

Louis Armand, PhD
SUPERVISOR'S REPORT:

re "The New America in Beat Literature: Spontaneous, Far Out, and All That Jazz"
by Tereza Novicka
(BA dissertation, 2010)

Ms Novicka's thesis examines the relationship between core characteristics of "Beat" writing and Bebop, which in the 40s was the dominant "experimental" strand within jazz: Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg representing the former, Dizzy Gillespie, Charles Parker, Thelonious Monk *et al.* representing the other. This relationship is founded on several common elements, attitudinal and stylistic. They also share a common element in the widespread use of prescription drugs and narcotics, in particular amphetamines. An intriguing picture of cultural history could be built around the coincidence of emergent literary (and musical) styles and contemporary intoxicants—a history not based merely upon the circumstantial, but one prepared to delve into *formal* relations. And just as the 50s represents an eruption in formal experimentation in jazz, with emergent tenets of "cool" and "free jazz," so too "Beat" writing in the 50s articulated itself according to several broadly divergent tendencies both in temper and style. Kerouac's rhapsodic free-flowing, speed-driven, high-tempo improvisations stand in contrast to the acerbic, ironic, discontinuous, deadpan chance operations of Burroughs: the expressive ego and the egoless. Can this be attributed to Burroughs' preference for opiates? The cut-up tends towards a type of minimal unit, that might be said to constitute a "phrasing" that advances the writing in a different way to Kerouac's "beat" – collage rather than linear cadence. The question would be to what extent are these mutually implied, complementary, inter-cognisant? Miles Davis, Don Cherry, Ornette Coleman and Sonny Rollins were all playing in the 1950s: Dizzy and Bird *imply* them. Both forms, jazz and "Beat" writing in the 50s might even be said to describe a matrix back to which almost every major literary and musical innovation thereafter can be traced back – in stark contrast to the prevailing idea of the social conditions in America at that time. To what extent, then, could we also say that – in terms of what the writing and music *does* – Bebop and Beat are a *critique* of the emergent Cold War era? And to what extent is the advent of the Beatnik an expression of commodity capitalism's grip upon the collective imagination in the post-War period – an *anodyne*, in other words? Finally, what can be said about the rhetoric of "generation" and "generationalism" in relation to the Beats? To what extent did this serve to recuperate the claims upon solidarity of an emerging movement for cultural capitalism – as, for example, later occurred with Punk, and later still in the media-fabrication of "Generation X" etc? Kerouac was an evangelist who wanted to be understood, while Burroughs would've been content with mass extermination as a social corrective. Is the mainstream recuperation of the Beats a necessary implication of Kerouac's stance? Does the criticality of Burroughs' position survive it? Is Beat beat?

My provisional recommendation for this thesis, dependent upon the candidate's performance in his defence, is a grade of either "very good" or "excellent."

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