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## American Postwar Pilgrimage: The Beats in Paris

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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**Key words:**

Beat Generation, Transculturalism, Transnationalism, Postwar, Anglophone, Francophone

**Klíčová slova:**

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## Abstract:

The main objective of this thesis is to study the high point of the Beat Generation's production in Paris between 1957 and 1960 and to determine why it encouraged their major contribution to literature, art and criticism worldwide in the last quarter of the 20th century and today. Though most were born and educated in the United States, many of the most important Beat writers journeyed across the world in search of artistic recognition and determined to perform literary experiments they had failed to execute back home.

This thesis will provide an overview of the Beat pilgrimage to Paris, a city which has been coined "an arbiter of cultural value in the postwar era."<sup>1</sup> The thesis also attempts to examine the ways the Beats' time in Paris was invaluable for their influence on literature beyond American borders and how their writing was shaped by the oeuvres of such French writers as Rimbaud, Proust, Gide, Apollinaire, St.-John Perse, Céline, Cocteau, Genet, Michaux and others.<sup>2</sup> This thesis will survey the intersection between French and American culture and the influence of both on Beat authors and the list of works to be analysed includes but is not limited to Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* (1956), and "Kaddish" (1959); William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959), *The Soft Machine*; Jack Kerouac's *Satori In Paris* (1966), *Big Sur* (1962), *On the Road* (1957); Gregory Corso's "Bomb."

The transnational point of view informs my reading of these works, encouraging me to focus on the circulation of art beyond U.S. borders. Thus, by examining French literature and culture as an integral part of the Beat Generation's prose, poetry and art, this thesis will reveal the cultural, creative and emotional engagement these writers shared towards Francophone literature and the city of Paris. This thesis also considers intertextual and intercultural communication in collaborative works such as *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks* by William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac, and the appropriation of French texts by Beat writers.

This paper concludes by defining the role of Francophone culture in the literary development of the Beats as a transnational countercultural movement, and suggests how they continue to contribute to international literature.

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<sup>1</sup> Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review, and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2013) 120.

<sup>2</sup> Veronique Lane, *The French Genealogy of the Beat Generation* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017) 3.

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## 1. Introduction

The main objective of this thesis is to study the high point of the Beat writers production in Paris between 1957 and 1960 and to determine why it led to them being a major contribution to new intellectual standards in literature, music and art for future generations. The Beat Generation evolved during the 1940s in both New York City and San Francisco, where poets and writers like Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Gary Snyder, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Gregory Corso started to question mainstream politics and social culture.<sup>3</sup> This work will examine William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and Gregory Corso's appropriations of French literature and culture and suggest why their experience in Paris was invaluable for the making of the worldwide legacy of the Beat Generation. The primary source materials will be the Beats' literary works, as well as various publications and archives displaying the intersection between French and American cultures and this intersection's influence on Beat authors between 1944 and the 1960s. Some of the works to be analysed in this thesis include Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* (1956), "Kaddish" (1959); Brion Gysin and William Burroughs's *The Third Mind*, Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*; Jack Kerouac's *Satori In Paris* (1966), *Big Sur* (1962), *The Subterraneans* and *On the Road* (1957). In addition, recent email correspondence with Oliver Harris, a scholar of William Burroughs and Senior Lecturer in the Department of American Studies at Keel University, informs the arguments of the thesis, as does Barry Miles' book *The Beat Hotel*, Lawrence Sawyer-Lauçanno's *The Continual Pilgrimage: American Writers in Paris*, and Nancy M. Grace and Jennie Skerl's *The Transnational Beat Generation*. And lastly, a revised analysis of the Beat Generation by Veronique Lane's analysis of The Beat Generation — *The French Genealogy of the Beat Generation* — will be incorporated to display the recent changes in the attitudes towards the importance of the interdependence of French and American literature and cultures. One key aspect of my thesis is

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<sup>3</sup> Barry Miles, *The Beat Hotel: Ginsberg, Burroughs & Corso in Paris, 1957-1963* (New York City: Grove Press, 2001) Introduction.

an examination of how the existence of “transnationalism”<sup>4</sup> was the essence of the Beat Generation's literary journey. This topic will be touched on to refer to the circulation of art beyond American borders.

One of the main reasons the Beats journeyed across the world was to search for artistic recognition and to perform literary experiments they had failed to execute back home. This was rooted in the Great Depression in the 1930s, which had irreversibly affected the US economy and the sense of national identity. Even if America “became the world power”<sup>5</sup> after World War II, the newly shaped consumer society and its political and spiritual oppression triggered the Beat Generation's rebellion against traditional methods of composition and thinking. This is why they sought to create alternative intersections between visual, sound, and writing practices. As Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno suggests, “the aim, [...] was to go beyond the conscious mental censor that attempted to impose a rational order on verbal expression.”<sup>6</sup> Unsurprisingly, for many Americans in the 20th century, the quest for autonomous art and intercultural experience ended in Paris, a city which has been coined “an arbiter of cultural value in the postwar era,”<sup>7</sup> As a result, French literature and art greatly contributed to the formation of the Beat movement in the 1950s and its subsequent influence on the postmodern literature and culture, as well as social and critical studies. The following arguments focus focus on the personal and historical conditions that prompted a certain group of the Beat writers — namely, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs and Gregory Corso — to escape the oppressive political situation in the US by traveling to Paris. Their journey to Paris

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<sup>4</sup> This concept is explained throughout Nancy M. Grace and Jennie Skerl's *The Transnational Beat Generation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Ozan Selcik, “The Beat Generation in Social Cultural Context,” *VFAST Transactions on Education and Social Sciences*, August 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, *The Continual Pilgrimage: American Writers in Paris* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2001) 261.

<sup>7</sup> Glass, 120.



between 1957 and 1960 brought their literary and artistic practices across national borders, and was essential for the formation of the Beat Generation.

Chapter I of the thesis examines the reasons why the Beat writers left the US for Paris between 1957 and 1960. This will be presented with particular examples from as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs and others. The first chapter will analyse their motivations to operate across national borders — including American consumerism and censorship which made it complicated for them to publish — and why this relocation was a necessary stage in the making of new ways of literary composition and “the liberation of words from censorship.”<sup>8</sup>

The second chapter will focus on the Beats’ lifestyle and their literary experiments during their time Paris. Texts examined in this chapter include Burroughs and Gysin’s cut-ups among others. This will show how Francophone society shaped these writers’s essential values and how they composed their experimental prose and poetry. Emphasis will be put on the intercommunication between the aesthetics of various French authors — especially those radically opposed to literary conservatism, like Rimbaud. Among the French writers and artists, the list of works includes but is not limited to the essays of Antonin Artaud, André Breton, Jean Cocteau, Arthur Rimbaud and others. These French writers represented the modern human condition in the Western world with the same radical assault on and cruelty towards the conventions of post-war society and literature that is present in the books of the Beats. This chapter will also show how the Beats employed French literature as an ideological alternative for their own writings.

The third chapter highlights the Beat Generation’s cultural, social and political patrimony, which was closely connected to the writers’s creative practice and life in Paris. This part of the thesis will enlist specific changes in modern literary composition and cultural values as developed by the Beats — not only in the framework of literature but also in political and social wakefulness

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<sup>8</sup> Allen Ginsberg, “A Definition of the Beat Generation,” *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays (1952-1995)*: 50-52.

worldwide. Veronique Lane's *The French Genealogy of the Beat Generation* will be especially useful for this part of my argument. By examining how French literature and culture inspired the first major writers of the Beat Generation and materially shaped their works, the Beats' pilgrimage to Paris will be presented as a milestone in their establishment of the post-war counterculture. To understand this, though, it is necessary to examine the roots of this literary and cultural movement, which began several decades earlier.

## 2. Chapter I: Why Did the Beats Go to Paris?

Between 1957 and 1960 Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Gregory Corso, writers who had already gained fame and notoriety in the US as the Beat Generation<sup>9</sup> and many more American writers moved to Paris. While these writers were escaping oppressive American politics in Paris, they also managed to bring the writing of dissent across national borders, “extending or operating across national boundaries.”<sup>10</sup> Beat Generation writers abandoned the US during this period and fled to Paris because postwar censorship in America did not encourage evolution of both the intellectual and physical freedoms but rather created, in David Riesman’s words, “the other-directed man,”<sup>11</sup> a conventional, suppressed and repressed post-war figure who was easily influenced by advertising and the media. Towards the end of 1950s, the Beat writers became one of the major forces to start breaking out of this frustrating suppression of individuality. For their inability to be published in America But this isn't really true. City Lights was already publishing Corso and Ginsberg and Kerouac’s poetry. Specify who you mean, made them look for the support of European publishing houses. Second, Francophone literature and European culture in general responded to the intellectual interests of these American writers. In general, to a greater or lesser extent, the Beats were activists of the social politics of identity, gender, ethnicity, LGBT rights and environmentalism and some of them practised explicit homosexuality, open sexuality and drug use.<sup>12</sup> Thus, it was only logical for these writers to migrate to France and “develop their own experiments to achieve aesthetic and ontological otherness through writing.”<sup>13</sup> Overall, the strictures of post-war

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<sup>9</sup> Norman Podhoretz, “The Know-Nothing Bohemians,” *Partisan Review* 25.2 (1958): 305-18.

<sup>10</sup> “Transnational”, 2018 Oxford University Press, [en.oxforddictionaries.com](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com) 2018 ed.

<sup>11</sup> David Riesman, Nathan Glazer and Reul Denney, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950) 17.

<sup>12</sup> Morris Dickstein, “Beyond Beat,” [archive.nytimes.com](https://archive.nytimes.com), The New York Times, August 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Lane, 6.

American conformity which led to publishing censorship, motivated Beat writers to move to Paris where an artist, they assumed, would feel more valued and respected.

## ***2.1 The Transnational Beat Generation***

Once seen as solely American rebels and revolutionaries against the conformity of the 1960s, the Beats have more recently been reconsidered as a transnational, global and multimedia generation whose activities and topics went beyond the borders of American society and literature. In their study *The Transnational Beat Generation*, Nancy M. Grace and Jennie Skerl explain why this generation's internationalism makes the Beats one of the most important postwar countercultures of the '60s. Grace and Skerl also raise an uneasy question about the Beats' "transnationalism" which "is more than just a question of influence—it also raises interesting questions concerning how texts are used, disseminated, and appropriated across space and time."<sup>14</sup> This important study makes clear "the growing importance of the global for both the literary scene in the United States as well as for concerns such as ecology, spiritualism, arts production, international protest movements, women's issues, and the economy."<sup>15</sup> In an interview with Anne Waldman about the importance of the transnational nature of the Beats' works, Nancy Grace presents the constant travels and cultural exchanges of these writers not only as a way to escape oppression but also as a "vehicle" that transported their philosophy around the globe:

Their values continue to reflect the issues of candor, or Whitman's "adhesiveness," empathy, free speech, first amendment poetics, tolerance on matters of gender orientation, investigative poetics, an awareness of the primary influence of black culture, the interest in the "fellaheen" worlds or what goes on below the borders or crossing borders. psychological and paranormal and neurological investigations.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Erik Mortenson, review of *The Transnational Beat Generation*, eds. Nancy M. Grace and Jennie Skerl on [Ebsn.eu](http://Ebsn.eu).

<sup>15</sup> Mortenson, review.

<sup>16</sup> Nancy M. Grace and Jennie Skerl, 135.

Especially important here is that the transnational character of these Beat writers was determined by the concept of crossing or transcending borders and the blurring of the boundaries between genre and form: “the essential point about Beat transgression is the extent to which crossing textual boundaries is activated by, and in many cases predicated on, first crossing physical borders.”<sup>17</sup>

This is why the Beats’ pilgrimage to Europe, and specifically Paris, where they gained publishing and creative freedom, was one of the most crucial moments for this movement between 1957 and 1960, the years when they first became a global phenomenon in literature, art, politics, environment, sexual liberation, social change, fashion, music and more. For example, one might think of Gregory Corso’s stay in Paris during the final days of the Fourth Republic when the poet (while being one of the least political among the Beats) actively engaged into the political turmoil with his poems “The Sacré-Coeur Café” and “Bomb” — “the centerpiece of his 1960 volume of Paris poems, *The Happy Birthday of Death*” where the poet’s “immediate political and historical context” became “quite visible.”<sup>18</sup> Some of the most internationally recognised works of the Beat writers — such Ginsberg’s *Kaddish*, Jack Kerouac’s *Mexico City Blues*, William Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* — were also produced abroad. In the given situation in 1950s, the writers’ tense relationship with America motivated them to seek for literary and aesthetic models while travelling abroad. However, the Beats’ motivation to protest was not simply a desire to make a sensation.

## **2.2 America and the Beats**

While this desire certainly played some role in their actions, it was coupled with the hard work of analysis and implementation of true humanity, in the sense of “the quality being humane or benevolence,”<sup>19</sup> in the humanities, the academic field of literature and arts. Illustrating this important point Oliver Harris, in his detailed analysis of the Beats’ Cold War correspondence, presents the

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<sup>17</sup> Jimmy, 28.

<sup>18</sup> Jimmy, 3

<sup>19</sup> “Humanity”, 2018 Oxford University Press, [en.oxforddictionaries.com](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com) 2018 ed.

concept of benevolence as a predominant feature of Beat Generation poetry, prose and correspondence:

Historically linked to the romantic idea of spontaneity, [...] for the Beats the letter represented a technology of self-expression and intimate communication opposed to the impersonal relations of commodity exchange and the controlled uniformity of modern mass media. Put another way, the value of Beat letters is the product of their position as not just unpublished but *unpublishable* writers: the likes of Ginsberg and Kerouac invested essential energy in correspondence during the early Cold War years, when their social marginality was also economic and cultural.<sup>20</sup>

This insight is essential for reading Beat literature outside of a nation-based framework as it opens up the possibility of unprejudiced and intimate transnational crossings and encounters that influenced Beat Generation writing. For instance, in his letter to Benson Soffer,<sup>21</sup> on May 13, 1943, Ginsberg reflects on intellectual and physical freedom and makes a clear “endorsement of democracy:”

My own tentative philosophy is this, that man is a superior animal, that his superiority lies in self-consciousness and self-knowledge. This self-knowledge includes a realization of a purpose and meaning of life (whether an affirmative, negative, or neuter meaning) and the ability to use natural force to achieve fulfilment of that meaning. What that purpose is, other than freedom from physical limitation, and freedom from intellectual limitation, I do not know. [...] Ethics and philosophy involve the search for freedom from intellectual limitation. History — the development of civilization — is the development of the slow evolutionary search for this (excuse me if I begin to sound like Allen Ginsberg) physical and intellectual freedom. [...] In our time we have evolved the principles of universal democracy, and these principles are commonly accepted. The time is not far off when we shall have advanced to a stage where we will apply these principles, even as the Greeks applied their primitive principle in their time. This is one illustration of the broadening of the intellectual comprehension of the whole humanity, aided by and allied to physical freedom.<sup>22</sup>

Then, Ginsberg explains what the practical usage of this theorizing by saying that it can be practically applied at any given time. Technically, “an endorsement of democracy” is “the evolution to-

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<sup>20</sup> Oliver Harris, “Cold War Correspondents: Ginsberg, Kerouac, Cassady, and the Political Economy of Beat Letters,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 46.2 (2000): 185.

<sup>21</sup> Bill Morgan, *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2008) 4.

<sup>22</sup> Morgan, 4 -5.

ward complete self-consciousness” which is achieved by the cooperation of all the humankind towards the “universal” progress. In short, by referring to the “intellectual comprehension of the whole humanity” in this letter, Ginsberg explains the essence of the role of one’s personal poetics and individual character in literature and why self-confidence and self-knowledge are essential for a wholesome life free from “intellectual limitation.” This and earlier examples can show that while dabbling into everything from drugs to open sexuality, from Eastern religion to European philosophy, Beat writers like Ginsberg actually followed — maybe not in a very civilised way — a clear path towards the beauty of social and political freedom. It wasn’t only Ginsberg making these gestures.

In his introduction to the book *The Americans* (first published in France in 1958) — a powerful selection of 20th century photography by Robert Frank — Kerouac comments on the American beauty Frank captures, and how this contrasts with the country’s rampant racism and consumerism:

That crazy feeling in America when the sun is hot on the streets and the music comes out of the jukebox or from a nearby funeral, that’s what Robert Frank has captured in tremendous photographs taken as he travelled on the road around practically forty-eight states in an old car [...] and with the agility, mystery, genius, sadness and strange secrecy of a shadow photographed scenes that have never been seen before on film. [...] The humor, the sadness, the EVERYTHING-ness and American-ness of these pictures! [...] he sucked a sad poem right out of America onto film, taking rank among the tragic poets of the world.<sup>23</sup>

Frank’s photographs (and Kerouac’s description of them) express the Beats’ complicated relationship with post-war America. They castigated but also admired American society, which appeared to them as “a sad poem” on the one hand but gave them “that crazy feeling” on the other.

Critics such as Jerold M. Starr have commented on how “the Beats” mounted a “great refusal” against the establishment that justified repression of dissent in the name of militarism, racism, materialism, and conformity in American society, and these writers raved about the politics

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Frank and Jack Kerouac, *The Americans* (Göttingen: Steidl; Revised edition, 2008) Introduction.

of personalism and individual freedom. They shunned “square” society and adamantly demanded the right to be different.<sup>24</sup> This meant a complete revision of what America, its literature and its people were supposed to be. Commenting on his formal innovations in *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac wrote:

I was originating (without knowing it, you say?) a new way of writing about life, no fiction, no craft, no revising afterthoughts, all of it innocent go-ahead confession, the discipline of making the mind the slave of the tongue with no chance to lie or elaborate.<sup>25</sup>

Naturally, American society was concerned that the Beats’ provocative works would lead to the demise of the nation’s culture. Therefore they sought to prevent the anti-conformist mindset and ideas from spreading. Probably, the most well-known example of such an effort — which drew international attention — is the censorship trial against Allen Ginsberg's “Howl.” The poem was subject to an obscenity trial soon after its publication by Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s City Lights Books in 1956, and was “cleared by Judge Clayton Horn in a ringing affirmation of individual liberty and creative expression — and a flag of revolt, a blow against conformity, a hallowed relic, ever since.”<sup>26</sup> Eventually, the Beat’s response to this kind of political prosecution was not by any means aggressive: they chose to migrate and travel to better pursue their counter-culture lifestyle elsewhere. For the majority of authors and activists, honest wording and straightforward writing helped to bring into conservative post-war America a freer way of self-conscious living, opening the doors for political, social and sexual freedoms. In his obituary for *The New York Times* “Jack Kerouac, Novelist, Dead; Father of the Beat Generation,” Joseph Lelyveld commented on Kerouac’s writing style, writing that “his subject was himself and his method was to write as spontaneously as possible by threading a hefty roll of teletype paper into his typewriter and setting down his story on one

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<sup>24</sup> Paul S. George and Jerold M. Starr, “Beat Politics: New Left and Hippie Beginnings in the Postwar Counterculture,” *Cultural Politics: Radical Movements in Modern History* (New York: Praeger, 1985): 238.

<sup>25</sup> Carl D. Malmgren, “On the Road Reconsidered: Kerouac and the Modernist Tradition,” *Ball State University Forum* 30.1 (1989): 59-67.

<sup>26</sup> Greil Marcus, “Classic Beat,” [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com), *The New York Times*, April 2006. Web.



continuous sheet.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, some mandatory proof-reading and post-production were demanded by publishers and editors but, on the whole, the Beats’ works composed in a matter-of-fact language — besides the writers’ concern with social changes and political struggles — were not warmly welcomed by the oppressive American society in the 1950s: there were severe physical and intellectual limitations in those years which were key motives for the Beats to move out and search for alternative ways to establish their artistic and individual freedom abroad.

On the whole, the Beats’ reputation as “know-nothing bohemians”<sup>28</sup> along with their works pushed boundaries of the conservative 1950s American society resulting in more legal battles later. Another example of such legal proceedings surrounding the Beats’ unconventional work is the case of William S. Burroughs’s 1959 novel *Naked Lunch* — a story about various consuming addictions based on his own life experience. While completely forbidden in America, *Naked Lunch* was published in France by Olympia Press as part of The Olympia Press’ *The Traveller’s Companion Series*, which included other controversial works such as Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* (1955) and Henry Miller’s *Quiet Days in Clichy* (1956) among others. American obscenity laws prohibited the publication of these books in the United States, and it wasn’t until 1962 that *Naked Lunch* would be published by Grove Press. Thus, the Beats became a new exciting property for this French publishing house and Olympia Press became the first to acknowledge Beat writing as a fresh sensational phenomenon in literature world. Yet, besides the political situation in the US, another the key factor for the writers to leave their home country was their identification with ethical values and world views of a certain group of French writers that will be discussed in the following section of this chapter.

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph Lelyveld, “Jack Kerouac, Novelist, Dead; Father of the Beat Generation,” [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com), *The New York Times*, October 1969. Web.

<sup>28</sup> See Norman Podhoretz, “The Know-Nothing Bohemians.”

### 2.3 *The French Writers of “Radical Otherness”*

The second reason for the Beat pilgrimage to Paris was that these writers identified with the radical attitudes and creative experiments of Francophone writers and artists. To name a particular example — there was a close intertextual and ethical connection between Burroughs, probably, one of the most “extreme” members of the Beat circle, and Artaud, a French dramatist. This connection consisted, in Lane’s words, in extreme commitment to “radical otherness.” This means that even if he was concerned with the specific experience of an individual’s body and mind — “the creation of a character” in a book — Burroughs’s position was rather “post-human (life beyond the self).” In *The Soft Machine* (Date) and *Naked Lunch*, his main point was to change, or “mutate” human sentience, to put oneself in danger, to go beyond the known (conservative) limits of lifestyle and beyond the limits of language as well.<sup>29</sup> The same can be said of the connection between Proust and Burroughs (in terms of time, space, memory and so on) yet the author identified himself with Artaud’s “radical shift in consciousness” quite categorically.<sup>30</sup> This philosophy was the opposite of what was usually understood or accepted during the period when the ignoble presence of McCarthyism was loose in the US — in short, there was a huge concern over America’s post WWII euphoria and little space for such characters as Burroughs:

In the 1950s censorship concerns gave authorities the means to identify dissent and the grounds to investigate and regulate cultural trespassers. Because Cold War culture perceived difference as a lack of patriotism, or a flaunting of conformity, artistic expression was often sanctioned or curtailed.<sup>31</sup>

This Cold War’s paranoid politics and militaristic moods were ridiculed by Allen Ginsberg in his poem “America” published the year before he left to Paris:

I can’t stand my own mind.

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<sup>29</sup> Lane, 187.

<sup>30</sup> Lane, 187 - 188.

<sup>31</sup> Joel Elan Black, “‘Arrested for selling poetry!’ or ‘You wouldn’t want your children reading this’: the historical significance of the ‘Howl’ obscenity trial,” *Concordia University* (2003). Web.

America when will we end the human war?  
Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb  
I don't feel good don't bother me.  
I won't write my poem till I'm in my right mind.  
America when will you be angelic?<sup>32</sup>

As Ginsberg's poems shows, while based in American cities from North Beach to Greenwich Village, the Beats were not feeling fully comfortable, or "good," or in their "right mind," and their following pilgrimage — in other words, a voluntary exile — to Europe came about naturally. The significance of and excitement about this travel were understandable: what could be more fulfilling for an artist than "the excitement of gazing at the same cityscapes and dawdling in the same cafes as Henry Miller, a reluctant forbear, Jean Genet. Samuel Beckett? Or Rimbaud, Apollinaire and Camus?"<sup>33</sup> The moment they abandoned their hometowns and headed to the French capital, the power of these American poets and writers expanded into larger discussions on literature, social and political issues. In other words, as James J. Farrell accurately mentioned in his study of postwar radicalism in the sixties, the Cold War created the Beats as "an act of political personalism."<sup>34</sup> In other words, the Beats' philosophy stressed individual and personal reflections over group activity and collective consciousness.

Beat writers "challenged society's definition of politics" and suggested "the activist possibilities of personal transformation,"<sup>35</sup> yet it would not be entirely correct to say that the Beats brought some long-awaited freedom to Paris or that somebody from the French capital invited these young men to work and grow in their city. As a matter of fact, France had never been very interested in Beat writing. The literature there had already experienced enough freedom and liberation from social and literary constraints through Surrealism and Modernism after the 1920s:

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<sup>32</sup> Allen Ginsberg, "America," *Collected Poems* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988).

<sup>33</sup> Campbell, *The Guardian*.

<sup>34</sup> James J. Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties: The Making of Postwar Radicalism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013) 70.

<sup>35</sup> Farrell, 70 - 71.

During the first half of the 20th century, Paris remained the hub of European intellectual and artistic life. Its position was challenged from the 1930s, and especially after World War II, by Anglo-American writers, many of whom honed their own skills within its culture and its borders; but it still continued to generate modes of thinking and writing that others followed.<sup>36</sup>

Consequently, the Beats were not as revolutionary in France as they were in America. Yet they revealed themselves to French audience as non-European activists and champions of this liberation who dared to prove the assumptions and meditations of European artists, writers and poets they admired in real life. According to Veronique Lane, the reason for the Beats to travel to Paris was more about literature than life in the French capital:

The engagements made by Burroughs, Ginsberg and Kerouac with specific French texts that enabled them to develop their own experiments to achieve aesthetic and ontological otherness through writing. Paris was to that extent a natural but strictly symbolic destination. Gregory Corso's reflections after meeting Genet and Michaux in late 1958 draw this crucial distinction, sharply dividing the authors and the French capital from the vitality of their works: "They are dead here, and all is good in their writing yet they, themselves as heroic or mad or eccentric, no: stale all of it" (*An Accidental Autobiography*, 182). What drew the Beats to such French writers was not so much the allure of national difference as an identification with those who resisted, even betrayed national identity through writing.<sup>37</sup>

Such a comparative analysis only emphasises the writers' rejection of geographical, textual and strictly national divisions as a base for their establishment as transnational writers — beyond national horizons. This concept of "inter-national literary power relations" is partially discussed in Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters*<sup>38</sup>, where the literary space aligned with national frontiers is described "a form of astigmatism." In her study, Casanova describes "the Republic of Letters" as a "de-nationalized world" in which a writer — ironically — plays a dual role or "twice defined," meaning that "each writer is situated once according to the position he or she occupies in a national space, and then once again according to the place that this occupies within the world

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<sup>36</sup> "French Modernism," 2017 *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*, *britannica.com*, 2017 ed.

<sup>37</sup> Lane, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Pascale Casanova, "Literature as a World," *New Left Review* 31 (2005): 78.

space.” This, perhaps, also deciphers the Beats aspiration to reject — and transform — their motherland, which clearly limited creative independence but also served as their “national literary space.”<sup>39</sup> The Beats therefore played an important role as mediators between French and American culture.

#### ***2.4 Communication between the French Culture and the Beats***

There is no certain and definite way to describe each Beat writer’s engagement with the Francophone world. “The early Beat circle is connected through the language of literature, that shaped the oeuvres of all three of its major writers,” according to Veronique Lane. The Beats’ very first communication, letters and correspondence was, in fact, bilingual. “Not only were the first surviving documents of the Beat Generation bilingual or, to be more precise, written in English framed by French, but the very term “Beat Generation” was first theorised through the French writer and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre.”<sup>40</sup> Probably — besides Rimbaud, Breton or Céline who mostly influenced the Beats’ formally — one of the first central figures of the French authors’ post-war American reception was Antonin Artaud: his concepts about the “cruelty” in art and constant communication between the spectator and the spectacle that makes the artistic experience raw had extensive influence on the the Beats conceptual and ethical profile.<sup>41</sup> Some particular examples from Artaud’s study *The Theater and Its Double* will be displayed in the following chapter so as to establish this connection more in detail.

Another important point to mention about the Beat writers’ interpretations of French culture is that it differed one from another. For instance, as Oliver Harris points out, “Ginsberg’s homage to Apollinaire tells us as much about his passionate engagement with French literature before he came to Paris as about the impact of being in the city.”<sup>42</sup> As for Burroughs, it could be said that he “made

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<sup>39</sup> Casanova, 78.

<sup>40</sup> Lane, 14.

<sup>41</sup> Anton Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double* (New York: Grove Press 1994) 100 - 103.

<sup>42</sup> Email correspondence with Oliver Harris.

such a major breakthroughs in Paris — getting *Naked Lunch* published, working closely with Ginsberg, developing cut-up methods” and so on, “yet at the time he showed very little enthusiasm for it [Paris] and looked back with some disdain once he had moved to London.”<sup>43</sup> In his turn, Kerouac identified with the French authors not only aesthetically or mentally — as in the case when he resorted to Céline in case of difficult mental issues with his family<sup>44</sup> — but also genealogically while seeking to establish his French origins, as in *Satori in Paris*, for instance. These individual differences between the American writers’ command of the French literature might be useful for the further analysis of why they were drawn to certain French authors that helped them to shape their personal writings and how, on the whole, their individualist approach contributed to the overall formation of the literary movement.

As a matter of fact, by bringing high art and the low life together and by distrusting any administered experience, the Beat writers attracted sensational attention in the late 1950s and became a social and literary phenomenon. Besides the work by Grace and Skerl presented earlier in this chapter, some other recent sources, such as the article of James Campbell for *The Guardian* on the occasion of the exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris (July, 2016)<sup>45</sup>, Miles’ book *The Beat Hotel* and some useful materials from the 6th EBSN Conference “Paris Interzone: The Transcultural Beat Generation” (September, 2017)<sup>46</sup> will be included as supportive materials for the analysis in the next chapters to explain how exactly the Beats’ transnational pilgrimage unleashed in Paris. Some examples from these researches will explain that even if the Beats’ works might sound like “the reminiscent of existentialism,”<sup>47</sup> they actually present a wide range of real and meaningful ex-

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<sup>43</sup> Email correspondence with Oliver Harris.

<sup>44</sup> Lane, 66 - 67.

<sup>45</sup> James Campbell, “Ginsberg, Kerouac and Burroughs: celebrating the Beats in Paris,” [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com), *The Guardian*, July 2016. Web.

<sup>46</sup> See EBSN.EU, <<https://ebsn.eu/past-conferences/2017-conference-paris-france/>>.

<sup>47</sup> Eugene Burdick, “The Politics of the Beat Generation”, *The Western Political Quarterly* 12.2 (1959): 554, JSTOR.

perience and radical thinking. Since their own country provided little support for publishing in general, the majority of them went to Paris to practice a freer lifestyle and search for literary innovations. The following chapter of this thesis will discuss this period in Paris, analyse the extent to which each writer bonded with the French capital and how it materially shaped their works emphasises differences in their individual world views and methods of artistic self-disclosure.

### 3. Chapter II: The Beats in Paris (1957 — 1960)

This chapter focuses on the Beat writers' intellectual and editorial life during their Parisian years, between 1957 and 1960. French literature and culture influenced the literary and artistic establishment of the Beat Generation in several key ways. First, this period was essential to the formation of the literary movement itself. For instance, the works produced by the writers during or related to this period include Gysin and Burroughs's *The Third Mind*, Jack Kerouac's *Satori in Paris* and *The Subterraneans*, Allen Ginsberg's *Kaddish*, Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, *The Soft Machine* and *The Ticket That Exploded*, among others. In principle, these oeuvres did not necessarily originate in Paris but the city shaped the stylistics of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs. Not only were these writers affected aesthetically by Parisian art and culture, but they made practical use of French literature to fulfil their major literary experiments while in Paris. The textual bond between Michaux and Burroughs, for example, can be exemplified in "GALLERY DESTROYED ON EVE OF VERNISSAGE" (1959) — an unpublished cut-up work that narrates how the Galerie Daniel Cordier — where Michaux's canvasses were displayed — was set on fire. "The very existence of this text," Lane explains, "demonstrates how closely Burroughs thought about Michaux's work at this early stage in his development of cut-up methods, and how interested he was in the visual as well as the verbal."<sup>48</sup>

Since the level of engagement with the Francophone world distinguished one writer of the Beat Generation from another, the spectrum of their literary experiments, ethic and creative achievements differed as well. Nevertheless, the connotations of specific French texts and writing practices in Paris organically contributed to the formation of Beat prose and poetry as a whole. Thus, while "the residents of the Beat Hotel were making the first sketches of unexplored terrain,"<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Lane, 193.

<sup>49</sup> Miles, 10.



working hard to formulate their new humanist values and ideas, the culture of Paris played an important role in moulding these essential principles.

### ***3.1 The Influence of Francophone Culture on the Beat Generation***

The influence of French literature on the Beats goes back to Arthur Rimbaud — one of the greatest French literary prodigies of the second half of the 19th century — whose radical politics and prophetic visions were especially inspiring. In May, 1871, in his letter to his mentor Georges Izambard, Rimbaud wrote:

...I am degrading myself as much as possible. Why? I want to be a poet, and I am working to make myself a seer: you will not understand this, and I don't know how to explain it to you. It is a questioning of reaching the unknown by the derangement of all the senses. The sufferings are enormous, but one has to be strong, one has to be born a poet, and I know I am a poet. This is not at all my fault.<sup>50</sup>

Later, in their collaborative book *The Third Mind*, a controversial manual to the “cut up” method first published in a French-language edition in 1977, Burroughs and Gysin make a reference to this “derangement of all the senses:”

All writing is in fact cut-ups. A collage of words read heard overheard. What else? Use of scissors renders the process explicit and subject to extension and variation. Clear classical prose can be composed entirely of rearranged cut-ups. Cutting and rearranging a page of written words introduces a new dimension into writing enabling the writer to turn images in cinematic variation. Images shift sense under the scissors smell images to sound sight to sound sound to kinesthetic. This is where Rimbaud was going with his color of vowels. And his ‘systematic derangement of the senses.’ The place of mescaline hallucination: seeing colors tasting sounds smelling forms.<sup>51</sup>

This is followed by a further experimentation and illustrative usage of the “cut up” technique Gysin and Burroughs invented:

Poetry is a place and it is free to all cut up Rimbaud and you are in Rimbaud's place. Here is a Rimbaud poem cut up.  
‘Visit of memories. Only your dance and your voice house. On the suburban air improbable desertions ... all harmonic pine for strife.

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<sup>50</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, “Correspondance a Georges Izambard,” *Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne* (1871).

<sup>51</sup> William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind* (New York City: Grove Press, 1982) 38.

'The great skies are open. Candor of vapor and tent spitting blood laugh and drunken penance.  
'Promenade of wine perfume opens slow bottle.  
'The great skies are open. Supreme bugle burning flesh children to mist.'

Thus, it was this common goal of stripping forms of creative self-expression of the regulated conventions that inspired the American writers — the Beat Generation writers — to engage into intertextual relationships with their French accomplices. They were not the first ones to do so: “take Gertrude Stein, [...] we know that the US was subordinate in literary terms during the 1910s and 1920s, and that American writers came to Paris seeking literary resources and aesthetic models. wanted to use this knowledge of otherness towards their own unique understanding of poetry and prose and betray the standards of national identity.”<sup>52</sup>

Thus, many French writers whom the Beats worshipped — Rimbaud, Celine, Artaud, Gide, Genet and others <sup>53</sup> — were champions of the exiled, mad and rebellious long before the Americans came into the picture. For instance, in her analysis of the connection between Kerouac and Celine, Veronique Lane explains this phenomenon — the apprehension of French authors’ stylistics as well as the lifestyle — as follows:

To take but one example, by 1949, Céline has become such a crucial measure of all things for Kerouac that he not only resorts to him to meditate the mores of his friends, but of his closest family members and of wider society. Here, ‘Céline’s people’ help Kerouac rationalize the traumatic event that would famously come to open *On the Road*, the death of his father:  
'The fact is, my father’s death was not serious at all. You don’t even die any more, you just slip away past the last streetlamp like Céline’s people do. It’s not even a mockery of anything. An accident. Who cares about naturalism? [...] I want a soul. I want a soul. I want a soul. [...] I insist that life is holy, and that we must be reverent one for another, always. This is the only truth: it has been said so, a thousand million times.’ (Windblown World, 205)

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<sup>52</sup> Casanova, 86.

<sup>53</sup> Lane, 193.

Kerouac clearly associates his individual sorrow with Céline's universe, and his insistence on life being "holy" not only shows how hard he is trying to work through his loss, but also how powerfully Céline's nihilism has invested his thoughts, for better or worse.<sup>54</sup>

So as to experience the French "universe" practically, most of the Beats at a certain point travelled to Paris. There, they enjoyed the joy of living their lives as bohemians: drinking multiple morning coffees at Cafe Select or gazing at the Seine while walking to the middle of Pont des Arts. For example, after his "obscene" poem "Howl" was seized in 1957 and its publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti had been taken to the court, Ginsberg travelled first to Amsterdam then Paris, where he was constantly working on his poetry. The fifty-six lines he wrote in the Select were to become 'Kaddish Part IV,' where they appeared with very few changes: a few repetitions eliminated and some images combined to give a tighter impression. Most of "Kaddish" was written in one very long session on his return to New York, but the idea for the poem had its origin in Paris. Though not as famous as "Howl," it is widely regarded as Ginsberg's best poem.<sup>55</sup> Thus, an important point to mention here is that various instances of the French influence on the Beats existed not only aesthetically or formally but also practically, as a certain lifestyle manual for the writers on how to mix art and life. This united the authors in their passion towards French culture before they even travelled to Paris.

The evidence of this can be found in their essays, random encounters with other writers and correspondence, whether hinted at or clearly indicated in their works. For instance, "in 1949, having fallen in with some petty criminals, [Ginsberg] was arrested for harboring stolen goods and subsequently committed to the New York State Psychiatric Institute, where he met the future dedicatee of

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<sup>54</sup> Lane, 66.

<sup>55</sup> Bill Morgan, *The Beats Abroad: A Global Guide to the Beat Generation* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2016) 19.

“Howl,” Carl Solomon.”<sup>56</sup> There, he was writing about this encounter to his friends in numerous letters:

[Solomon] is also responsible for the line: “There are no intellectuals in madhouses.” [...] Jumped ship and spent months wandering through Paris — finally at the age of consent he decided to commit suicide (on his 21st birthday) and committed himself to this place (entering a madhouse is the same thing as suicide he says — madhouse humor) — presented himself practically at the front door demanding a lobotomy.<sup>57</sup>

Carl Solomon was the one to introduce Ginsberg to the poetry of Antonin Artaud, a 20th century avant-garde French poet whom he had seen reading poetry aloud to the crowds in Paris.<sup>58</sup> This immediately encouraged the young poet to research more about Artaud.<sup>59</sup> In fact, playing the extremes and not separating art from life is something that Artaud and the Beat Generation clearly had in common, especially in paying close attention to “direct communication” between the “spectacle” (or the text) and the “spectator” (or the reader), as it has been mentioned in the previous chapter. Artaud wrote:

THE STAGE—THE AUDITORIUM: We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theater of the action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it.<sup>60</sup>

Also, from the same book *The Theatre and Its Double*, Artaud explains that life as an integral part of art (or a play, as he was writing about the theatre), therefore, introducing a concept of “cruelty” meaning “an appetite for life” (which was a central notion to the Beat writing as well):

I employ the word ‘cruelty’ in the sense of an appetite for life, a cosmic rigor and implacable necessity, in the gnostic sense of a living whirlwind that devours the darkness, in the sense of that pain apart from whose ineluctable

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<sup>56</sup> James Campbell, “Howls,” [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com), *The New York Times*, January 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Bill Morgan, *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2008) 114.

<sup>58</sup> Campbell, “Howls.”

<sup>59</sup> Morgan, 115.

<sup>60</sup> Artaud, 96.

necessity life could not continue; good is desired, it is the consequence of an act; evil is permanent. [...] A play in which there would not be this will, this blind appetite for life capable of overriding everything, visible in each gesture and each act and in the transcendent aspect of the story, would be a useless and unfulfilled play.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, many of the Beats testified candidly and enthusiastically about the French ascendancy in their lives and works. It served as a common ground for their continuous researches and the way they challenged mainstream values of post-war society. Within this particular connection between Artaud and the Beats, one can locate the evidence of the American writers who were directly inspired by yet showed their own individual versions of French Surrealism and avant-garde not fully congruent with Artaud's though helped to define the Beat Generation central principles. The full list of the French writers who influenced the Beats is long and includes several different names and literary oeuvres: what is more important though is not only the Beat's ultimate passion about the Francophone world but also their own experimental usage of it. As Veronique Lane writes:

Their encounters came about not simply because Burroughs, Ginsberg and Kerouac moved in a circle of Columbia University apprising writing, but also because they were intense Francophiles. Ranging from a passion for 1930s films starring Jean Gabin to the paintings of Paul Cezanne, the Francophilia of the Beats color their early correspondence and conversations. [...] over decades, their own writing were materially sustained by the works of Rimbaud, Proust, Gide, Apollinaire, St.-John Perse, Celine, Cocteau, Genet, Michaux [...]<sup>62</sup>.

From these facts one may conclude that the French writers' new search of identity and destabilising artistic liberation contributed enormously to the future of the Beat Generation as they were learning to refract everyday experience and social and political tenets through their own unique minds. The following section of this chapter will demonstrate an overview and the analysis of some of the works either written or assembled in Paris and how they vary from one member of the Beat Generation to another.

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<sup>61</sup> Artaud, 102 - 103.

<sup>62</sup> Lane, 14.

### 3.2 *The Paris Experience: A Comparative Analysis of the Beats' Works*

The artistic freedom Beat writers sought in Paris was tightly connected to “praxis”<sup>63</sup> (real-life experience) — a rather anti-Freudian orientation in which not the source of an emotion but the exhilarating and mixed-up fullness of the experience of the moment mattered. This would lead to experimentation with language, expanding traditional writing-styles into modern, experimental alternatives: “by this point, it is clear that Burroughs’ text is less about Surrealism than about the cut-up project he was launching with Brion Gysin.”<sup>64</sup> Some of the major works the Beats produced in Paris or that were related to the city include Jack Kerouac’s *Satori in Paris* and *I Wish I Were You*; Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* and his book written with Gysin, *The Third Mind*, and another in collaboration with Kerouac *And The Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks*; Allen Ginsberg’s *Kaddish*; and Gregory Corso’s *Bomb*. When uniting these American expatriate authors under one investigation of their writing accounts in Paris, it is important to highlight how this engagement with French culture differed in various ways. Again, it seems relevant to bring up some useful information from Lane:

They were all inspired by French writers of radical otherness who projected their own resistance as Americans to an increasingly conformist national identity. [...] when Burroughs, Ginsberg and Kerouac were drawn to the same French texts, they constructed them in distinct ways, putting them to different symbolic or creative uses as if reading quite different works.<sup>65</sup>

These interpretations were distinct but by no means contradictory. No matter whether they worked separately or collectively while defining themselves individually as writers, the Beats always shared a mutual emotional engagement with the Francophone culture. For instance, in *Satori in Paris*, Kerouac’s search for his French ancestry and constant references to various French writers and artists (Proust, Balzac, Breton and Pascal among others) suggest his direct appropriation of French literature (the book follows his genealogical search in Paris and Brittany):

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<sup>63</sup> Paul Whinston, *The Working Class Beats: a Marxist analysis of Beat Writing and Culture from the Fifties to the Seventies* (Sheffield: Sheffield University, 2012) 9.

<sup>64</sup> Lane, 194.

<sup>65</sup> Lane, 15-16.

Meanwhile I kept asking everyone in Paris ‘Where’s Pascal buried? Where’s Balzac’s cemetery?’ Somebody finally told me Pascal must certainly be buried out of town at Port Royal near his pious sister, Jansenists, and as for Balzac’s cemetery I didn’t want to go to no cemetery at midnight (Père Lachaise) and anyway as we were blasting along in a wild taxi ride at 3 a.m. near Montparnasse they yelled ‘There’s your Balzac! His statue on the square!’<sup>66</sup>

In the book, the narrator rumbles through the dark streets of Paris and Brest, almost permanently drunk and excited about the experience. Even if it might seem that the search for his French name “Lebris de Kerouac” was just a bunch of wild stories of his eventful life, the actual importance of Kerouac’s raw writing comes from a complete self-disclosure and honesty about these stories. In *Satori in Paris* — as in most of his books — Kerouac bridges the gap between pop culture, his own life and literature in an attempt to assert a concept of a human identity and also the importance of this very effort:

I want to tell them that we don’t all want to become ants contributing to the social body, but individualists each one counting one by one, but no, try to tell that to the in-and-outers rushing in and out the humming world night as the world turns on one axis.

Hence, Kerouac’s explorations — written in a raw autobiographical language understandable to both critics and average hipsters — were literally focused on French names and connections he could find related to himself and on reconstructing, redefining and reexamining these connections because “you always learn something and learn to change your thoughts.”<sup>67</sup>

As for Burroughs, his communication with French culture differed from Kerouac’s. For the former, the connection to Francophone writers had more to do with being able to produce (and publish) some of his non-conformist experimental writings than with Francophone culture itself. In the search for his identity as an artist, he rejected any connections and sought out the alienating experience of otherness. In fact, Burroughs had a weak command of French and no particular admiration

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<sup>66</sup> Jack Kerouac, *Satori in Paris* (London: Penguin Books, 2012) 36.

<sup>67</sup> Kerouac, *Satori in Paris*, 43.

for Paris (and actually felt some aversion toward the city once he moved to London): yet it was the city's liberating conditions for creativity that led to Burroughs' biggest breakthrough.<sup>68</sup>

Burroughs' rejection of bohemia and literature, through Dennison's refusal to identify with Rimbaud in the same romantic way as his friends, is an early statement of his alienation from the historical options eagerly taken up by the younger crowd. [...] Within the economy of identification, the desire to be absolutely different—to be, in effect, an alien—can only backfire since identifying with an alien, of course, can only threaten your own sense of being an alien. at is, refusing to identify with Rimbaud, or with anyone else for that matter, itself identifies Burroughs with Rimbaud's search for otherness, and so by extension with those modern, "abnormal writers" who make the same refusal as his. [...] In short, Burroughs' extravagant non-identification with Rimbaud the poet couldn't be more Rimbaud-like.<sup>69</sup>

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in 1959, when *Naked Lunch* was first published by Maurice Girodias' Olympia Press, a French publishing house that issued books by Marquis de Sade, Samuel Beckett and Jean Genet, the book was banned from Britain and the US and, as a result, it became difficult to obtain, which made it even more irresistible. Barry Miles, an author of biographies and criticism on Beat Generation, recalls his impression about *Naked Lunch* and the public frenzy behind it:

I was astonished by the outrageous pot-head humour: crazy ideas taken way beyond their normal limits. The book was a savage indictment of American racism and consumerism, it dealt with the corruption, graft and lies of politicians with Swiftian humour. I had never read anything like, then or since. [...] Copies of *Naked Lunch* were very difficult to obtain (it was not published in the US until 1962, and not in Britain until 1964); they had to be smuggled in, wrapped in dirty laundry or stuffed down the back of your shirt. Anyone returning from Paris had a duty to bring back some Olympia titles. Pete Russell's Gallery Bookshop at 20 D'Arblay Street in Soho sometimes had copies of *Naked Lunch*, but very much under the counter, and they were expensive. In the early Sixties I stayed in John Hopkins' communal flat in Paddington. One of the residents was Peter Wollen, later to become a well-known film critic. I remember Peter commenting one day: "This is such a cool pad, man. There's always a fresh copy of *Naked Lunch* on the table."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Email correspondence with Oliver Harris.

<sup>69</sup> Lane, 33 - 34.

<sup>70</sup> Barry Miles, "Barry Miles's Book of a Lifetime: *Naked Lunch* by William S Burroughs," [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk), *Independent Magazine*, January 2014.



Besides these controversial books, other works published by Olympia Press that were illegal in the US during the 60 — 50s include one third of the Traveller's Companion series: Oscar Wilde's *Tele-ny*; J.P. Donleavy's *The Ginger Man*; Jean Genet's *The Thief's Journal*; *the Kama Sutra*; John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* and others — all of these were labelled “pornography” and “hidden away at the bottom of the suitcase” — along with all the available issues of *Naked Lunch*.

To give more examples of the Burroughs and Kerouac's difference in the rapport of French culture, it makes sense to bring up their collaborative work *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks*. The book was written after the killing of David Kammerer by Lucian Carr and is an intense crime novel and a fictionalised account of that bloody event. It is also an interesting display of the contrast between the both authors' employment of and relation to Francophone literature. For Burroughs, a homage to Rimbaud and French genealogy, for example, was more at a formal level (as he was experimenting with the cut-up method and using Rimbaud's “A Une Raison,” employing both French and English). For Kerouac the connection had an intense cultural and aesthetic implication (in *Satori in Paris* is a French experience “on the road,” where Kerouac is literally “digging” into the French culture while in Paris and searching for his genealogy). This difference is highlighted in Lane's further analysis of two books: *Hippos* and *I Wish I Were You*, written by Kerouac as his own interpretation of the events happened in *Hippos*:

In sum, Burroughs and Kerouac's narrators both define themselves through the culturally central figure of Rimbaud in *Hippos*, but in ways that are so opposed that they confirm the contrast between their views on the subject of literature. [...] In *I Wish I Were You*, Dennison may still prefer the man to the writer and identify with the Rimbaud who gave up on literature and traded literary Paris for African adventures, but Kerouac now finds himself free to identify in his own way with Rimbaud, so that Ryko, his story's sole narrator, can at last spell out his admiration for Rimbaud, in categorically literary terms: ‘Rimbaud's prose is what I'd like to achieve...’<sup>71</sup>

Thus, *Hippos* is more cursory towards the French references (for example, Burroughs' usage of the word *bourgeois* is rather cosmetic so as to give Dennison a whiff of edge) and randomly mentions

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<sup>71</sup> Lane, 42.

France as a dream destination (when Ryko is talking with Philippe about a “breakthrough to Paris”).

On the contrary, *I Wish I Were You* shows Kerouac’s ethical, artistic and lingual bonds that Burroughs’s attitude lacks (as shown in *Hippos*):

[*I Wish I Were You*] concentrates on the artistic sensibility Kerouac developed later through his self-education in French works—books, paintings [...] —the importance of which *I Wish I Were You* enlightens. Kerouac’s stunning work of rewriting *Hippos* indeed draws on an extensive knowledge of French culture that he acquired less through friends and family than by himself, at the Lowell public library and then in the bookshops, museums and cinema theatres of Manhattan. [...] Kerouac [...] aspired to build more than an oeuvre, a universe: the Duluoze legend. That is, the mission that he set himself in *I Wish I Were You*, to see everything, proceeds from the outrageous wish of attaining an omniscient vision.

In comparison — in *Hippos* — there are various slightly superficial references showing anything French in a romantic way or as an extravagant detail without presenting any in-depth knowledge of the culture. As in the example earlier, when Ryko is talking to Philippe about travelling, the latter randomly mentions France as a dream escape and an opportunity to “get out as soon as possible”:

“There’s no telling where our ship’ll be going,” I told him.

“I don’t care, although I’d like France.”

“So would I,” I said, “but you’ve been to France.”

“I was there with my mother when I was fourteen, with an English governess hanging around. The Latin Quarter’s what I want to see.”

“The Latin Quarter’s in Paris,” I said, “and all we have is a strip of the Normandy peninsula. I don’t think we’ll see Paris this time.”

“There might be a breakthrough to Paris at any event. However, the main thing is to get out of America.”<sup>72</sup>

In fact, this comparison should be understood as an illustration of the impressive variety of the Beat’s mutual bonds within their common passion for the French culture: by interlacing their unique formal and rhetorical methods, the Beat writers communicated to one another across their works “in mutually illuminating ways”<sup>73</sup> — as in the case of Kerouac and Burroughs, or Burroughs and Ginsberg and so on.

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<sup>72</sup> *Hippos*, 17.

<sup>73</sup> Fazzino, 28.

This kind of communication is also present in Ginsberg's works. His connection with French precursors — while different from Kerouac and Burroughs — is conducted mainly through his language of prophecy and detailed descriptions of madness, chaotic visions and controversial mental behaviours in the form of poetic prayer. This way, the linkage between Ginsberg and Francophone literature appears on a rather psychoanalytic level and displays the poet's mental experiments within the poetical framework. In his analysis of *Kaddish*, Tony Trigilio explains this feature of Ginsberg's poetic language in relation to Deleuze and Guattari, who published much later than the poem itself. This philosophical duo that studied various aspects of human mentality and preached their politics of individualism and anti-capitalist thinking:

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's work in antipsychiatry, especially their *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, provides a vocabulary for understanding Ginsberg's pilgrimage in *Kaddish* as one that incorporates desire to multiply, rather than fix, meaning. For Deleuze and Guattari, the language of the "schizophrenic taking a walk," their model figure for psychic and social deterritorialization, empties the values imposed by absolutist naming and shatters the conceptual spaces circumscribed by such naming. As the name Anti-Oedipus suggests, the book assaults the primacy of Freud's oedipal model of identity. In Deleuze and Guattari's work, Oedipus is a trans-historical figure of absolutist identity in the West. Whether national, familial, or individual, all identity is circumscribed as normative or pathological according to its relation to the oedipal model, a series of relations that separate —"oedipalize" —identity in the West into lawful (oedipal) and transgressive (schizophrenic, anti-oedipal) modes."<sup>74</sup>

So it's possible that Beat authors engaged with the French creative mindset in ways that even they could not have understood in the 1950s. Namely, in *Kaddish*, Ginsberg, with an immediacy of personal feeling and complete honesty, portrayed and presented in his raw language an image of his mother's mental illness as well as the various social and political events that caused or surrounded it:

Naomi, Naomi—sweating, bulge-eyed, fat, the dress unbuttoned at one side  
—hair over brow, her stocking hanging evilly on her legs—screaming for a

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<sup>74</sup> Tony Trigilio, "Strange Prophecies Anew": Rethinking the Politics of Matter and Spirit in Ginsberg's *Kaddish*," *American Literature* 71.4 (1999): 781. Web.

blood transfusion—one righteous hand upraised—a shoe in it—barefoot in the Pharmacy—

The enemies approach—what poisons? Tape recorders? FBI? Zhdanov hiding behind the counter? Trotsky mixing rat bacteria in the back of the store? Uncle Sam in Newark, plotting deathly perfumes in the Negro district? Uncle Ephraim, drunk with murder in the politician’s bar, scheming of Hague? Aunt Rose passing water thru the needles of the Spanish Civil War?

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Besides psychoanalytic language and the language of prophecy, Ginsberg embraced and projected various formal structures of French poetry in “Kaddish” — for example, the Surrealist language of André Breton.

Ginsberg had been reading Breton's poem “Free Union,” for example, and this section of ‘Kaddish’ [Part IV] is clearly influenced structurally by Breton’s poem:

My wife with a belly like a gan claw  
My wife with the back of a bird fleeing vertically  
With a back of quicksilver  
With a back of light  
With a nape of rolled stone and wet chalk  
...  
My wife with a sex of seaweed and ancient sweets  
My wife with a sex of mirror  
My wife with eyes full of tears.”<sup>76</sup>

According to Philip Lamantia — an American Surrealist who encouraged the Beat Generation’s launch in San Francisco — the Surrealist wording in this poem is in its “vocal consciousness” meaning “picking out the highlights of phenomena and arranging them in words on a page” and “rejecting ‘craftsmanship,’ the surrealist viewpoint, respecting sovereignty of mind, the primacy of human desires and oneiric exaltation, considers and finds true poetry to be an instrument of knowledge, of discovery, of unveiling, and of human freedom.”<sup>77</sup> In this poem, Breton composes an image of his wife’s (or, most likely, his mistress) “highlights” on a page to create the sensation of a

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<sup>75</sup> Allen Ginsberg, *Kaddish and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2001).

<sup>76</sup> Miles, Chapter 1.

<sup>77</sup> Philip Lamantia, "The Grim of Poetry," *City Lights Anthology*, ed by Lawrence Ferlinghetti (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1974) 250.

certain image. The same can be said for “Kaddish”: in Part IV, where Ginsberg breaks the portrait of his mother into fragments consisting of either some parts of her appearance or characteristics:

with your old dress and a long black beard around the vagina  
farewell  
with your sagging belly  
with your fear of Hitler  
with your mouth of bad short stories  
with your fingers of rotten mandolins [...] <sup>78</sup>

Therefore, Ginsberg’s method of communicating his relations with the French culture was based on “a primal language for prophecy” <sup>79</sup> with such founding elements as psychoanalysis within poetry and spiritual empirical pilgrimage. For the most part, this approach had much to do with the colours and sensations of the words themselves not with the subject they initially represented meaning that the effects one gets out of the wording is as powerful as the subject of the pome itself. This can be named as one of the many peculiar features of the literary establishment of the movement that is presented in more detail in the next section.

### ***3.3 The Humanity for the Humanities***

Throughout the history of the Beat Generation's artistic formation — whether through travelling, drugs, meditation, jazz or sex — Ginsberg, Kerouac and Burroughs wanted to depict their own permutations of emotional and physical experiences, the urgency of change, and the literary rebellion once described by the French: “Paris, both as cultural citadel and as potentially more neutral political territory for the subjects of other imperial or national powers, was used by numerous 19th and 20th-century writers as a weapon in their literary struggles.”<sup>80</sup> Born from the American post-war containment politics, the Beats were, probably, the main resistance to this very political turmoil. As Ann Douglas explains her book on Cold War politics *Holy Fools: the Beat Generation and the Cold War*, the writers insisted “100% honesty:”

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<sup>78</sup> See Appendix I for the full section IV.

<sup>79</sup> Trigilio, 782.

<sup>80</sup> Casanova, 89.

In Kerouac's words, "both psychic and social," makes little sense outside its Cold War context and the drastic restrictions of civil liberties that war purportedly mandated. [...] they sought to make spontaneity and deliberate defencelessness supreme virtues at a time when over-militarization and its concomitant creed of preparedness first became U.S. foreign and domestic policy.<sup>81</sup>

Consequently, when the Beats left the US, France seemed like a perfect place for artistic experiments, because besides feeling a strong spiritual connection with the aesthetics of specific French writers, the Beats were also allied with their radical opposition to cultural conservatism, sexual, political and racial suppressions on the whole:

The encounters of Burroughs, Ginsberg and Kerouac in mid-1940s New York coincided with the rise of overwhelming American military, economic and cultural power. In such a context, they contested definitions of American national identity but lacked ideological alternatives or any models of writing and living beyond the nation state, and French literature had the appeal of a readymade mark of cultural difference, of moral and artistic otherness. At is, literature in France could transcend crime, as in the spectacular pardons given to Genet in 1943 and 1949, supported by testimony from Cocteau and letters signed by Sartre and Prévert among others.<sup>82</sup>

The application of this connection in the Beats writings varied from one author to another but, together, their longing for humanity, truth and self-freedom made a strong argument against the Cold War hypocrisy and organically furnished their common literary and artistic legacy that remained influential in social, cultural and political fields up till now. The following chapter of this thesis will analyze the movement's post-Parisian activities and demonstrate how the transitional poetics of the Beat writers influenced and enhanced a vision of what a worldly poetry, prose and criticism might and should be like. Later on, in the years after Paris, J. Edgar Hoover, in Douglas' words, would declare "the Beatniks' a threat to national security in 1961"<sup>83</sup> and some critics and followers would either vulgarize or denounce the writers in media because of their scandalous lifestyle. However,

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<sup>81</sup> Ann Douglas, "Holy Fools: The Beat Generation and the Cold War," *History* 41.3 (2013): 526.

<sup>82</sup> Lane, 9.

<sup>83</sup> Douglas, 526.

despite this uneasy formation as serious writers, the weighty literary interest from fine institutions and academics would help the Beats to stabilize their position as an influential literary phenomenon.

#### **4. Chapter III: After Paris: The Formation of the Beat Legacy**

The third chapter of this thesis will be focused on the Beats' cultural, social and political legacy, which was built upon their disjunctive life experiences and artistic practices in Paris.<sup>84</sup> First, the life and practice of the Beats in Paris helped them to spread their ideas internationally and opened up possibilities of worldwide recognition, thus creating a greater range of new followers, supporters and contributors. Second, a few years after they left Paris, the Beats began to receive attention not only from the popular media but also from various major critics and respected academic institutions. This enlarged the scope and significance of their creative legacy for future generations.<sup>85</sup> Finally, the Beat Generation's legacy made a visible impact on current political turmoil, as well as social and literary standards and artistic freedom. However, in Louis Menand's words, their significance as writers and artists back in the '50s was quite often underestimated or not regarded seriously: "in the literary world, academic critics, whose aesthetic was all about form and restraint, ignored them [The Beats], and the New York intellectuals, whose ethic was all about complexity and responsibility, attacked them."<sup>86</sup> This is why it's important to recognize that the current significance of the Beats was in no ways assured during their literary formation. Another critic close to the Beat scene, Bruce Cook, highlights the change of this situation in later years as a young generation of artists and writers followed the Beats' path in battling against social conformity and conservatism.<sup>87</sup> The influence of the Parisian-American literary environment on Beat writers —

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<sup>84</sup> Tilman Otto Wagner, *The Beat Generation in a Scholastic Analysis* (Munich: GRIN Verlag, 2011) 3.

<sup>85</sup> Some of the important criticism mentioned in Matt Theado, "Beat Generation Literary Criticism," *Contemporary Literature* 45.4 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004): 748.

<sup>86</sup> Louis Menand, "Drive, He Wrote," [www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com), *The New Yorker*, October 2007. Web.

<sup>87</sup> Bruce Cook, *The Beat Generation* (Santa-Barbara: Greenwood Pub Group, 1983) 152.

transplanted avant-garde writers in the French capital — will be analyzed in the following sections, which conclude by considering the Beats' international influence on current literature, politics and social life.

#### ***4.1 The Beats' Artistic Individualism in Paris***

As mentioned in Chapter II, while in Paris, the Beats developed their creative and emotional bonds with French literature rather individually and in various unique ways: on the whole, their time in France, which included experimental writing and textual communication with their French precursors, unveiled great possibilities for aspiring writers and poets. Some of their oeuvres were not only started in Paris or published after the writers left the city<sup>88</sup> but were also recognized internationally and gained sufficient followers and critical appeal to boost the rising popularity of the Beat's fundamental ideas. Veronique Lane's study is worth quoting at length on this point:

For Burroughs, Ginsberg and Kerouac were committed to the same experiment as their French modernist predecessors, and did nothing less than contribute to transforming our conception of 'man,' destitute it from its bourgeois humanist throne, and put it, not on top of everything like a postmodern artist or god, "a magician, an angel, free from all moral constraint," but 'back to the soil to seek some obligation, to wrap gnarled reality' in his arms (Rimbaud, 'Farewell')<sup>89</sup>

As a matter of fact, the everyday routine of the writers in the French capital between 1957 and 1960 did not make them renounce their American background or values (they still proudly admired and believed in their motherland while "thinking transnationally" and "reimagining the United States' place in the world"<sup>90</sup> ). The Beats' life in Paris however was instrumental in providing these writers with a certain amount of freedom and work conditions for creative accomplishments that opened up new horizons and real writing opportunities. For example, Bruce Cook strongly advocates for the

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<sup>88</sup> Some of these works include: Ginsberg's "Kaddish" and "To Aunt Rose;" Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*; Kerouac's *Satori in Paris*; Corso's *Bomb*, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, *The American Express*; Gysin and Burroughs' *The Third Mind*.

<sup>89</sup> Lane, 217.

<sup>90</sup> Fazzino, 13.



Americanness of the writers in his study *The Beat Generation*, saying that “Allen Ginsberg was the Beat Generation’s Walt Whitman, [...] Gary Snyder was its Henry David Thoreau” — not Celine or Rimbaud or anyone French — and also suggests that the movement’s intense explosion in France disturbed academic and amateur intellectuals and “touched something essential and responsive in their younger readers and listeners.”<sup>91</sup>

Primarily, some of the most visible benefits Beat authors gained during their years in Paris were, first of all, rising artistic independence, which occurred when their work began to be published. This combined with an ability to showcase their innovative compositions at the international level, something that the oppressive nature of the American culture of the day simply could not provide; second, various motivating meetings with their French accomplices and supporters such as Celine, Jean-Jacques Lebel, Duchamp and Jacques Stern proved to be important.<sup>92</sup> As a result, all of this encouraged the actual formation of the Beat Generation’s international literary contribution.<sup>93</sup> Understandably, before anyone could have predicted that the Beats’ work would actually one day become rather mainstream, achieving clear “cultural relevance,”<sup>94</sup> these writers had been struggling with public or academic disapproval during the 1950s and ‘6-s (especially before Paris), and, in a way, were “suicided by society.”<sup>95</sup> To explain the circumstances that preceded the trip to Paris and were, to some extent, one of the reasons for the Beats to escape the US, James Campbell’s note about one peculiar letter Allen Ginsberg received from a female friend after he had been put into mental asylum in the early ‘50s is revealing:

while in the Institute, Ginsberg received a letter from a female friend who had also had a spell in ‘the bin.’ Nothing to worry about, she told him. Cheer up. I was not much surprised to hear about your hospitalization, as I’ve been

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<sup>91</sup> Cook, 157.

<sup>92</sup> Miles, 118.

<sup>93</sup> Theado, 747.

<sup>94</sup> Theado, 747.

<sup>95</sup> From the title by Antonin Artaud “Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society” (1947).

claiming for years that anyone who doesn't blow his top once is no damn good.<sup>96</sup>

Moreover, Campbell quotes Ginsberg's own words about his hospitalization: "so a sick society invented psychiatry to defend itself against the investigations of certain visionaries whose faculties of divination disturbed it."<sup>97</sup> This quote nicely sums up the feeling most of the Beat writers had while in their homeland and also explains why, when they finally left for Paris, the city provided just the right amount of artistic individualism so they could push their concepts towards the change of unprogressive standards. All things considered, the earlier argumentation presents the uneasy political situation in the US in the 50s and, on the contrary, the favorable conditions in France for artistic formation of the Beats. The following part of the chapter will show some specific instances of the American writers' rendezvous with various French philosophers, authors, artists and activists who either influenced their literary evolution directly or were supportive of their linguistic, writing and lifestyle innovations.

#### ***4.2 American — French Encounters in Paris***

Probably, one of the most detailed accounts of these encounters is presented in Barry Miles's book describing how the Americans enjoyed "a very French [...] culture of bohemia" and their stay in the hotel owned by Madame Rachou "that had always had its Bohemian residents," whom they met in Paris under various circumstances.<sup>98</sup> The writers were often visited by Jean-Jacques Lebel — a French artist — who lived nearby on the rue l'Hotel Colbert and also complained about Madame Rachou's hotel facilities: "It was a ghastly thing, an atmosphere a bit like the *Naked Lunch*." However, despite the fact that the hotel was quite trashy and foul-smelling, it was the perfect place for the Beat writers to feel their necessary creative liberation and "where a black man was

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<sup>96</sup> Campbell, 10.

<sup>97</sup> Campbell, 10.

<sup>98</sup> Miles, 15.

able to live with a white woman, much less one half his age, without opprobrium.”<sup>99</sup> Thus, Allen Ginsberg and his lover Peter were able to live as a couple at the hotel and were highly recommended as guests to Madame Rachou by a wealthy Dutch painter, Guy Harloff, who was “kind” to both. Later, he also got in contact with Burroughs and was a resident at the hotel himself.<sup>100</sup>

Burroughs moved to the Beat Hotel in 1958 and then met his future lover Ian Sommerville — an electronics technician and programmer — with whom he invented the Dreamachine, a stroboscope that affected the viewer's brain alpha wave activity.<sup>101</sup> Later, he also happened to bond with Brian Gysin in Paris when he was casually crossing Place St. Michel in September 1958: he already knew Gysin from Tangier but had never actually been friends with the writer. In Paris the creative duo started producing experimental work together (the “cut-ups” mentioned in the previous chapter). Also, there was another person in Burroughs's life who supported and respected him — Jacques Stern, “a wealthy young Frenchmen [...] almost transparent green demon on two crutches [...]” who “knew Salvador Dali and Jean Cocteau and the fashionable side of Paris, but was bored by it.”<sup>102</sup> Despite having constant mood swings and a heroin addiction, Stern was always generous to Burroughs and the Beat writers and was even trying to get the latter access to “the small Molière first editions, which were tremendously valuable.” Around this time, Burroughs had a quite important encounter with Louis-Ferdinand Céline, who returned to France in 1950: he introduced the latter to Ginsberg and Kerouac, who immediately felt a connection with the French modernist and his breakthrough writing style in *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932). Ginsberg commented on the importance of this meeting thus:

“That had a big influence on Kerouac, and Bill,” said Allen. “Mentally on me, more on their prose. Kerouac's famous quote from it [*Journey to the End of the Night*] was, ‘We are all going forward in the silence of facts to

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<sup>99</sup> Miles, 17.

<sup>100</sup> Miles, 44.

<sup>101</sup> Morgan, *The Beats Abroad*, 16.

<sup>102</sup> Miles, 117.

die.’ Kerouac liked that. And Céline’s humor is like Bill’s. Bill gets a lot of that from him. That’s one of the strongest influences on Bill I’m sure, literally.”<sup>103</sup>

As a matter of fact, these rendezvous in Paris piled up quite organically in one continuous chain of events: for example, the same Jean-Jacques Lebel — who was an associate curator of the “Beat Generation: New York, San Francisco, Paris” exhibition at the Pompidou Center in 2016 and a “buddy” of the Beats in the ‘60s — “invited them all to his parents’ apartment, a sprawling affair in the exclusive 16th Arrondissement” and introduced them to “the Dadaist master Marcel Duchamp” and later to Man Ray — an American visual artist who played an important role in both the Dada and Surrealist movements.<sup>104</sup> Likewise, by a lucky coincidence, the writers also met Henri Michaux — a Belgian-born French writer, “a solitary, reticent, cultured man, [...] he had lived, after all, near the infamous Beat Hotel in Paris, and was courted by the likes of Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Brion Gysin.”<sup>105</sup> Occasionally, he also employed hallucinogenic drugs to write and experience intense spiritual journeys. The influence of Michaux is especially visible in Burroughs’ works. For example, “both authors had written about their experiments with a range of drugs, [...] made scientific research a central part of their artistic projects, [...] saw their oeuvres as scientific research, and admired De Quincey’s foundational work of drug writing as ‘medical and poetic at the same time.’”<sup>106</sup> Another American who became far closer to the other Beats in Paris was Gregory Corso — an Italian-American poet, the author of *Gasoline* and *Bomb*, and also the youngest inside the Beat circle. He “took part in the original book of cut-ups, *Minutes To Go*, with Burroughs, Brion Gysin and Sinclair Beiles” and had his novel *The American Express* published by Olympia Press in 1961. Summarizing the above, these and many more encouraging contacts in

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<sup>103</sup> Miles, 130.

<sup>104</sup> Frank Rose, “The Beats’ Countercultural Ferment Still Bubbles, in Paris,” [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com), *The New York Times*, August 2016. Web.

<sup>105</sup> “Who needs drugs, when you can paint like Henri Michaux?” [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com), *The Guardian*, February 1999. Web.

<sup>106</sup> Lane, 192.

Paris provided the Beats with an opportunity to establish their way of thinking through writing and a lifestyle that slowly gained considerable support and following at an international level. When most of the writers left Paris and eventually travelled to other destinations — to England, Morocco or back to the United States — their lifestyle, publications and contacts travels raised the public awareness about the movement. This being said, the writers — who once became friends in New York and San Francisco to form Beat Generation in 1940s — had become well known in the US and beyond for various critics and academics as a major emerging counterculture by 1960s.

#### **4.3 Beat Generation Criticism**

In the late 50s, this major following first appeared in the form of public attention and various references “in the popular songs, movies, and television shows.”<sup>107</sup> Probably, as a response to all this media buzz and public debate, Jack Kerouac decided to compose his own version of the Beat Generation account — “The Origins of the Beat Generation” — published in *Playboy* in 1959. In this very personal essay, even Kerouac himself was struggling to describe that “feeling of alienation so brilliantly captured in the literature by French philosophers a decade before by the term ‘existentialism.’”<sup>108</sup> In an attempt to do so and to explain the rapidly building phenomenon of the “beat” in America and abroad, he traced the “origins” of “his” fellow writers and their works, saying that it all went back to

The glee of America, the honesty of America, the honesty of oldtime waiters in line at the Brooklyn Bridge in Winterset, the funny spitelessness of old big-fisted America like the big Boy Williams saying “Hoo? Hee? Huh?” in a movie about Mack Trucks and slidingdoor lunchcarts. To Clark Gable, his certain smile, his confident leer. Like my grandfather this America was invested with wild selfbelieving individuality and this had begun to disappear around the end of World War II with so many great guys dead (I can think of half a dozen from my own boyhood groups) when suddenly it began to emerge again, the hipsters began to appear gliding around saying “Crazy, man.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Theado, 747.

<sup>108</sup> Ann Charters, *Beat Down to Your Soul: What Was the Beat Generation?* (London: Books, 2001) 36.

<sup>109</sup> Jack Kerouac, “The Origins of the Beat Generation,” *Playboy* (1959): 31- 32.

Concurrently, in the late 1950s, with the publications of various Beats' works and a growing number of loyal readers, some critics finally expressed a certain curiosity but not necessarily in a positive way. Due to the movement's controversial linguistic experiments, strong association with drug culture, sexual frivolity and counter-politics, a few more years had to pass since Paris before they were taken seriously by the academic world. In his essay "Beat Generation Literary Criticism," Matt Theado explains that "as distance from the 1950s increased and the 1960s counterculture bore fruit with solid social developments in the 1970s and beyond, many social critics overhauled earlier dismissals of the Beats' significance [...] Conferences on the Beats held at universities have focused increasingly on the literary value as well as social influence of these writers"<sup>110</sup> and various articles appeared in the magazines such as *the New York Times*, *the Los Angeles Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *the Chicago Tribune*, *Life*, *Time*, *Mademoiselle*, *Playboy* and more — most of them were concerned with the discussions about the writers' behaviour and lifestyle rather than critical analyses of their works. As a consequence, as William Lawlor explains *Beat Culture: Lifestyles, Icons, and Impact*, the critics' focus on the Beats' easy-going lifestyle caused a misunderstanding of their' creative concepts that had been formed during their Paris period. Instead of being concerned with the artistic input of the Beats's writing, the majority of academics and journalists described their liberal behaviour and various details of their personal lives. As Lawlor argues:

Journalists and reviewers often chose to emphasize who it means to be Beat and what the Beat Generation is all about. Instead of asking Kerouac about spontaneous prose based on bop and jazz, journalists pursued the idea of frantic, angry delinquents relentlessly seeking kicks through sex orgies, highway adventures, passionate jazz, and unrestricted drugs and alcohol. Instead of asking Ginsberg about the tradition of Walt Whitman and the inventiveness of William Carlos Williams, writers mocked the dress and idioms of the Beats, reducing literary artistry to berets, shades, and bongos, betraying literary language with "like," "cool," and "hip."<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Theado, 748.

<sup>111</sup> William T Lawlor, *Beat Culture: Lifestyles, Icons, and Impact* (Santa-Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005) 13.

As a further illustration of this case, one might consider such critical papers as Robert Brustein's "The Cult of Unthink" published in *Horizon*, or Paul O'Neil's "The Only Rebellion Around" in *Life* that only suggested "the intolerance [...] towards the Beat writers' mission to confront and transform their world." To sum up, the majority of the academic establishments did not believe in the revival of the Bohemians, "the glorious years in London and Paris during the 1920s," and definitely refused to recognise the Beats as someone who can be as intellectually and textually elaborated as the French and American modernists."<sup>112</sup> As a result, serious "literary respectability" and a real academic interest in the Beats appeared mainly in the mid-1960s. This marked the wider acceptance of their works among major academic critics.

#### 4.4 A "Genuine Bunch of Dissenters"

Some of these early serious publications include Leslie Fiedler's "The New Mutants" in *Partisan Review* 32 (1965); Ihab Hassan's "The Subtracting Machine: The Work of William Burroughs" in *Critique* 6.1 (1963), Thomas Pynchon's introduction to *Slow Learner* (1984) — where he talks about fascinating power of personal freedom the Beats introduced in their works — and the quite detailed account of the Beats *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were* (1977) written by historians Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak. In their study, Miller and Nowak argue that in the fifties there weren't many people who realised the Beat writers' real motivations and ideas about social and political revolution. Most people remained very "cynical and disaffected" about any sort of changes:

The Beats made the establishment afraid because they were a genuine bunch of dissenters: they were humanitarian, attractively hedonistic, very vaguely left wing, and most of all, popular. That gave them a dangerous power. That is why virtually every established commentator overreacted so strongly against the Beats. [...] They attracted so many young people because, through the mass media they flamboyantly spoke of the possibilities of choice and change. Such ideas repelled the conservative forces in America, which needed abdication, acquiescence, or at least apathy to survive. Attack-

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<sup>112</sup> Charters, 36.

ing the Beats was first of all a recognition that this tiny group disproportionately countered such acquiescence.<sup>113</sup>

The Beats' prosperous period in Paris, where their relationship with Francophone culture became deeper emotionally and textually, enhanced the writers' intellectual and artistic maturity. The movement's legacy laid the foundations for the liberation of youth culture and is now recognized as one of the major cultural movements of the 20th century. This claim continues to be supported by some recent critical works such as *The Beat Generation: Critical Essays*, edited by Kostas Myrsiades, and *Reconstructing the Beats (2002)*, edited by Jenny Skerl, among many others. These detailed overviews of the Beat Generation legacy and influence have contributed "significantly to a body of criticism and literary analysis of Beat writing that has developed over the last decade. [They] enlarge and complicate our conceptions of the Beat generation and bring serious critical acumen to bear on the topic."<sup>114</sup> Following their return from Paris in the late 1950s, the Beats not only gained visible popularity and media support as well as publishing and writing opportunities but also a gradually increasing academic interest from various literary critics who finally ceased to belittle the writers' important artistic legacy and began to endorse their experimental literary practices.

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<sup>113</sup> Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, *Fifties: The Way We Really Were* (New York: Doubleday, 1977) 386.

<sup>114</sup> Theado, 748.



## 5. Conclusion

This thesis investigates and clarifies the significance of the Beats' time in Paris and shows how this period contributed to their establishment as a non-conformist transnational group of writers and artists. The countercultural movement might be considered as an inevitable reaction to the social, political, economic and cultural issues of the US society after World War II and, also, during the Cold War when "any suggestion of alternatives to American democracy would have been taken as communist sympathizing at best."<sup>115</sup> As a result, the most prominent creative voices among Beat writers — Ginsberg, Kerouac, Burroughs, Corso — left the US and traveled to Europe where they were looking for alternative ways to develop their individual voice as mature writers. Their valuable input for the contemporary generation is that the Beat's determination of the politics of personalism transformed the ways society understands artistic standards, both in the twentieth century and today.

For instance, "in order to awaken the public, the Beat Generation often aroused attention and made their voices heard using straightforward, and even impulsive and provocative language, which in their early works was particularly evident."<sup>116</sup> This artistic rebellion could be seen as a product of the oppressive situation after the war and the Beats' role in it. This is by no means a coincidence but rather a calculated and logical consequence. After the war with Communist North Korea, the US was locked in a cold war with the Soviet Union. Concurrently, Joseph McCarthy was constantly feeding the anxieties of American society with his communist witch hunt<sup>117</sup> and also — as Gregory Corso put it in his interview with Robert King — "people were worrying about dying by the Bomb."<sup>118</sup> Naturally, the younger generation of writers and artists, in one way or another, es-

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<sup>115</sup> Stephan Delbos, *Behind Enemy Lines: The New American Poetry and the Cold War Anthology Wars*, PhD diss. (Charles University in Prague, 2017).

<sup>116</sup> Yonghong Zhang, "On the Beat Generation," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 3.17 (2013): 205.

<sup>117</sup> M.J. Heale, *McCarthy's Americans: Red Scare Politics in State and Nation, 1935-1965* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998) 157.

<sup>118</sup> Michael Skau, "On Bomb," [www.english.illinois.edu](http://www.english.illinois.edu), *Modern American Poetry*, 6 July 2018.

caped this oppression by referring to and engaging with numerous literatures and philosophies beyond the US. The Beat Generation — besides their infatuation with Native American and Eastern cultures — “projected their own resistance as Americans to an increasingly conformist national identity” by interpreting and communicating with several French writers of “radical otherness.”<sup>119</sup> The list includes but not limited to Antonin Artaud, Arthur Rimbaud, Henri Michaux, Jean-Jacques Lebel, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Guillaume Apollinaire, Charles Baudelaire and others. Most of these French writers were counted among the French Surrealists.<sup>120</sup> Surrealism's controversial finesse, its radical betrayal of domestic identity through art and its random juxtaposition of dissociated images shaped the Beats' writing.<sup>121</sup>

Furthermore, it should be understood that Beat writers also used the techniques of the French surrealists in practice to develop their own stylistics and writing compositions: this particular detail made the Franco-American relationship one of textual and formal interdependence. According to Endre Bojtár — a literary historian and translator whose research area circulated within Central European literary history —one of the most peculiar characteristics of Surrealism is the blending of art and life, the trespassing of borders between genres and styles: “the poem was freed of all didactic explanation and symbolic duality, and became as raw as experience.”<sup>122</sup> Since the major Beat writers — Ginsberg, Kerouac and Burroughs — were all skilful appropriators, they managed to transmit this particular feature of the Surrealists in their writing. To put it concisely, while in Paris, the Beats experimented with the knowledge they adopted “from their [French] predecessors and near contemporaries [that] was both precise and part of their creative process.”<sup>123</sup> As

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<sup>119</sup> Lane, 5.

<sup>120</sup> Phyllis Taoua, “Of Natives and Rebels: Locating the Surrealist Revolution in French Culture,” *South Central Review* 20.2/4 (The Johns Hopkins University Press on behalf of The South Central Modern Language Association, 2003): 67-110, JSTOR.

<sup>121</sup> Jennie Skerl and Nancy Grace, *Transnational Beat Generation*.

<sup>122</sup> Endre Bojtár, “The Avant-Garde in Central and Eastern European Literature,” *Art Journal* 49.1 (1990): 62, JSTOR.

<sup>123</sup> Lane, 215.

a result, in their own poetry and prose, the relationships between words and ideas, the authentic personality and the world were to some extent paralleled by the subjective nature of French (and European) Surrealism. However, it should also be mentioned that due to the restrictions on the length of this thesis, some of the broader instances of the Beats' appropriations of French literature are not addressed here — such as their references to Balzac, Chateaubriand, Hugo, Stendhal, Villon and others who were not necessarily Surrealists but occasionally made an appearance in some of the Beat writers' works (for example, in Kerouac's *Satori in Paris*).<sup>124</sup> Later, when the writers finally left Paris — either back to the US or elsewhere — their experience in France changed their status as writers when their works receive more widespread literary attention, and it also contributed to social and political changes worldwide.

After their experience in Paris, the Beats carried on contributing to sexual and spiritual freedoms. The issues they played a role in included partial liberation from censorship, openness about drug use and birth control pills, the environmental and ecological consciousness, unconventional writing practices and the resistance of the mechanical materialism of capitalist American society.”<sup>125</sup> However, these changes are not likely to be seen as entirely unidirectional. Of all the domestic political issues facing the US during the 1950s and '60s, the one that was most disturbing was the Civil Rights movement and, eventually, the Beats became a part of it.<sup>126</sup> Yet their appropriations of black culture — as, for example, in Kerouac's *On the Road*, where he praises American primitivism<sup>127</sup> — could be also seen as a romanticised gesture of the white male to free himself from the conservative standards and privilege imposed on white Americans rather than a genuine identification with the the hardships of racism in the US. Nevertheless, despite popularising racial

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<sup>124</sup> Lane, 6.

<sup>125</sup> Justin Thomas Trudeau, “Specters in the Rear-View: Haunting Whiteness in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 31.2 (2011): 151.

<sup>126</sup> Trudeau, 150.

<sup>127</sup> Trudeau, 150.

minorities in some of their works or being favourably disposed to extreme lifestyles (including drug and alcohol abuse or sexual deviancy), the Beats were not simply trying to stand out but also to overcome a major obstacle in the face of conformist society so as to achieve a breakthrough towards individual freedom and unrestrained self-expression. Therefore, such a lifestyle was rather a way to exert their intellectual and visionary potential to reach its absolute pinnacle, or, in Breton's words, "to pursue experimentation at the level of individual self-expression... before collective revolutionary action."<sup>128</sup>

At this point, it might be relevant to bring a few lines from Salman Rushdie's article "On Censorship" in which he reflects on this particular challenge: "great art [...] is never created in the safe middle ground, but always at the edge" and that it "challenges, questions, overturns assumptions, unsettles moral codes, disrespects sacred cows or other such entities" and is "a revolution."<sup>129</sup> Nonetheless, while being loyal to their revolutionary mission, the Beats did not become less patriotic about their own country and its people. Thus they showed an exemplary determination in the idea that the acute issues of the society could be — and had to be — taken into consideration and potentially straightened out by younger generations of unconventional artists. And indeed this turned out to be true. The next generation of the American counterculture was concerned with Civil Rights and war — for example, Ken Kesey, the author of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and Bob Dylan, who was a close friend of Ginsberg during the '70s — started travelling and undertaking creative experiments as well. Also, The New Left, during the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, was influenced by writers "like Rexroth, Ferlinghetti, and Ginsberg and Burroughs [who] covered the convention for *Esquire*, teamed with the French avant-garde playwright Jean Genet and the coau-

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<sup>128</sup> Taoua, 89.

<sup>129</sup> Salman Rushdie, "On Censorship," [newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com), *The New Yorker*, May 2012. Web.

thor of *Easy Rider*, Terry Southern.”<sup>130</sup> More recently, in the 1990s, some of the major changes in the attitude towards the Beat literature took place at universities and public schools:

In addition, outside the academy, Beat-influenced poetry slams and readings increased in number across the country. Many retrospectives and long-term projects by Beat writers were produced, including collected works and recordings of many Beat writers, among them Kerouac and Ginsberg, Snyder's book-length, forty-year project *Mountains and Rivers without End* (1996), and a marathon reading of *On the Road* on the fortieth anniversary of its publication. By the time of Ginsberg's and Burroughs's deaths in 1997, university courses on the Beats were becoming common, and in 1998, Ferlinghetti was named poet laureate of San Francisco. Later that year, the Modern Library placed *On the Road* at number 55 on its “Top 100 English Language Novels of the 20th Century.”<sup>131</sup>

This thesis hopes to stimulate further discussions and more detailed studies of other Beats authors not mentioned in this paper. For instance, Diane DiPrima, Elise Cowen and Lenore Kandel as well as Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, and Philip Whalen also made unique contribution to the Beat legacy. As James F. Scott writes in his essay, the Beats “are much harder to ignore than the temperate, rational academician, so hard to ignore, in fact, that before passing into oblivion they may shock a few people beyond the universities into re-examining the American dream, or perhaps more accurately, the American somnolence.”<sup>132</sup> In recent years, the question of the engagement between American and French cultures in the ‘50s has been given particular attention not only from both American and French scholars. A recent exhibition devoted to the Beat Generation in Paris, held at the Centre Pompidou in July 2016, and the conference with the same topic (organised by Olivier Penot-Lacassagne in September 2016) opened a clear and consistent dialogue between English and French speaking scholars nowadays. One can only hope that this dialogue will continue.

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<sup>130</sup> Chuck Carlise, “The Beat Movement,” *literature.oxfordre.com*, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, July 2017.

<sup>131</sup> Carlise, “The Beat Movement.”

<sup>132</sup> James F. Scott, “Beat Literature and the American Teen Cult,” *American Quarterly* 14.2 (1962): 160, JSTOR.

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## Appendix I

### IV

O mother  
what have I left out  
O mother  
what have I forgotten  
O mother  
farewell  
with a long black shoe  
farewell  
with Communist Party and a broken stocking  
farewell  
with six dark hairs on the wen of your breast  
farewell  
with your old dress and a long black beard around the vagina  
farewell  
with your sagging belly  
with your fear of Hitler  
with your mouth of bad short stories  
with your fingers of rotten mandolins  
with your arms of fat Paterson porches  
with your belly of strikes and smokestacks  
with your chin of Trotsky and the Spanish War  
with your voice singing for the decaying overbroken workers  
with your nose of bad lay with your nose of the smell of the pickles of Newark  
with your eyes  
with your eyes of Russia  
with your eyes of no money  
with your eyes of false China  
with your eyes of Aunt Elanor  
with your eyes of starving India  
with your eyes pissing in the park  
with your eyes of America taking a fall  
with your eyes of your failure at the piano  
with your eyes of your relatives in California  
with your eyes of Ma Rainey dying in an ambulance  
with your eyes of Czechoslovakia attacked by robots  
with your eyes going to painting class at night in the Bronx  
with your eyes of the killer Grandma you see on the horizon from the Fire-Escape  
with your eyes running naked out of the apartment screaming into the hall  
with your eyes being led away by policemen to an ambulance  
with your eyes strapped down on the operating table  
with your eyes with the pancreas removed  
with your eyes of appendix operation  
with your eyes of abortion  
with your eyes of ovaries removed

with your eyes of shock  
with your eyes of lobotomy  
with your eyes of divorce  
with your eyes of stroke  
with your eyes alone  
with your eyes  
with your eyes  
with your Death full of Flowers <sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Allen Ginsberg, "Kaddish," *Howl and Other Poems* (New York: City Lights Publishing, 2001).