore deprived of all of its realistic features. Thus, he makes a clear distinction between the cities of the past and the cities where he currently lives, described in the third chapter. These two are firmly separated by a great gap of temporal distance.

Another recurrent element and symbol of temporal distance between the past and the present, and between memory and actual reality is the river. The rich set of connotations draws on a long tradition that commonly associates the stream of the river with the unstoppable flow of time. For that reason it is frequently employed in

59 Ferlinghetti 258.

Ferlinghetti's poems concerned with themes of memory, impermanence and death.

The theme of the clash between one's recollection and new experience has been already suggested to be the main subject of the poem "Firenze, A Lifetime Later." The image of the Florentine river with which the poem begins develops this idea further as it represents different aspects of the relation between "now" and "then," one of which is transience. A multitude of fragmented sounds, voices and distinct sorts of silences blend into one polyphonous stream that resounds the city and is echoed back by Florentine river Arno: "A cavatina of broken parlando utterances/ punctuated by sighs."⁶⁰ These sighs that interrupt the flow of speech leaving it broken and incomplete prefigure that the expectations and desires of the speaker will not be satisfied. The speaker wishes that the return to the city where he had spent some of his most beautiful times enabled him to experience the feeling "as if we were students again/ just hitchhiked down from Paris" once again.⁶¹ However, he realizes that it is impossible to step twice in the same river – the past cannot be recuperated or replicated for it is now "a lifetime later" and the past is irrecoverably gone, just as the waters of the river.⁶² Another aspect of this metaphor is that the river symbolizes an uncrossable obstacle between the present and the past. The speaker fancies that by performing an almost magical procedure that consists in repeating the same actions at the same places the time breach could be bridged. And indeed, he and his lover return to the same *pensione* and make love in the same *camera*, but the ardent passion of the old times is gone.

River as a symbol of passing time and irrecoverable loss is also used in the poem "Reading Apollinaire by the Rogue River" where the speaker reflects on distinct perspectives of time in different cultural environments, more specifically on its cyclical respectively linear character. Sitting on the riverbank in the wilderness he reads Guillaume Apollinaire's poems and recalls a famous image of "the river that runs through the city/ taking time & life & lovers with it/ And none returning/ none returning."⁶³

60 Ferlinghetti 274.

61 Ferlinghetti 274.

62 Ferlinghetti 274.

63 Ferlinghetti 212.

Finally, the images of the river in the poem “Paris Transformations” also point to the same idea. In the thirteenth part the poetic image of an angel who is playing piano on a riverboat suggest the idea of life that heads inevitably toward death. Unlike the other examples, river is in other parts of this poem also connected with the idea of longing for home experienced by people who came to Paris from different parts of the world. The sculpture of mermaid on the bridge in the seventh part discussed in the first chapter reminds a bargeman of the Statue of Liberty at home: “Et sous le Pont Mirabeau/ coule la liberté.”⁶⁴ The eighth part communicates a similar idea through the surreal image of a homesick elephant sitting by the Seine while dreaming of the Nile. Not only he fantasizes about remote Egyptian landscapes but also about the remote times, in particular about the era of silent films in which elegant seducers floated down the river in felucas and sang love songs to their ladies. This lost life echoes in the sound of the river together with other noises of the city before the elephant siphons it up with his trunk.

There is a distinction between metaphors of the river that are used in the poems that concern urban memory in European cities and those that appear in poems set in American cities. This difference does not consist in the subject matter, because in both the ideas of passage of time, ephemeral nature of life, and the conclusiveness of death are expressed; rather they differ in their representations. The metaphor of the river in American cities often draws upon the imagery of classical mythology and works such as Dante's *Divina Commedia*, in particular the rivers of the underworld, the most known of which is the river Styx, that is to be crossed by the deceased in order to enter Hades. In the poem “I Genitori Perduti,” that will be analyzed in detail further, the Hudson can be seen as such a chthonic river: on its shrouded shores, beyond the uncrossable border of “all the silent years,” dove-white gulls that represent the transmigrated souls of the speaker's progenitors are dwelling.⁶⁵

In the poem “Queens Cemetery Setting Sun” the river serves as a symbol of irrecoverable loss: fates of citizens buried at the cemetery, as well as the memory of the

64 Ferlinghetti 254.

65 Ferlinghetti 30.

whole nation disappear into oblivion flushed down the “great American drain” of the East River.⁶⁶ This implies a reference to the Lethe, the mythical River of Oblivion. At the same time the East River performs the function of a natural obstacle that separates the area of Queens burial ground from the Manhattan island full of exuberant life and represents thus the uncrossable border between the world of the dead and the living at the two opposite banks.

The symbolic meanings of the underworld river may occur independently even when no physical river is mentioned as in the poem “The Old Italians Dying.” In this poem the speaker recalls the presence of the picturesque minority of Italians “almost gone now” in the city of San Francisco.⁶⁷ The sense of passing time pervades the whole poem also due to recurrent expressions such as “for years,” “day by day,” “every day,” “One by one Year by year.”⁶⁸ Moreover, there are certain repeated actions that seem to measure time and at the same time impart a sort of eternal feeling to the scene: wedding and funeral processions that enter and leave the church, ceaseless tolling of the bells and rolling of the bocce ball. The Italians are seated on park benches at Washington Square and observe this daily “spectacle.” They are “waiting for the bocce ball to stop rolling/ waiting for the bell/ to stop tolling & tolling,” “sitting and waiting for their turn” to be carried into the church in coffins that resemble “small skiffs” or “carved black boats.”⁶⁹ They are “ready to be ferried over” by Charon – “fisherman [...] in a black boat without sails/ making his final haul.”⁷⁰ The unfinished phrase that comes from Dante's *Divina Comedia* written on the facade of the church suggests that the imagery is taken from Dante's *Inferno* that represents “the syncretic combination of classical and Christian otherworld.”⁷¹ Another such synthesis between two images that convey Christian and classical concepts can be found in the poem “I Genitori Perduti.” The Christian afterlife imagery is represented by souls-doves, associated with air and heaven; the Styx-Hudson belongs to the classical mythology, located in the underworld

66 Ferlinghetti 32.

67 Ferlinghetti 220.

68 Ferlinghetti 219-221.

69 Ferlinghetti 220-222.

70 Ferlinghetti 221.

71 David Lawrence Pike, *Metropolis on the Styx: Underworlds of Modern Urban Culture, 1800-2001* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007) 76.

and associated with hell.

In all these poems the analogy between the river and the course of human life is made: life is heading towards its end similarly as the river that finally discharges into the ocean. However, the significance primarily relevant to the theme of urban memory is the fact that it symbolizes the absence of memory – forgetting and oblivion.

Until now, only individual recollections of urban spaces, that may of course contain elements that also pertain to collective memory, were analyzed. I will now turn my attention towards individual memory within the context of the city, and focus in particular on its social environment. Maurice Halbwachs who explored the subject of memory stressed the important role of the rootedness of memory in “concrete social experiences [...] associated with temporal and spatial frameworks.”⁷² He clarifies that claim by saying that “memory orients experience by linking an individual to family traditions, customs of class, religious beliefs, or specific places.”⁷³ Both spatio-temporal dimension and social aspect are therefore essential for individual memory.

Memories located in the social space of a group, in particular family memory, are searched for in the poem with a fitting title “I Genitory Perduti.” Since the family plays an important role in the forming of individual identity, memories tied to family members are to be recuperated. In order to discover his roots the speaker begins his search for his “lost parents” and the traces they had left in the city in his memory; he contemplates the lives of his gone relatives upon the sight of dove-white gulls on the wet lawn at Washington Square as if these were their transmigrated souls. Once again the distance that separates the speaker and his dear ones is expressed through the combination of spatial and temporal terms: haziness that enshrouds the speaker's memories finds its physical expression in the foggy environment of the scene. Time has blurred the real character of the job of his “maybe mafioso father” and also the smile of his beloved mother has faded during the course of time.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, even at times when the family was not yet separated by the abyss

72 M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1996) 26.

73 Boyer 26.

74 Ferlinghetti 30.

of time like now, when birds-souls dwell on the other side of the Styx-like river Hudson, there was a distance of spatial (and perhaps also emotional) character between them: the father in his real estate office on the Forty-second Street or elsewhere on a business trip, mother locked away, one brother working at the crossroads of long-distance train routes of New York Central Railroad Station, the second one in the depths of Sing Sing's darkest offices, and the third in a far suburb.

Already in the poems about the return a particular emphasis was placed on the rootedness of memories into specific place, but in “I Genitori Perduti” it is supported also by the resemblance of the way how the speaker retrieves his family memory and the technique of mnemonics with its principle of *loci et imagines*. Introduced in Antiquity mainly for the purposes of rhetoric, this method used the mechanism of creating a connection between certain place and image in order to recollect the image or a series of them in particular order later. The symbolic assignment of the recollection of each family member to a specific place works similarly: father – the office on Forty-second Street, brother Charley – New York Central Station, brother Clem – Sing Sing prison, brother Harry – suburb. The city thus serves as a space where mnemonic images – memories of the inhabitants – are stored. However, in spite of the resemblance, there is also an important difference: while mnemonic applies to the deliberate memory training – the Art of Memory, what Ferlinghetti is most interested in is the spontaneous unprompted recollection or “natural memory.”

While in the poem “I Genitori Perduti” the speaker wishes to re-discover one's family memories in one's native place, in “Plan du Centre de Paris à Vol D'Oiseau” a newcomer attempts to discover his place in the foreign city. Halbwachs's observation that “memory unfolds in a spatial framework” finds its expression here because the emphasis is placed on individual memories interwoven into the net of collective memory of the city stressing culturally significant places: the Père Lachaise cemetery where many notable personalities are buried, the meeting point of two essential figures of the French Revolution Danton and Robespierre, or the café above which the famous couple Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir had lived.⁷⁵ The fact that these spots

75 Boyer 68.

that have attained throughout time almost a mythical value are related to culturally significant personages converts the city also into a social framework. These places are gradually integrated into the newcomer's private city plan among the places of purely personal significance.

Another attempt of the individual to establish relation with the collective memory is the inscription written directly on the “skin” of the city, as in the poem “Autobiography.” The speaker confesses that he has drawn a popular cartoon character Kilroy accompanied by the slogan “Kilroy was here” on the wall. His motivation was to leave his imprint. According to Hodrová it is an attempt to communicate with the “unconscious mind” of the city.⁷⁶ The lines “I have read the writing/ on the outhouse wall/ I helped Kilroy write it” seem to confirm that assumption.⁷⁷ An important aspect of various kinds of graffiti “pieces,” is the strong sense of connection with the very moment of creative realization; the work is rooted not only in the place but most importantly also into a particular time. In case of Kilroy design this spatio-temporal aspect is enhanced by the presence of the phrase that explicitly states the message that someone/ Kilroy/ collective soul was there at some particular point. It is both a form of individual self-expression because it converts the city into a diary of individual memory, and collective work for it is a diary of many.

Proceeding to the subject of collective memory, two ways of how it manifests itself should be distinguished first: either it manifests physically or it does not. The most conspicuous example of the first is the the phenomenon of “urban palimpsest” which denotes the presence of various layers of architectonic styles of different eras at one place.⁷⁸ The individual phases of urban construction, which together may extend over a long time-span of even hundreds of years, are conserved in the edifice. When displayed visibly, the eyes of passers-by may perceive them as time layers.⁷⁹ This occurrence may be termed as “syntopy,” that is the simultaneous coexistence of more time layers in certain space.⁸⁰

76 Hodrová 58.

77 Ferlinghetti 109.

78 Hodrová 22.

79 Hodrová 38.

80 Hodrová 44.

Syntopy as a significant feature of urban space and its memory is most clearly described in the poem “Queens Cemetery, Setting Sun” where a passenger observes the changing cityscape through the window of an airport bus that passes next to a huge cemetery in Queens. Departing from the airport, a symbol of modern travel services and going by the cemetery, the bus ride is transformed into a symbolic journey back in time as far as to the times of the wheelless people. During that the speaker identifies the following time layers: the present is represented by the street-life on Manhattan, the relatively recent past can be reconstructed from the names on the tombstone inscriptions, and finally the distant past is only preserved in the original place name “Mannahatta.”⁸¹ The individual temporal layers that belong to urban memory of New York in this poem shall be analyzed in the following paragraphs.

When the bus passes the huge cemetery, the skyscrapers of Manhattan on the horizon can be spotted at the very same moment. This juxtaposition enables the comparison of the two “cities” – the metropolis and the necropolis – facing each other: the burial ground with its “small stone slabs” with statues on the parapets casting their hair-like shadows, and the city of New York seen as “great stone slabs” with their own parapets and casting their own shadows.⁸² Each place lodges its own generation(s) of “inhabitants”; the two “cities” are set apart by a gap of time period in which they happened to live. The speaker realizes that the difference does not consist in the actual presence/absence of life in them since the cemetery is described as a restless place with gesturing statues, and the buildings in New York as “skyscraper tombs.”⁸³ Hodrová maintains that it is characteristic of the graveyard *topos* in contemporary literature that the worlds of the dead and the living differ only a little and are not rigidly separated:

Svět mrtvých, v románu (nebo nejen v něm?) vlastně jen zdánlivě mrtvých, [se] pramálo liší od světa živých, vlastně jen zdánlivě živých, neboť jejich existence je podobně ubohým živořením jako hřbitovní existence mrtvých. Mrtví-živí a živí-mrtví jsou obyvateli téhož “trýznivého města,” vědomí a nevědomí do sebe plynule

81 Ferlinghetti 31.

82 Ferlinghetti 31.

Necropolis viewed as a city of the dead again refers to the already discussed chthonic imagery.

83 Ferlinghetti 31.

přecházejí.⁸⁴

The citation implies that mental contents and life stories of city-dwellers, both alive and dead, belong to the text of the city and are inscribed into the city's collective memory.⁸⁵ The graveyard may be looked upon as an “island of a different time” where various strata of past time are “stored.”⁸⁶ The concentration of memory which is there perhaps greater than elsewhere in the city converts the cemetery into a “palimpsest *par excellence*” and an exemplary representation of the city as a whole and its relation to memory.⁸⁷

However, reverse stance might be also taken: the cemetery might be as well viewed not as place where memory is stored but quite on the contrary as a site where it is dumped and where dead bodies are tossed to decompose because underground is “first and foremost it is the trash heap of the world above.”⁸⁸ Such view coincides with the image of great sewer through the tunnels of which all urban sewage disappears in the poem. The past is compared to waste because it awaits the same fate of falling to oblivion. There are therefore two contrasting ways how to perceive waste matter: either as trash doomed to destruction and oblivion, or as latent memory that accumulates everywhere. Such “remnants of civilization [...] have not been collected and yet form a collection that can be defined as the converse image of the archive.”⁸⁹ For Hodrová dustbins and junkyards are places where the past is being disposed off together with leftovers.⁹⁰

Yet even more ancient layers of history can be traced in the city of New York in

84 Hodrová 327.

85 Hodrová 23.

The concept of individual memory inscribed into one's body is present in one poem where Ferlinghetti asks: “who are we now, who are we ever,/ Skin books parchment bodies libraries of living/ gilt almanachs of the very rich/ encyclopedias of little people/ pack of players face down/ on faded maps of America.” [Ferlinghetti 181.] Also, in his work *Her* the idea that people are “perambulant palimpsests” whose flesh contains all their memories and life experience is expressed. [Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *Her* (New York: New Directions, 1988) 84.]

86 Hodrová 85.

87 Hodrová 85.

88 Pike 2.

89 Assmann 13.

90 Hodrová 317.

the poem “Queens Cemetery Setting Sun.” People buried at the cemetery, newcomers then, were the successors of the original inhabitants of the land – “the wheelless Indians” whose dirt path was turned into Long Island's old expressway.⁹¹ Also, the origin of the the place name Manhattan dates back to pre-Christian times, as it is derived from the word “Mannahatta” in the Lenape language.⁹² These few mentions that resemble a myth rather than an objective historical fact due to their intangible character and remoteness supply a hint of the foundations of New York's collective memory.

It has been said a lot about collective memory but the exact character of it has not been discussed yet. As Hodrová asserts, the accumulated energy of memory remains latent, as if “pupated” in the atmosphere of the city like some scrolls which would later unfold in the consciousness of a sensitive person and from there possibly infiltrate, often only as fragments, into his artwork.⁹³ Even though not visibly observable, it might be experienced as the phenomenon of *genius loci*, which is a unique spirit that permeates the place. Although the physical aspect of the city that includes the peculiar architectonic features, dominants, its natural disposition and the character of the surrounding landscape – “picturesqueness” – also contribute to the final image of the city, the city is no longer perceived as a mere “pile of stones.”⁹⁴ Besides the material substance also the inner dimension is appreciated: Hodrová ascribes to the city mental and emotional aspect and even its conscious and unconscious mind, all of which are markers indicating certain inwardness.⁹⁵ Despite the fact that *genius loci* is experienced as a peculiar state of consciousness and therefore depends upon the sensitiveness of each individual, the perceptions tend to resemble each other.⁹⁶ Hodrová explains that this is due to the fact that it stems from collective urban memory.⁹⁷

91 Ferlinghetti 31.

92 Emma Bryce, “New York City Reimagined,” *Scienceline: Environment*, 18 Nov. 2011, 28 Dec. 2011 <scienceline.org/2011/11/new-york-city-reimagined>.

93 Hodrová 224.

94 Hodrová 39.

95 Hodrová 17.

96 Hodrová 38.

97 Hodrová 357.

The city looked upon as a macro-information or macro-consciousness that absorbs all thoughts, dreams and memories of the inhabitants thus in a certain sense comes to life.⁹⁸ It should not be surprising, therefore, that it is often portrayed as a living organism; Ferlinghetti's poetry abounds with examples of such personifications, "animalifications" and "beastifications." Typically, traffic and the movement of masses of people would tempt the poet to describe the city as an ant-hill, to compare the city dwellers to shy animals fleeing to hide into their burrows and to see their cars as bugs. The particular examples that may be identified in the poems "Ladakh Buddhes Biker," "Home Home Home," "Uses of Poetry" or "London Crossfigured" will be analyzed in detail in the next chapter as they are not greatly relevant to the theme of memory.

A motif relevant to the theme of memory is the emergence of an enigmatic phantom intrinsically connected with the city that appears at the end of the poem "Moscow in the Wilderness, Segovia in the Snow." The city is described as "monster Moscow," which may refer to its monumental architecture, monstrous because of its vastness and ugliness.⁹⁹ However, it may be well the case that this early mention prefigures what comes later; the suspicion of the city's horrific animateness grows as we start to detect the subtle inner life beneath the ordinary appearance of the frozen and solid city: "Segovia hears his [Stone Mayakovsky's] stoned cry/ and he hears the pulse in the blood."¹⁰⁰ Later, we realize that this life is probably triggered by some hidden force kept secret beneath the steady surface of the snow-covered city: "Segovia plays in the loose snow/ and digs a bit alone/ under the free surface/ with his free hand/ he strikes softly as he listens/ he hears a dull thud/ where something is buried/ a familiar thud."¹⁰¹ When the originator of the strange sounds is discovered, the secret is finally revealed: it is an ancient armadillo, which has been sleeping for centuries in Kremlin's cellar.

Such a discovery generates more questions than it answers: What does this strange creature with three eyes and horns symbolize? It most probably embodies some

98 Hodrová 358.

99 Ferlinghetti 141.

100 Ferlinghetti 142.

101 Ferlinghetti 143.

wild and dangerous element because it is also referred to as a sphinx, most probably the evil accumulated by generations of despotic rulers, as is suggested by the resemblance of the thud produced by the beast with a similar one that Andrés Segovia used to hear back home when Spain was under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco and was seeking desperately the song of freedom. It seems probable that this dense concentration of energy has materialized in the form of an ominous mythical being and is released when the creature utters the ecstatic static.

Similarly, the aggressive atmosphere of the New York Stock Exchange is described in the poem “Sherman's March Reglitterized.” Wall Street is depicted as a bestial predator with “the very gelty pumping heart” – a pun that merges greedy lust for money and the sense of guilt.¹⁰²

Discussed manifestations of collective memory were all concerned with memory that accumulates freely within the whole city; it is not assigned any particular place. However, there are also material objects that might be viewed as manifestations of memory and that are enclosed in specialized institutions which are frequent settings of Ferlinghetti's poems. Among such “places of memory” where the remnants of the past are stored and which therefore function as cultural “memory-tanks” belong museums, art galleries, libraries, archives and other similar institutions where the material is not only gathered but also selected and organized.¹⁰³ The organized nature marks the main difference between this highly systematical sort of well-maintained memory that eventually becomes institutionalized and thus official, and memory outside these neatly circumscribed boundaries that accumulates and disappears chaotically without any discrimination.

This distinction should not nevertheless imply the total confinement of cultural memory into spaces such as libraries, galleries, museums and archives. As a part of collective memory it naturally exist also outside those, in memory of individuals as suggest the following citation in which the speaker wonders “how many Neal Cassadys [are] on lost railroad tracks/ How many replicas of Woody Guthrie with cracked

102 Ferlinghetti 34.

103 Hodrová 56.

guitars/ How many photocopies of longhaired Joan/ How many Ginsberg facsimiles and carbon-copy Kesey's/ still wandering the streets of America."¹⁰⁴

Similarly as the individual searches for his personal identity within the framework of individual and collective memory, also the body of citizens searches for its collective identity also using for that purpose collective urban memory. The conscious endeavor to retrieve and maintain urban memory includes activities like the construction of monuments to commemorate important historical events, the erection of statues dedicated to notable personalities such as saints, artists, scientists or military men, the placing of commemorative plaques, informative panels and busts on the facades.¹⁰⁵ The search for collective identity is suggested in the poem "They Were Putting Up the Statue..." where the sculpture of Saint Francis of Assisi is being erected. Besides this poem that describes the very act of placing of the statue, there are countless other references to monuments that commemorate important events and personalities that belong to collective memory of the city.

This chapter analyzes different representations of individual and collective memory that manifest themselves in urban space. One of the conclusions regarding the subject of individual memory is that Ferlinghetti's poems concerned with recollections of European urban spaces use a specific style that coincides with conventional imagery and that converts the city into an idealized space. Not a depiction of real urban space with its countless issues but the sense of ancient reminiscence is thus conveyed. Another frequent imagery employs the metaphor of the river which often represents lack of memory: transience, loss and oblivion. Both these processes that symbolize presence and absence of memory are important themes in the poems because the main axis of all of these poems is the motif of the individual who experiences feelings of disconnection and distance from everything (other people, his past, and even his own self) therefore he struggles to get hold of his individual and collective memory in order to establish his identity and reconnect with his surroundings. This search is performed within spatial-temporal and social structures of the city which serves as a framework

104 Ferlinghetti 240.

105 Hodrová 26.

for individual, family and collective memory that is always rooted in specific time, location and social environment. Such concept of urban memory resonates with the view that regards the city as an intertext which contains various minor texts because the city might be viewed as a framework for all minor memories. Also the main features of collective memory were identified, most notably its syntopic character that enables various layers of time sediment and co-exist in the urban space. Also the theme of cultural memory that may also fall into the category of institutionalized memory preserved at places assigned for that purpose was discussed. The endeavor to recuperate collective/ cultural memory in order to search for collective identity is a process parallel to the search for individual identity. It seems that Ferlinghetti's view on memory concurs with that of Paul Antze and Michael Lamberk who evaluate the role of memory in the following manner: "It has become a major idiom in construction of identity, both individual and collective, and a site of struggle as well as identification."¹⁰⁶ The conclusion about the role that the urban space plays in that process is that the city serves as spatial, temporal and social framework where the struggle for identity is carried out through means of various sorts of memories.

106 Paul Antze and Michael Lamberk qtd in Assmann. Assmann 6.

Chapter III – Critical Urban Discourse

The representations of urban spaces analyzed in the previous chapter were concerned with cities preserved as memory images. These were often subject to various sorts of idealization, employed conventional imagery and were influenced by works of art. This chapter presents a different approach focusing on the urban issues of the cities where Ferlinghetti was living at the moment, in particular New York and San Francisco. These poems inevitably involve a distinct poetic style; in contrast with the “cities of the past” emphasis is placed less on the characteristic linkage with visual arts and more on the representations of various social and political issues. Since the author has lived there he had much fresher knowledge of these urban spaces and their problems. Moreover, he probably felt more inclined to express his opinions on national issues through his engaged poetry.

This part of Ferlinghetti's work belongs to the critical urban discourse prominent in that period and represented most notably by poets of Beat Generation. Nevertheless, the themes stretch beyond the domain of urban issues and include more general topics such as consumerist life-style and its impact on personal values, society and environment, lack of tolerance for diversity resulting in social tensions, abrupt changes in society leading to growing sense of chaos and disorder experienced by the inhabitants as loss of identity, direction, orientation and meaning both on individual and collective levels. On the individual level, the problems mostly center around the relation one has to others such as social deprivation, problems in communication, a sense of anonymity, alienation and rootlessness, accompanied by insecurity or perhaps even anxiety. Naturally, these problems exist also outside the city but Ferlinghetti insistently tends to discuss them within the urban context in his poems. The reason for that is that he uses urban spaces as a synecdoche: the city often represents the whole country. Robert Bennett explains why this technique was frequently employed by postwar American writers:

Interpreting these spaces as symbolic expressions of larger national and international issues, the cultural avant-garde frequently used artistic representations of architectural and urban spaces as tropes for representing and analyzing a wide range of cultural, political and philosophical concerns [...] While these writers were also concerned about urban issues themselves, their critical analysis of urban spaces simultaneously functioned as a metaphorical trope for representing and analyzing the larger economic, political, and cultural forces that shaped the city's socio-spatial topography. Once again, this further blurred the boundary between urban and aesthetic concerns because writers frequently invoked the city as an aesthetic metaphor at the same time that they explored it as a thematic subject.¹⁰⁷

Due to the fact that the named issues are mostly interrelated, to determine which of these are causes and which their effects is beyond the possibilities of this work, if not impossible at all. Therefore, I will limit myself on the analysis of their representations and mutual relations in Ferlinghetti's poems.

Not only the city as a whole but also its parts figure in the poems as symbols that refer to certain more general concepts. For instance suburbs were places that best embodied the official American ideology of the postwar era that valorized consumer goods and high wages. Domestic prosperity, global dominance and suburban lifestyle shaped national identity and defined the “American way of life”; old-world culture associated with European cities was rejected.¹⁰⁸

The critique of this lifestyle was a very frequent theme in works of counterculture authors, the Beats in particular. They realized how the homogenous environment of suburbs with its nearly-identical houses reflected social and political conformity and cultural homogeneity of its inhabitants. This space defined the standards of normality and functioned thus as a “psycho-spatial straightjacket that normalized suburban subjects into a homogeneous community of isomorphic

107 Robert Bennett, *Deconstructing Post-WWII New York City: The Literature, Art, Jazz, and Architecture of an Emerging Global Capital* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 19.

108 Robert A. Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) xi.

citizens.”¹⁰⁹ Their life was governed by conservative values that imposed restrictions on individual freedom through clearly defined set of expectations that included stereotypical gender roles and induced intolerance towards minorities and any kind of otherness because any behavior that did not match these standards was considered deviant. In spite of that, the suburban lifestyle remote from dirty industrial quarters in centers of big cities was celebrated as an ideal life by the majority society and associated with images of prosperity and happiness.

The discrepancy between the ideal and its practical implementations is illustrated in the poem “Home Home Home” where citizens of San Francisco flee at the greatest speed from the city center to their suburban homes to be nourished with warm and loving atmosphere, sense of security and belonging to their family and the community of their neighbors: they are “almost flying/ home to the nest/ home to the warm caves/ in the hidden hills & valleys/ home to daddy home to mama/ home to the little wonders/ home to the pot plants behind the garage.”¹¹⁰ However, what they expect and wish for is not what they find there as the following reflections of the speaker show.

Meanwhile thinking about his daily chores and processing automatically the actions necessary for driving – “MUST TURN LEFT,” “YIELD,” “GAS FOOD LODGING NEXT RIGHT” – the speaker contemplates his life and fully realizes that his family does not resemble the ideal family model because they are ordinary or perhaps even “unsuccessful” people: uncle Ned is “puttering in the toolshed” since he has lost his property on the stock exchange, his elder sister with mental disorder or addiction “lost her way in encounter groups,” and the “97-lb housewife/ driving two tuns of chrome & steel/ three blocks to supermarket/ to buy a package of baby pins” suffers probably not only from an eating disorder but also from boredom and depression because she does not reach her full potential.¹¹¹ Furthermore, she experiences overwhelming solitude in this remote neighborhood waiting all day for her

109 Bennett 4.

110 Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *These Are My Rivers: New and Selected Poems 1955 - 1993* (New York: New Directions, 2004) 230.

111 Ferlinghetti 230-231.

husband to come home. While they do not resemble the ideal model of happy and successful family, they do stick to the precisely defined roles of man and woman: the wife stays at home to clean, cook and care for the children and the husband commutes to his nine-to-five office job in downtown in order to bring home money to purchase the latest commercial products and consumer goods because acquiring of these constituted a life of prosperity that was equaled to contentment and happiness.¹¹²

The excessive emphasis on material welfare caused that the insufficient emotional life of these marriages and families would be often compensated for by purchasing products that were supposed to supply a sense of security. However, the speaker does not feel more “safe at home in the bathroom/ safe with the washingmachine & dishwasher/ safe with waterheater/ safe with the kitchen clock.”¹¹³ The couple neither feels comfortable in their king-size double bed because the real intimacy has evaporated from their emotional and sexual relationship. What remains are either false substitutions – “waterbed with the vibrator/ with the nylon nympho in it,” or soulless sex that seems to alienate them even more because it is not lovemaking but mere convulsions of their shaken bodies in front of the cyclope eye of the television.¹¹⁴ The speaker admits that he does not feel pleasure anymore; rather it is an unpleasant obligation for him to lie in “the bed we made/ and must lie in/ with 'whoever.’”¹¹⁵ As a result, they are not only “hidden from each other” but also hiding from themselves too afraid to change this unfulfilled life.¹¹⁶ In spite of living in couples, the people experience extreme solitude and frustration. Home reduced to a place “where the food is” is therefore as unwelcoming as the center of the megalopolis.¹¹⁷

The concept of suburbia that symbolizes lack of freedom and unfulfilled democratic ideals and thus relates to a variety of social, political and cultural issues that concern the whole nation can be found in the poem “Sailing thru the Straits of

112 Lisa Wellinohff, “Styles of Dress, the Beats and,” *Beat Culture: Lifestyles, Icons, and Impact*, ed. William T. Lawlor (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005) 342.

113 Ferlinghetti 232.

114 Ferlinghetti 232.

115 Ferlinghetti 232.

116 Ferlinghetti 232.

117 Ferlinghetti 230-231.

Demos” where America approached from the sea is depicted as “the strange suburban shores/ of that great American/ demi-democracy.”¹¹⁸ Various representations of freedom are ubiquitous in the poem, however instead of a desirable degree of freedom it seems to be total anarchy. Animals do not respect the laws of nature – elephants float in bathtubs and play mandolins; cows fly and chant hymns; people violate the established social orders – vestal virgins who are priestesses of Vesta, the goddess of the hearth, liberate themselves from their seclusion, abandon their duties and vows of chastity and embark on the boat together with discus throwers to roam the free ocean. On board, they read Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, yet another source of inspiration on how to achieve complete self-sufficiency and freedom, which is arguably an unsustainable ideal. Other promises include the helicopters that fly above and drop “free railway tickets/ from Lost Angeles to Heaven” and promise of Free Elections, both of which seem to be equally unreachable goals.¹¹⁹ These repeated references to freedom, which to a certain degree should be warranted by American democratic system based on similar principles that were first introduced in the city state of Athens (hence the allusions to ancient Greece) represent the situation in the United States by far falling short of democratic ideals. It would be a long journey before approaching the shores of real democracy. At the moment it seems to be a utopian concept, expressed by a multitude of signs of ill omen in the poem: the tragic fate of the heroes can be foretold from the flight patterns of “symbolic birds” shrieking over the “swart ship” together with hovering eagles with their image of scavengers, the “eager eagles” waiting perhaps to feed on their liver.¹²⁰ Also, the blossoms of poppies worn by patriotic maidens could be interpreted as bad sign because they were in Greek and Roman myths offerings to the dead, and the connotation of death is preserved until these days as they are symbols of remembrance for the victims of war. Approaching the “strange suburban shores,” the sailors do not feel a “wild surmise” as Cortez and his men felt according to John Keats at the moment of discovery of the new land.¹²¹

118 Ferlinghetti 82.

119 Ferlinghetti 81.

120 Ferlinghetti 81.

121 Ferlinghetti 82.

John Keats, “On First Looking into Chapman's Homer” (1816).

Instead after coming back to their American home they experience a “mild surprise” over America searching for its identity and direction, driven at the moment by various antagonistic forces that produce great chaos.¹²²

The problems responsible for the deviation from the ideal are not identified explicitly in the poem but for example the image of the elephant in a bathtub may refer to social tensions produced as a result of racial, sexual and class distinctions. Despite the fact that elephant jokes are originally innocent riddles based on inherent absurdity and incongruity of questions and answers in order to undermine the conventional logic and produce thus amusement, they might be regarded also in a different way. Sigmund Freud in his work *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) argues that jokes in general are aggressive articulations of the underlying motives and may be therefore perceived as masked assaults.¹²³ Roger Abrahams and Alan Dundes depart from Freud's observations in their article “On Elephantasy and Elephanticide” (1969) and identify the elephant joke cycle of the 1960s as such hostile type of humor because it supposedly served to express disguised racism by concealing fears and fantasies of whites held against blacks during the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the innocuous form of elephant jokes.¹²⁴ The essayist Elliott Oring was convinced that elephant jokes arose in a wider counter-cultural movement that is reflected through these jokes that were challenging conventional logic, and their intrusive sexuality.¹²⁵ In either case, having that in mind, the author's intention was to use the powerful image of elephants floating in bathtubs across the stormy waters of our unconscious that conceals diverse suppressed emotions to draw the reader's attention towards problems of American minorities and the conflicts arising from the lack of tolerance for diversity in general and values and lifestyle that did not correspond with those of the majority living at the “strange suburban shores.”¹²⁶ The reference to political corruption that does not ensure “Free Elections” indicates another area of problematic issues of “that

122 Ferlinghetti 82.

123 Maurice M. Manring, *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1998) 3.

124 Manring 4.

125 Manring 4.

126 Ferlinghetti 82.

great American demi-democracy.”¹²⁷

Lawrence Ferlinghetti reflects on these national issues in the context of the city also in the poem “Dog” that expresses the true democratic ideal. The dog trots freely in the street and notices everything that belongs to the urban reality of San Francisco from small unimportant objects on the ground like fish wrapped in newspapers, chicken heads thrown away from restaurants in Chinatown, ants in their holes, cigar butts, puddles, cats and babies to objects bigger than himself like wandering drunks, Coit Tower and “moons on trees.”¹²⁸ Much of what he sees and hears is absurd, discouraging and depressing but that does not prevent him from being a figure that symbolizes freedom, because he roams the streets without inhibitions and is free to express his political opinion: “He will not be muzzled/ Congressman Doyle is just another/ fire hydrant/ to him.”¹²⁹ He has the ability to observe and listen to “great gramophone/ of puzzling existence” and also to think critically.¹³⁰ According to Jack Foley he is “making a gesture not only towards freedom but towards an acceptance of all the elements of his complicated, contradictory, multiple, reticent, egocentric, socially-conscious, introverted, extroverted, multi-lingual, multi-national 'self,’” however at that time the awareness of “multiplicity” was usually looked upon as synonymous to “insanity.”¹³¹

The expansion of suburbs coincided with the crisis of traditional industrial city abandoned by a significant part of its inhabitants who moved to suburbs. The cities therefore had to cope with negative consequences of the urban crisis that included aesthetic, cultural, social and political concerns: “It also had to contend with pictures of boarded-up buildings, rioting African Americans, looted stores, burn-out automobiles discarded on inner-city highways, and idle and abandoned factories. U.S. Cities were

127 Ferlinghetti 82.

128 Ferlinghetti 113.

129 Ferlinghetti 114.

130 Ferlinghetti 115.

131 Jack Foley, “A Second Coming,” *Contemporary Poetry Review*, 2008, 14 Apr. 2012

<www.cprw.com/Foley/ferlinghetti.htm>.

The title of *A Coney Island of the Mind* (1958) implies both the image of amusement park and the themes of (in)sanity and (ab)normality. Funfairs in the past often exposed natural abnormalities of creatures that deviated from standards of their species for the amusement of the audience, therefore the two concepts converge there.

perceived at home, and abroad as free-falling into inescapable chaos.”¹³²

This sense of chaos was represented in poetry in various ways, for instance through the exploration of marginal urban spaces that served at the same time as inspirational source and metaphor for employed experimental aesthetic practices.¹³³ An example of such exploration of alternative spaces within the city can be found in the poem “The Poet's Eye Obscenely Seeing...”¹³⁴ While the general vision of the world is poetic and abounds with eroticism and mystery, the description of the American cityscape is very different. It operates with the contrast between vacant and cluttered lots in the marginal areas of the city. There are empty areas of “ghost towns,” “empty Ellis Islands” and also semi-used space of suburban prairies that spread over a considerable extent of land.¹³⁵ Despite the fact that these spaces are rather empty of compact housing, they are cluttered with waste at the same time: it is “a kissproof world of plastic toiletseats tampax and taxis.”¹³⁶ The state of the landscape corresponds to the mental state of its peculiar inhabitants – “drugged store cowboys and las vegas virgins/ disowned indians and cinemad matrons/ unroman senators and conscientious non-objectors.”¹³⁷ The dreams of immigrants who entered America through the gateway of Ellis Island to live their American dream were torn to fragments; instead of true values they have found empty “mindless prairies” or junk.¹³⁸ The cityscape once again reflects the dissatisfactory state of affairs and is a synecdoche for the whole country.

The element of chaos is almost omnipresent in Ferlinghetti's depictions of American cities. It might be observed for example in the poem “Sailing thru the Straits of Demos” where a theme Odysseus' journey is recreated – the sailors return home to America and its “strange suburban shores” outside which there is an area of utmost

132 Beauregard 20.

133 Bennett 19.

134 The obscenity of the poet's look alludes to Allen Ginsberg's vision of American society that has diverged significantly from Walt Whitman's ideals. Both Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti, who published “Howl” (1956) became widely known through the trial accusing them of obscenity which initiated a larger discussion.

135 Ferlinghetti 83.

136 Ferlinghetti 83.

137 Ferlinghetti 83.

138 Ferlinghetti 83.

chaos.¹³⁹ It is represented by an incongruent mixture of themes from a great variety of sources from Homer's epic *Odyssey*, Greek and Roman mythology, and poetry of John Keats and Ezra Pound that re-created Homeric themes, to elephant jokes and tongue twisters which results in a peculiar “mishmash” in which the old and the new, the high and the low, the realistic and surrealist, and the serious and the grotesque blend in one. Not accidentally is this scene set in the midst of an ocean, because water is an element associated with the unconscious, the chaotic, the irrational, the wild and the surreal. The aesthetics of the poem attempts to capture the erratic and chaotic sense of urban space, not merely in order to imitate it but also to express his critique of narrow-minded suburban nation.

Ferlinghetti does not provide ready-made solutions to the outlined problems but he enjoys imagining the most effective one, which would entail the total destruction of American cities by a tidal wave a mile high described in the poem titled “Wild Dreams of a New Beginning.” Nevertheless, despite the fact that he refers to the flood myth, in particular the Biblical deluge with its connotations of purification and restoration of primal innocence, Ferlinghetti does not give an account of a terrifying apocalyptic vision in this poem. It is a jocular phantasy about the twilight of our civilization that ends sinking as the Titanic with all lights lit, accompanied by the band composed of players who do not pay attention to water that is filling their instruments and keep on playing Handel's *Water Music* until they are swept away like the bass player who floats away on his instrument. Also, the coyotes are perplexed and swim around without direction, skyscrapers turn into aquariums and Chicago Loop into a roller-coaster.

The poem begins with a stereotypical image that ascribes negative aspects to urban areas and positive to country: the city is described as a place of separation and general emptiness – “Lives cross lives/ idling at stoplights/ Beyond the cloverleaf turnoffs/ 'Souls eat souls in general emptiness,’” rural areas are associated with piano music that can be heard through the open window, the pleasant smell of flower fragrance, and a lawn among trees where a yogi gives lecture about the interconnection

139 Ferlinghetti 82.

of all beings because all is “taking place in one mind.”¹⁴⁰ The very presence at the class where “lovers are listening/ for the master to tell them they are one” indicates that they do not experience the desirable unity yet, neither between the two of them, nor “with the universe.”¹⁴¹ Also, there is an interesting work with various sounds and the absence of them in the two environments. While piano music plays in the serene landscape of Ojai, the city is silent; before the wave strikes, the premonition of the catastrophe manifests itself by a “breathless hush on a freeway tonight beyond the ledges of concrete” of already “lost Alexandria” which intensifies into a “deathless hush” right before impact.¹⁴² When the ocean starts to inundate the land the orchestra is playing but after water recedes only the song of crickets and cry of seabirds can be heard.

The ocean purifies America as well as the superannuated stinking civilization of decadent “Camembert Europe.”¹⁴³ After the withdrawal of water the original natural order is restored: “the washed land awakes to wilderness/ the only sound a vast thrumming of crickets/ a cry of seabirds high over/ [...]/ Indians reclaim their canoes.”¹⁴⁴ The violent force of water that raids the city brings eventually renewal and symbolizes a new promising beginning. The sea is besides the river discussed in the previous chapter another powerful water element. It represents a force of chaos capable of being destructive but also revitalizing.

Ferlinghetti seems to focus more on the creative potential of forces of chaos. A similar image of renewal that follows after destruction where the transformational element is also liquid can be found in the poem “The Painter's Dream.” A wild-haired band raids the “Whole World Museum of Art” where the most valuable pieces of western art are stored and they spray paint solvent over the exhibited paintings which immediately start to dissolve. Havoc does not result only in expected destruction and irrecoverable loss; instead the puddles of colors form “fantastic new and exciting images,” therefore the “end of our little universe” mourned for by “picturesque painters in berets” who “stagger through the halls weeping” enable the creation of a brand new

140 Ferlinghetti 189.

141 Ferlinghetti 189.

142 Ferlinghetti 189.

143 Ferlinghetti 190.

144 Ferlinghetti 190.

universe of art.¹⁴⁵ Although the processes of renewal in “The Painter's Dream” and “Wild Dreams of a New Beginning” differ in particular details (such as the missing aspect of purification in the former) the important pattern of violent liquid force that produces rejuvenation is shared.

As suggested at the beginning a member of that “suburban nation” would probably recognize anything that would trespass beyond the narrow limits of the defined standards of normality as deviant. Any kind of otherness would be regarded as disorder and heterogeneity would be equaled to chaos. Ferlinghetti, on the other hand, seems to suggest that heterogeneity may be often beneficial. Not only in aesthetic practices that combine different media and dissimilar motifs and themes in order to create something fresh illustrated symbolically in the poem “The Painter's Dream” or by the often employed technique of juxtaposition discussed in the first chapter. He is a promoter of cultural as well as social heterogeneity which stands in contrast to the criticized conformity and homogeneity.

Regarding social heterogeneity within urban context there are many poems that contain references to coexistence of different minority groups within American cities, most notably Italian immigrants in the poems “Old Italians Dying,” and “They Were Putting Up the Statue.” Ferlinghetti however does not suggest that the coexistence is perfect; there is a great distance between the minority and the majority, which is evident from the way how the speaker talks about the Italians: he not only uses the offensive term “dagos” but also expresses their otherness by saying “you have seen *them* on the benches/ in the park in Washington Square” and continues with the description of their unmistakable appearance that consists in typical apparel of faded felt fedoras with stained hatbands, baggy pants with both belt and suspenders and black high button shoes and other particularities such as gnarled hands, wild eyebrows, yellow teeth and the smell of Grappa, garlic and pepperoni.¹⁴⁶ Together with other peculiarities of their traditions Ferlinghetti depicts them as a group that regardless inhabiting the same urban space rather lives in isolation. Yet they are one piece in the

145 Ferlinghetti 18-19.

146 Ferlinghetti 219. my emphasis.

heterogeneous urban mosaic.

The cosmopolitan character of the American city also involves the image of multi-lingual Babylonian space, in which the very idea of chaos is engendered. Once again, the metaphor of sea is used to express that: “ah the polyglot sea.../ sybils' syllables fellaheen dialects/ all run together/ everywhere re-echoing/ [...]/ coalescing all/ into one huge/ polyphonic/ liquid language/ babbled together/ cobbled together/ into one polyphoboistrous/ running sea of speech/ Upon which mute ships race/ toward a common humanity.”¹⁴⁷ Similar imagery is used in the poem “A Vast Confusion” where sea is in turn compared to the polyphonous murmur of voices in the subway – “a billion sotto voices murmuring/ a vast muttering/ a swelling stuttering/ in ocean's speakers” expressing “a vast confusion in the universe.”¹⁴⁸ The increasing degree of chaos seems to be verified by the proof of general entropy: when the tape that records all sounds produced by “world's voice-box” is played backwards through the “Moog Synthetizer of time” chaos unscrambles as time approaches towards the first simple harmonies before it reaches the first light.¹⁴⁹ The chaotic underground scene where a multitude of voices blend together expresses therefore an essential postmodern concept of entropy which is related to other ideas that underpin its philosophy such as multiplicity, fragmentarity and the fundamental importance of language in the construction of reality.

The increasing degree of chaos within urban spaces is emphasized in many poems. For example in the poem “Uses of poetry” the scenery of the “cities by the sea” is described as “mad spectacle of existence/ and all these talking animals on wheels/ heroes and heroines with a thousand eyes.”¹⁵⁰ These hallucinatory visions resemble states invoked by drug consumption or experienced in a fit of madness where insect metaphors are frequent.¹⁵¹ Images of inhabitants who resemble insects because of their compound eyes serve here the purpose of describing the chaotic or surreal character of

147 Ferlinghetti 25-26.

148 Ferlinghetti 196.

149 Ferlinghetti 196.

150 Ferlinghetti 5.

151 For example Franz Kafka's novella *The Metamorphosis* (1915) or William S. Burroughs's novel *Naked Lunch* (1959).

American cities.

Ferlinghetti also explores the problematic issues of urban spaces on a more personal, rather psychological level, although it inevitably relates to the broader social situation as well. One of his concerns is how the urban environment is experienced by an individual. A pessimistic tone prevails in his poems: big cities are often depicted as apathetic where in the midst of thousands of other people one may easily feel lonely, anonymous, alienated from others, disconnected, and suffer from a sense of rootlessness because of lost or weak bonds with family. A set of these interconnected themes can be identified for example in the poems “Lost Parents,” “Genitori Perduti,” “People Getting Divorced,” and “Home Home Home,” some of which were already analyzed earlier.

Urban experience is often connected to a sense of anonymity and apathy that one experiences in public spaces. These are places where many distinct worlds cross each other but scarcely intersect; the accidental encounter of two diametrically different worlds usually results in indifferent look that the two pedestrians cast on each other as they are passing by, perhaps not even that. Most citizens behave like “mute singers” or the “walking dead.”¹⁵² I would like to compare two poems that both describe the encounter of strangers in the city. Whereas the poem “Two Scavengers in a Truck, Two Beautiful People in a Mercedes” expresses the idea of an invisible line that separates firmly the two worlds, in “Ladakh Buddhism Biker” there seems to be a spark of understanding. Both of these encounters take place at a crossroads while waiting for the traffic lights to change. When the incessant flow of cars is suspended for a short while, the people are given an opportunity to observe other drivers, passengers and pedestrians.

In one such short moment of suspension, two dissimilar vehicles are kept close to each other in the poem “Two Scavengers in a Truck, Two Beautiful People in a Mercedes.” The young garbageman standing on the back stoop of the garbage truck and the man at the steering wheel of the Mercedes have quite a lot in common: they are of the same age, both have long hair and wear sunglasses. Yet, the main difference

152 Ferlinghetti 263.

between them – their social status – is an uncrossable border. The scene is described from the perspective of garbagemen who perceive the wealthy couple as a sort of spectacle that is detached from reality: “as if they were some odorless TV ad/ in which everything was possible.”¹⁵³ Despite being so close it seems as if they were observing each other from a great distance. Once again, great social differences are described through the comparison of this sort of democracy to a sea gulf where each social group resides on one side of the coast forever separated: “And the very red light for an instant/ holding all four close together/ as if anything at all were possible/ between them/ across that small gulf/ in the high seas of this democracy.”¹⁵⁴ This poem is another example that illustrates my argument that Ferlinghetti uses everyday scenes from urban life in order to express more general concerns.

The second encounter is described in the poem “Ladakh Buddhes Biker”: a motorcyclist with an exotic appearance that resembles an oriental goddess with her blue eyebrows, a gold button on her temple and strange mesmerizing look of her “witchy” eyes “not designed to blink” gazes at the speaker speechlessly while waiting at the traffic lights.¹⁵⁵ Her visage suggests to view her as Kali, an important female Tibetan Buddhist and Hinduist deity, who is known as a goddess of death, time and change, commonly associated also with violence and sexuality. The depiction in the poem however provides more insight into the ambivalent symbolism of her character and reveals qualities ascribed to this goddess that are closer to the original tradition. She is not a bloodthirsty monster that longs to kill; what her terrible appearance really represents is painful death of ego that is regarded as a source of all problems. Therefore, she might at the same time embody qualities like compassion and motherly love that seem contradictory to her dreadful look. Her intense gaze reveals sympathy for the stranger (and the whole humankind) for she has “her corneas red and blue/ as if from loving & weeping too much/over our samsara.”¹⁵⁶ In this poem another hint is

153 Ferlinghetti 228.

154 Ferlinghetti 229.

155 Ferlinghetti 53.

The speaker is presumably Ferlinghetti himself because the setting is “on the corner of Columbus & Broadway” where the City Lights bookstore is located. [Ferlinghetti 53.]

156 Ferlinghetti 53.

given about the general character of our age; it is seen as “Kali Yuga Age” – the dark age.¹⁵⁷ It is characteristic of Ferlinghetti's poetry and his critical discourse that he seldom attempts to identify specific problems. He often contents with such general statements as comparing our time to “Kali Yuga Age” or American political system to “great American demi-democracy.”¹⁵⁸

Another symbolic setting that allows to pillory vices associated with urban mode of living is the shrine of consumerist lifestyle – seven floors high department store Macy's, advertised as the largest in the world in the poem “Director of Alienation.” This place that abounds with ostentatious luxury makes the speaker feel as a sort of Charlie Chaplin's bum with his bent shoes and beat bowler. Being judged by his credit cards and a hole in his sock, he naturally feels uncomfortable, even though he knows it is only a trap. The store is designed to make one feel bad about one's clothes and appearance and make one thus more vulnerable to their irresistible offers which are only “imbecile illusions of happiness.”¹⁵⁹ The speaker abhors this artificial world of false substitutions such as “nylon ladies,” artificial neon lights, wigs and “plastic jewels and genitals.”¹⁶⁰ It does not seem he could find his “fair-haired angel” there where everyone looks so serious, unhappy and alienated from the earth and from each other, especially in the limited space of the elevator.¹⁶¹

The “anarchist among the floorwalkers” responds to this cold sterility with a series of provocative actions that laugh at the unwritten rules of the department store and the society that has created them.¹⁶² He converts the store into his playground: he slides down the escalators “bare-ass”; he makes himself home at the furniture department slipping into one of the displayed beds that are for sale in the hope of finding his angel under the sheets; later he tries a flush toilet and a portable shower, and after emerging from the bath he slips on one of the wigs and pretends to be a manikin in a store window.¹⁶³ Not even the Keystone Cops running after him are

157 Ferlinghetti 53.

158 Ferlinghetti 53, 82.

159 Ferlinghetti 80.

160 Ferlinghetti 186, 188.

161 Ferlinghetti 185.

162 Ferlinghetti 185.

163 Ferlinghetti 186.

missing in this slapstick in Charlie Chaplin style that is funny and absurd and yet transmits a serious message concerning the condition of our world: the department store is not a place where one is supposed to have fun, feel at home or find love; it is a place where paranoia, two-way mirrors, and ubiquitous security guards rule.

Ferlinghetti uses exaggerated grandiloquent metaphors to describe this place of superficial brilliance devoid of meaning. He compares it to secular hell by depicting the customers as “lost souls descending thru/ Dante's seven circles” or to a modern urban Apocalypse: it is “wreck of civilization” or “the last days of somebody's empire.”¹⁶⁴ These ridiculously bombastic images are on the other side of spectrum of means of expression than the grotesque actions performed by the speaker, and yet both devices jointly undermine the values represented by this institution and its credible costumers.¹⁶⁵ The values represented by these relate to more general situation expressed for instance in the poem “Uses of Poetry” where urban dwellers are described through similar imagery of the forthcoming world's end: they are “stand-up tragedians/ pale-idols in the night streets/ trance-dancers in the dust of the Last Waltz/ in this time of gridlock Autogeddon.”¹⁶⁶

The themes of “Director of Alienation” touch upon larger social and economic issues of the country; using the symbol of department store in New York City that emerged at that time as the new cultural and economic center, the author criticizes larger structures of the capitalist economy.¹⁶⁷ At the same time the psychological effects of this environment and the values it promotes on the individual are described. Everyone feels alienated: “Indians alienated Artists alienated/ All these poets alienated/ Parents husbands wives alienated/ Kids alienated/ Even billionaires alienated.”¹⁶⁸ This alienation is “cured” by another shopping session in hope to finally belong – which makes it an ever-accelerating spinning wheel.

Although Ferlinghetti focuses his critique on American cities, the poem “History of the World: A TV Docu-Drama” recognizes similar issues that were and are

164 Ferlinghetti 186, 187.

165 Ferlinghetti 186, 187.

166 Ferlinghetti 6.

167 Bennett 19.

168 Ferlinghetti 187.

to be discussed in relation with European cities as well. The advance of civilization brings about the same problems reaching from the fact that everything can be converted in product and sold (even objects like the Tower of London) to joyless situation of the city-dwellers who experience the same kinds of anxiety (“The world's an orphans's home/ Rootless polyglots roam the cities”) in Eliotesque London where “a crowd flows over London Bridge/ Westward/ stick figures in the world's end / out of Giacometti.”¹⁶⁹

The given examples have shown that the representations of urban spaces often depict the city as a dehumanized place where true values have been lost. For that purpose Ferlinghetti often describes the inhabitants through animal metaphors, employing the poetic device that might be called “animalization.” In the poem “Home Home Home” Ferlinghetti seeks to emphasize the contrast between the urban environment with its “perfect,” rational and sterile architecture of the International Style based on Le Corbusier's principles of “pure geometry” that constituted in straight lines, geometrical cells, right angles and lack of ornament, and the “imperfect” bodies of the inhabitants that do not fit very well there.¹⁷⁰ The center of San Francisco “burning/ with the late sun/ in a million windows” is left behind by the people driving home on a highway who are described as frightened animals that flee into their nests and warm caves “where the food is”; they are “four-wheeled animals,” “fur and flesh/ in steel cabinets/ on wheels,” or “brave intrepid animals.”¹⁷¹ Nevertheless, as has been already demonstrated at the beginning, the same lack of humanness awaits them in their suburban homes.

The mode of urban living described through the approximation between humans, animals and machines also occurs in the poem “Uses of poetry.” In the cities by the sea the inhabitants that “criss-cross” the city are described as “talking animals on wheels” or “bare-faced bipeds in clothes.”¹⁷² These inhabitants have lost or were deprived of the properties most important to humans – they have “bent hearts,”

169 Ferlinghetti 301-302.

170 Bennett 4.

171 Ferlinghetti 230, 231.

172 Ferlinghetti 5-6.

“hidden oversouls” and “no more myths to call their own.”¹⁷³ As suggested before, these images also refer to the concept of chaos that invades the cities which may be illustrated through images of insects: “all these talking animals on wheels/ heroes and heroines with a thousand eyes.”¹⁷⁴

This manner of viewing the city that uses imagery related to insect life is not saved only for American cities but seems suitable for all urban agglomerations. London in the poem “London Crossfigured” suggests a kinship between public transport and the world of insects: it is “creeping with trams.”¹⁷⁵ The metaphor comparing the city to an insect colony draws on the Romantic notion of “city as organism.”¹⁷⁶

While animal metaphors were used in the previous examples to express the idea of a dehumanized city, the contamination that occurs in the poem “Ladakh Buddhess Biker” serves the opposite purpose. This time it is not an example of “animalization” but “mechanization.” The appearance of the woman biker does not only suggest her relation to Kali but she partly also resembles a machine: “her eyelids like fenders/ on old Oldsmobiles,” “her headlight eyes beam at me.”¹⁷⁷ Contrary to other such poems the dehumanizing metaphor does not serve the critique. Quite on the contrary, the author attempts to differentiate her from ordinary people because she is an immortal being, a goddess who does not suffer from any kind of human weaknesses, hence the imagery of solid and unbreakable metal sheets of a machine. Her Harley is conversely “animalized” becoming a huge hog which relates to another idea that the speaker associates with her: she might be a witch who has magically converted a hog into a motorcycle.

The third chapter analyzes Ferlinghetti's critical urban discourse that does not only concern problematic areas of American cities, but mainly uses these spaces to discuss themes that transcend the domain of urban issues. These more general concerns

173 Ferlinghetti 5.

174 Ferlinghetti 5.

175 Ferlinghetti 68.

176 Joachim von der Thüsen, “The City as Metaphor, Metonym and Symbol,” *Babylon or New Jerusalem?: Perceptions of the City in Literature*, ed. Valeria Tinkler-Villani (Amsterdam/ New York: Rodopi, 2005) 5.

177 Ferlinghetti 53.

include Ferlinghetti's reflections about political and social situation and the clash between the actual and desirable state of affairs. He focuses on the opposition between majority ideology represented by suburban lifestyle associated with certain values and behavioral patterns, and various kinds of minority lifestyles. These are perceived from that narrow-minded perspective negatively and are associated with the images of unruly chaos. Ferlinghetti, on the contrary celebrates these alternatives and associates them with concepts of freedom, heterogeneity and creativity. Such manifestations are, nevertheless, consistently suppressed, therefore the city is depicted as dehumanized because it is deprived of basic human qualities. The citizens suffer from social, emotional and spiritual deprivation and experience feelings like solitude, alienation and rootlessness that cannot be cured by consumerism or other false substitutions.

Conclusion

Three different perspectives on representations of urban spaces in Lawrence Ferlinghetti's poems have been provided. Some of the images recreated in the poems correspond to real physical locations, some of them are more generic urban settings. All of them, however, share one significant aspect that characterizes Ferlinghetti's work with urban spaces: the images are never depictions of the city *per se*; they function as a framework for the debate of themes that transcend the urban domain.

The first chapter presented the urban space as an intertext composed of various sorts of other minor texts, such as literature, architecture, sculpture, music, visual arts and others. Such space is particularly convenient for encounters of various dissimilar ideas and concepts, the consequence of which may be certain contamination of one or both texts. At the border of these two texts new meanings are constantly created. Such production also occurs when an artistic text is read within the context of urban space. The juxtaposition of these may result in an altered outlook and consequently in a singular artistic expression. Although only a minority of such surprising relations is thus “discovered,” the majority accumulates within the city as latent creative potential. The city is thus converted into a sort of “container” where various artistic texts and potential intertextual relations between these are stored.

These texts also belong to the memory of the city, which is the second perspective, discussed in the chapter two. The city is regarded as a space where memory – individual as well as collective – is preserved; it is perceived as a mnemonic space where memories are firmly rooted into specific places. A recurrent pattern occurs: an individual attempts to retrieve his recollections in order to reconnect with the past and ground personal identity, but such efforts are futile; what he encounters is loss and oblivion. As a result, a false mental construct is created, that is perceived as an authentic reminiscence, but which is, nevertheless, heavily idealized using conventional imagery.

While these images-memories are aesthetically appealing at the expense of their

authenticity and deprived of all problematic aspects, the images of urban space analyzed in the third chapter are different again: they reflect the present situation and are very critical. The social and political issues discussed here, which include debates over the clash between homogeneity and heterogeneity or between order and chaos, are very general and do not limit on urban areas. It cannot be denied, however, that because of high density of population, greater degree of migration, and the fact that it houses the headquarters of important national institutions the city functions as a sort of catalyst for important changes. It is therefore common to use the whole city, or its parts, such as the suburbs, as a symbol that embodies general and/or abstract qualities.

Each of the offered perspectives corresponds to a characteristic poetic style that involves a set of related themes, specific imagery and particular poetic devices; through this variety of forms each one of them seeks to achieve distinct results. Disparate as they are, these three types of representation share at least one important feature: the city is an inherent element in the larger discussion.

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