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THE ROLE OF THE *FLÂNEUR* IN JACK KEROUAC'S NOVEL *ON THE ROAD*

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THE ROLE OF THE *FLÂNEUR* IN JACK KEROUAC'S NOVEL *ON THE ROAD*

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“The Voyages are told each in one breath, as is your own, to foreshadow that or this rearshadows that, one!”

Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Cody*

AGRADECIMENTOS

É uma triste constatação, mas não há dúvida que o saber dura mais do que a beleza. Isto explica por que todos se esforçam tanto para aprender.

Ao fazer das palavras do grande Oscar Wilde as minhas, eu agradeço a minha orientadora e querida amiga Sandra Sirangelo Maggio, que me encorajou com todo seu conhecimento e carinho a levar adiante esta pesquisa. Meus sinceros agradecimentos aos professores Michael Korfmann, Márcia Ivana de Lima e Silva e Helenita Franco que, prontamente, aceitaram ceder parte de seu precioso tempo para ler e apreciar meu trabalho.

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RESUMO

Trata-se de uma leitura crítica do romance *On the Road*, do escritor norte-americano Jack Kerouac, cujas vida e obra representam a insatisfação social e a manifestação artística de uma geração de poetas e novelistas denominada, nas décadas de 50 e 60, *The Beat Generation* ou *The Beatniks*. Esta leitura consiste em uma investigação para estabelecer relações entre a tríade autor-narrador-protagonista na narrativa proposta**.**

Como apoio teórico temos o olhar do filósofo alemão Walter Benjamin. O enfoque escolhido contempla as reflexões de Benjamin sobre *autoria*, *experiência* e *modernidade*; mas, sobretudo, privilegia a sua concepção do *flâneur*; uma vez que o objetivo do trabalho é mostrar o movimento e o papel exercido pelo mesmo, tanto no *corpus* literário como na vida do autor *Beatnik*.

Para tanto, esta dissertação está dividida em três partes. A primeira apresenta um breve histórico da situação dos Estados Unidos no pós-guerra, a fim de contextualizar e discutir a criação do movimento *Beat* como vanguarda artística daquela época. A segunda parte introduz o pensamento de Walter Benjamin acerca do *flâneur.* Destaca, também, fatos e momentos relevantes de sua vida e obra. Apresenta, ainda, o ponto de vista de Sérgio Rouanet sobre a obra do filósofo. O terceiro momento analisa o romance *On the Road* em conexão com os movimentos do *flâneur* e no âmbito da tradição de Literatura de Viagem, dando relevância às questões de autoria.

Deste modo, na conclusão, espera-se legitimar o papel do *flâneur* no espaço narrativo e, também, histórico-social daquela geração.

Palavras chaves: Literatura Norte-Americana, Movimento *Beatnik*, Crítica Literária, Modernismo, Vanguarda e *Flâneur.*

ABSTRACT

This is a critical reading of *On the Road*, a novel by the North American writer Jack Kerouac, whose life and work represent the social dissatisfaction and the artistic manifestation of a generation of poets and novelists denominated, in the decades of 50 and 60, *The Beat Generation*, or *The Beatniks*. The work consists of an investigation to establish relationships among the triad author-narrator-protagonist in the proposed narrative. Supported by the theory of Walter Benjamin, the chosen theme contemplates the reflections of Benjamin about authorship, experience and modernity; but, above all, it privileges his conception of the *flâneur*; once the objective of the work is to show his movement and role in the literary corpus, as well as in the life of the *Beatnik* author.

This thesis is divided in three parts. The first presents a brief historical comment on the situation of the United States in the postwar period, in order to contextualize and discuss the creation of the *Beat Movement* as an avantgardist manifestation. The second part introduces Kerouac and Benjamin, highlighting facts and important moments of their lives and work through the movements of the *flâneur*. The third moment analyzes *On the Road* in connection with Walter Benjamin's thoughts and in the extent of the tradition of Travel Literature**,** emphasizing the relevance of authorship. In the conclusion, I expect to legitimate the role of the *flâneur* in the narrative and socio-historical scope of that generation**.**

Key words: American Literature, Beat Generation, Literary Criticism, Modernism, *Avant-Garde* and *Flâneur*.

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INTRODUCTION

The challenge of reading Jack Kerouac's work under Walter Benjamin's reflection is quite a thrill. Not only because it involves different interpretations and a series of sociological references, but also because the study implies a search into a not very distant past. One of the motivations to carry on a research about Kerouac's novel is the fact that this subject is not as much spread around Brazilian Institutions as I suppose its richness in what concerns reality, hope, fantasy, humanism, spirituality, and art deserves. During the eighties, it was common to find academic works on the *Beatniks.*[1] Actually, it was like a fever in some institutions, especially those in the United States, in which a lot of events, i.e. seminars, lectures, or book reading sections were very frequent. In Brazil, there was plenty of interest in the writing of the Beat Generation as well, but from the nineties onwards this kind of literature has become rarer among Letters students in Brazilian Universities. Eduardo Bueno (Peninha), the Brazilian writer responsible for

[1] The name of the Generation created by Kerouac in the fifties.

the first translation of *On the Road* into Portuguese (*Pé na Estrada*[2]) in Brazil, in 1984 (twenty-seven years after the North American first edition), is one of the great fans of Kerouac's style. In April 2004, a revisited Brazilian edition of the book finally came out, in pocket format (L&PM) with an introduction by the same translator.[3] This is a good sign that this classic of the Beat Literature is being revived in the Brazilian market and therefore points out to a renewal of the interest in the subject again.

The intention of this work is not only to collaborate to bring a group of authors back, nor to advertise the American *Beat* novel. It has to do with a sincere interest in undertaking a research related to a specific moment in North American reality (when conformation was the "order of the day", except for a few ones, whose visionary vein contributed for a new artistic and social way of facing power and progress). Not only the cultural and historic consequences of this movement, but also the aesthetic implications, are – in my opinion – too relevant to be left aside from our academic environment.

This thesis proposes to connect the Beat Movement with the ideas of Walter Benjamin. By joining Kerouac and Benjamin in the same platform of analysis, we can cover years of literary and cultural happenings in Europe and America, specifically important events that took place in Paris, New York and San Francisco, in the period between 1920 and 1960. The aim is not only to focus on the lives of these two authors but, rather, provide readers with a contextual framework for relevant facts concerning passages of their artistic existences and of the reality they refer to.

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[2] São Paulo: Ed. Brasilense, 1984.
[3] According to information published in "Zero Hora", Porto Alegre, 03/18/2004. See Appendices.

This research will develop an analysis of the role of the *flâneur* – based on Benjamin's definition of the term – in Kerouac's novel *On the Road.* However, it is important to mention that, for the purposes of this thesis, the dimensions of person, author, narrator and character might become a bit jumbled. According to Roland Barthes, "He who speaks (in the narrative) is not he who writes (in real life); and he who writes is not who he thinks he is"[4]. From this moment on, I apologize and ask permission to subvert Barthes' ideas in order to explore the figure of the *flâneur*.

The reason for choosing *On the Road* as the core of this investigation lies in three aspects: canon issues, theme appropriation, and personal preference. Even though Kerouac's other novels are amazing and full of passion and content, *On the Road* is still his work best recognized by the specialized critic. This novel is an icon about traveling literature that stands for the search of the self. Therefore the result is - I believe - an appropriate theme to be undertaken through Benjamin's conceptions.

By quoting a little part of T.S. Eliot's considerations about criticism I make an attempt of explaining the third factor,

> Criticism is as inevitable as breathing, and that we should be none the worse for articulating what passes in our minds when we read a book and feel an emotion about it, for criticizing our minds in their work of criticism […] (ELIOT, 1922)

Jack Kerouac was born in Massachusetts, USA, in 1922. His writing portrays his adventures and spiritual achievements in traveling

[4] BARTHES, Roland. *Poétique du Récit.* Paris: Seuil, 1977

geographically, and also through his innermost thoughts and feelings. Walter Benjamin was born into a Jewish family in 1892 and committed suicide in 1940 before crossing the board line between France and Spain, when trying to escape from the Nazi. The German Philosopher's theoretical contributions on Sociology, Marxist Studies and Modernity have been sought and complimented by scholars from all over the world.

In order to get things organized and read in a feasible and comprehensive way, my research has been designed in the following division: chapter one will present a brief history of post-war America, in the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, attempting to set social and artistic innovations related to the Beatniks in the so-called American *Avant-Garde* period. The second part will introduce Benjamin's contribution on philosophy and modernity (adding a little about his life and the similarities between himself and Kerouac). Chapter two will highlight an important discussion on the main ideas of the philosopher about the Storyteller, the Concept of Art and the *Flâneur*. Baudelaire, Sergio Rouanet's and other beat writers' thoughts will also prove decisive for the cutting of this work. Chapter three features the influences of Kerouac's own life experience in the process of his literary creation, as well as issues concerning Travel Literature as a progressive genre, and the matter of authorship in *On the Road*, where the slight line between fiction and real life is so significant to the analysis of the role of the *flâneur* proposed in the title of the thesis.

In the Conclusion, comments will connect the different roads pursued in the research. I hope the established connections may contribute somehow to a renewal of the interest in what has been considered 'visionary' for more

than a quarter of a century. By the end of the work a sense of fulfillment in what is considered the goals set above will hopefully replace the interrogative casting of these questions: What is the role of Benjamin's *flâneur* in *On the Road*? What contributions could my research give to the academic community?

1 Contextualizing the Beatniks in Post-War America

America is a vast conspiracy to make you happy.

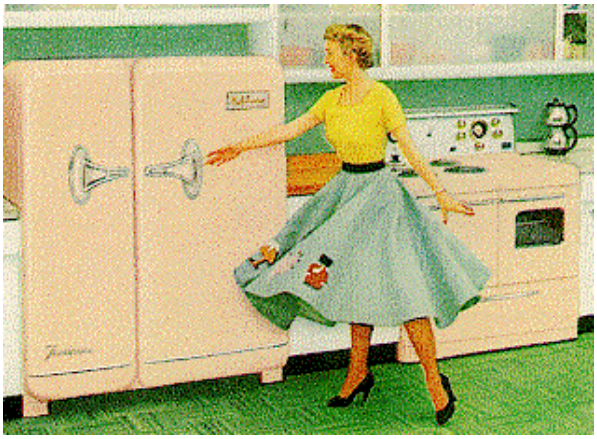
John Updike, *Problems*

1.1 The American Dream

After the Second Great War, the world was entirely shocked by the image of horror that had affected everywhere. Europe was quite destroyed and many people had moved to the United States seeking better living conditions and opportunities. During the 40s and 50s, the commercials about the perfect families in their perfect houses with their perfect furniture would sell throughout the country and also to the rest of the world, the idea of the American Dream. The ideal living standard spread rapidly amongst the American consumer society, everyone wanted to live a peaceful life in a quiet neighborhood with all conveniences, including a car in the garage, a dog and a television set.

O´Callaghan (1996), in the book *An Illustrated History of the USA,* states that television was one of the most important forces of American influence, provided that "in 1947, around 170,000 American families had television at their homes." (p. 136) This fact just highlights the great American illusory perfection over their own people and around the world as well. However, it was not only television – there were other wonders of modernity, which function was to make the lives of Americans housewives as easy as possible. According to Tindall and Shi (1989), in *America*, the proportion of

homeowners increased by 50 percent between 1945 and 1960. “And those new homes were increasingly filled with the latest electrical appliances – refrigerators, washing machines, sewing machines, vacuum cleaners, freezers and mixers.” (p. 817) The invention of supermarkets was also a good “boom” to fulfill the dream; when they “proved a commercial success in the United States they quickly spread to other prosperous countries.” (O’CALLAGHAN, 1996, p. 138)



Determined to reveal the hidden traps concealed in the ideal American Way of Life, a group of students gets together in the Greenwich Village, New York, with the purpose of exchanging poems and writings protesting against the conformation in the US, the American obsession for progress and power; electing freedom as their own way of life.

The *Beatniks* – throughout a combination of jazz, drugs, sex and poetry – celebrated all the joys of spontaneity and liberty. Their interest in jazz, drinking, smoking and sex characterizes the bohemian style of the *Beats*. Therefore, Kerouac’s *On the Road* (the most important novel of the group) expresses this spirit presenting a narrative that reflects the *Beatnik*’s vision of the world. Rather than only depicting the various hues of the American Dream, the author also focuses on important values, such as friendship, loyalty, trust, love and adventure to criticize the American hypocrisy. Consequently, the *Beat Generation* preceded the hippies and other latecomer counterculture movements.

1.2 Economy, Politics and Society 1920-1960

> *A California home; I hid in the grapevines, digging it all. I felt like a million dollars; I was adventuring in the crazy American night.*
>
> Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* [5]

The United States went through different economical phases in the period between 1920 and 1960. Although some of these phases seemed to be endless and hopeless for American citizens, the leaders of the country always kept faith and showed enthusiasm. Even in 1929, when the big crash happened and many workers lost their jobs and dignity. President Hoover and, then, President Franklin D. Roosevelt managed to calm the people down and reverse de Depression by developing the New Deal reforms.[6] As it is explained in *An Outline of American History*, "during the entire New Deal period, despites speed in decision and execution, public criticism and discussion were never interrupted or suspend; in fact, the New Deal brought to the individual citizen a sharp revival of interest in government."[7] As soon as the first signs of another war were coming out, the US got prepared to face the crisis and finance other countries.

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[5] Subsequent references to *On the Road* will be noted in this work by the abbreviation "*OR*" and page number.

[6] In March, 1933, Franklin Roosevelt (former Governor of the state of New York) becomes the President of the USA. Roosevelt's Government set up organizations called "agencies" to help the nation to recover from Depression. (O'Callaghan, p.100)

[7] *An Outline of American History* – organized by the USA Information Agency, p. 139.

> The United States government organized the whole American economy towards winning the war. It placed controls on wages and prices, and introduced high income taxes. […] Factories stopped producing consumer goods such as automobiles and washing machines, and started making tanks, bombers and other war supplies. […] By 1945 scientists […] had produced and tested the world's first atomic bomb. (O'CALLAGHAN, p. 106)

In 1941, the United States entered the World War II against Japan, and the nation initiated to prepare towards the consequences of war. All the activities (farming, manufacturing, mining, trade, labor, investment, education) were brought under new and enlarged controls. The armed forces of the USA grew up to a total of 15,100,000. By the end of 1943, approximately 65 million men and woman were in uniform or in war-related occupations.[8]

In 1945, the American economy adjusted from war to peace without serious unemployment. The necessity for consumer goods created by wartime scarcity collaborated to an industrial expansion.[9] This passage of the novel reflects the other side of that kind of society, in Detroit, 1949.

> The people who were in that all-night movie were the end. Beat Negroes from Alabama to work in car factories on a rumor; old white bums; young longhaired hipsters who'd reached the end of the road and were drinking wine; whores, ordinary couples, and housewives with nothing to do, nowhere to go, nobody to believe in. (KEROUAC, *OR*, p. 22)

America was the only country to profit from the Second World War; its houses were not bombed and the great majority of its people was employed. Years of prosperity were to come. Americans become the "most prosperous people the world had ever seen."[10] After President Roosevelt death, on April 12 (1945), Harry Truman, his vice, took the presidential oath. Truman gave one significant clue to his domestic policies on September 6, 1945, when he sent

[8] According to *An Outline of American* History, p. 145.
[9] Ibidem., p.145.
[10] Apud, O'CALLAGHAN, p. 108.

Congress a comprehensive peacetime program, which in effect proposed to continue and enlarge the New Deal.[11]

The economic problem facing Truman was not depression but inflation. "The demands of businessmen for higher prices and of workers for higher wages alike conspired to frustrate Truman's efforts to 'continue stabilization of the economy.'"[12] Tindall and Shi say that after the 1946 congressional elections Truman gave up the battle against inflationary prices. O'Callaghan reinforces the idea by stating that between 1950 and 1960,

> Americans saw their (supermarket's) loaded shelves and full freezers as visible proof of the superiority of the American way of organizing a nation's economic life. Not surprisingly, when the Soviet leader Khrushchev visited the United States in 1959, one of the places he was taken to visit was a supermarket! (1996, p.138)

Another important event during the prosperous age in America was the fear of war. The American people felt afraid of having their sons in a war nightmare again. The ideas of communism were also a threat to some, especially the leaders of the country.

Joseph McCarthy, "an ambitious and unscrupulous politician"[13], took advantage of the nation's fear and started to chase those who were supposed to have any sort of contact to communists or communist beliefs. Furthermore, this "witch hunt" – as the search was known – did not exclude important people, i.e. government officials and artists. As a matter of fact, the Hollywood celebrities suffered a lot because McCarthy insanity; anyone suspected to be in touch with Soviets or secretly working for the Soviet Union was the target. O'Callaghan focuses below,

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[11] TINDALL and SHI, 1989, p. 790.
[12] Ibdem., p. 792.
[13] Apud O'CALLAGHAN, p. 109.

> Then people began to doubt McCarthy. They watched him questioning 'suspects' on television. They saw he was a bully and a liar. By the mid 1950s, McCarthy had lost his power. He went on making wild accusations, but nobody listened. In 1957 he died. But 'McCarthyism' had done serious damage to the United States' reputation for justice and fair play. (p. 109)

During following months of Truman's victory in the election of 1948, he won some of his Fair Deal proposals: a higher minimum wage, more people under Social Security, extension of rent controls, farm prices supports, a sizable slum-clearance and public housing program[14], for instance. Eisenhower replaced President Truman in 1953.

The Beatniks were aware of what was going on in America and could not accept the postwar conformation. The presence of indignation in *On the Road* is clear. There is a passage where Sal Paradise remembers his friend Remi (they were robbing a cafeteria): "'You know what President Truman said' Remi would say. 'We must cut down on the cost of living.'"[15] Paradise also makes a point on the American police system, when they get a ticket in Washington DC,

> The American police are involved in psychological warfare against those Americans who don't frighten them with imposing papers and threats. It's a Victorian police force; it peers out of musty windows and wants to inquire about everything, and can make crimes if the crimes don't exist to its satisfaction. (*OR*, p.123)

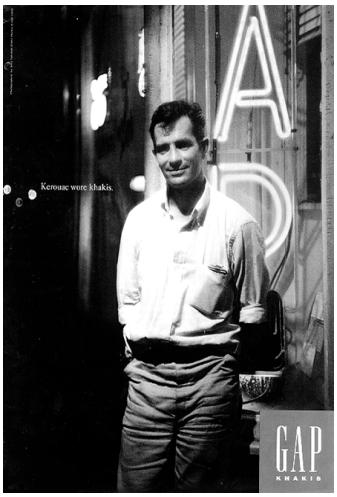
Dean Moriarty (Paradise's best friend) has also an interesting view of politics, especially in the passage when he speaks out his mind while Paradises listens to and agrees with him: "You spend a whole life of non-interference with the wishes of others, including politics and the rich, and nobody bothers you […]."[16] Of course, the period President Truman ruled was the most evidently expressed in the novel, because the narrative period is between 1947 and

[14] Apud. TIN and SHI, p. 805.
[15] Ibidem., p. 63.
[16] Op.cit., p. 229.

1950. However, the years that followed the mandate of President Eisenhower (1953-1961) were also important to the Beat Generation.

By the end of the novel, Sal is again on the road – now in the Mexican road –, and raises another interesting observation on society and American power. While admiring the landscape, and the Indians, he thinks:

> Life was dense, dark, ancient. They watched Dean, serious and insane at his wheel, with eyes of hawks. All had their hands outstretched. They had come down from the back mountains and higher places to hold forth their hands for something they thought civilization could offer, and they never dreamed the sadness and poor broken delusion of it. They didn´t know that a bomb had come that could crack all our bridges and roads and reduce them to jumbles, and we would be as poor as they someday, and stretching out our hands in the same, same way. (*OR*, p. 273)



The existence of the atomic bomb scared the entire world. In 1945, the United States was the only country to succeed inventing an atomic weapon. This invention started in 1939, when Albert Einsten told President Truman about the German experimentation on nuclear fission making the US leader invest a lot of money and workers to find out about the nuclear possibilities. The American two billion dollar research got to be known as the Manhattan Project. In the passage before, Kerouac's reflection on the bomb, throughout his character's voice, reinforces the importance of such happenings in the 40s and 50s for the Beat Generation discontentment.

Except for the bomb and political issues, America was becoming the example of family values. Women in the late forties turned to be, in general, beautiful, young, dedicated, excellent housewives and mothers. They had the task of taking care of home, looking after the children and being the most

charming creature to their husband. Marriage was to be a dream. This society's characteristic is present in *On the Road*. Sal meets many girls and as any young man search for sexual experiences. Apart from his free and adventurous spirit, he also daydreams about the one who will become his perfect wife: "All these years I was looking for the woman I want to marry. I couldn't meet a girl without saying to myself, what kind of wife would she make?" (p. 105) Dean, on the other hand, does not show any sort of marriage preoccupation or any concern about the matrimonial values. On the contrary, he gets involved and marries two or three women at the same time, and keeps living his life.

1.3 Literature and Art

The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem.

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

For Marc Saporta (1974), one of the critics of the life and art in America, the arts in the United States (as painting, theater and literature) received an unexpected importance in the beginning of the twentieth century, especially because the most important artistic expression of that period was the cinema. (p.249) Hollywood with its great actors and divas always helped the American system to sell the world the idea of a perfect society. Evidently, the cinema still being very important in the fifties, sixties, and today, but other sorts of artistic manifestations also found their place. In *An outline of American Literature* (2000), Peter B. High comments on the importance of the North-American

literature in the beginning of the twentieth century, seen, for the first time, as a national production based on national patterns now,

> The turn of the Century (20th) was an exciting moment in American intellectual history. American novelists and poets were no longer simply copying British and European writers. […]America was about to become an important contributor to world literature. (p.102)

America literary production, at the turn of the century, sought to outgrow European influence and writers tried to constitute a national identity in their writing. The "Muckrakers"[17], according to High, "had the job of printing the truth, however unpleasant, in their magazines." (p.103) The most famous of the Muckrakers, was Upton Sinclair.[18] Other many important names of the American literature such as: Sinclair Lewis, John Dos Passos, Ezra Pound, Carl Sandburg, Eugene O'Neill, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Hart Crane, Henry Miller, John Steinbeck, Raymond Chandler, Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, Isaac Asimov, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller appeared during the wars period.

Tindall and Shi observe that in the twenties, America symbolized optimism and prosperity, for others; those years represented despair and doubt. As they cite a comment by Scott Fitzgerald made in 1920: "here was a new generation…grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken." (p. 656) This lack of hope referred to what was named the *Lost Generation*. The post First Great War left this feeling of disillusionment. In the glamorous twenties, the United States was in a very favorable condition (many

[17] In Literature, the period from 1900 to 1914, which based on President Theodore Roosevelt's announcement (1902), when he declared that the Government would fight against nation's economic, political and social evils, was known as the "Muckraker era". (HIGH, 2000, p. 103)

[18] 1878-1968

countries owed it a lot of money, as a consequence of the First World War[19]). In this atmosphere of "roaring", the *Lost Generation* was formed by American writers, who moved out to foreign places, especially Paris, in order to not be a part of American society, and, also, to fill their needs for intellectualization and artistic values. The twenties were marked by the Charleston and by men carrying arms. There was also a puritanical attitude, represented by the prohibitive alcohol law, and a great attention to fancy cars, places and fashionable outfits. Gertrude Stein was one of the great personalities of that period, and her strong criticism towards modern society, behavior and art has brought many artists together in the famous and elegant meetings she used to offer in her Parisian apartment. In the words of High:

> Many young people in the post-World War I period had "lost" their American ideals. At the same time America "lost" many fine young writers – like e. e. cummings and Hemingway – because they had moved to Paris.[…]Two concerns now filled their lives: the fear of poverty and the worship of success. (2000, p. 143)

Ernest Hemingway contributed to the literary world with great books, and so did F. Scott Fitzgerald, which expressed very firmly the feeling of emptiness that touched all writers from the period. They had to live the sensation of leaving behind artificialities of America contrasting to the guilt of being expatriates. By the thirties, things become little different. Instead of depicting scenes of great parties, luxury and tycoons, writers and painters were concentrated on expressing the suffering and hopeless of ordinary people, since the "economic collapse of 1929 destroyed the happy, confident mood of America in the 'Jazz Age' twenties."(p.161)

> In the 1930s, America experienced what Fortune magazine called 'a sort of cultural revolution'. Americans learned that, like it or not,

[19] Idem.

> they had a culture and had had one all long – it had simply been overlooked. Now Americans tried to make up for lost time by tracking the culture down, recording, restoring, and celebrating it. They became intrigued with American art of all kinds, and particularly that least influenced by Europe: primitive, folk, or as it was called most often, "popular" art. (TINDALL and SHI, p. 677)

Many writers tried to give their fiction a realistic and naturalistic treatment, emphasizing the human nature and the national situation: the Depression era. John Steinbeck (1902-1968) was one of the most important authors of the period, his novels mixture myth and naturalism, contrasting to optimism and sentimentalism. Thomas Wolfe (1900-1938), according to High, "was another writer who tried to speak for all of America. He brought a voice of hope to the despair of the thirties." (p.165) There are several literary references in *On the Road*, and among many important names, both writers cited above have also been remembered by Kerouac. The novel has a part in which Carlo says that Sal was "talking absolute bullshit and Wolfean romantic posh" (p.44), and other when Paradise is in California talking with his girl; he mentions a part of the film based on Steinbeck's book *Of Mice and Men* (1937).[20]

The outcome of World War II, in what concerns the brutality in battlefields and its consequences, was pretty much the same as the First Great War; however, the US was going through a very positive financial situation. The poverty of the thirties has been replaced by years of prosperity, but the sophistication and glamour of the twenties are shifted now by the practicalities of the late forties and fifties. The intellectual production has taken a different way – the leftist ideology from the thirties is not as important as before – creating a strong sense of individualism. As High points out,

[20] Idem, p. 82.

> Americans authors in the fifties show that they are very uncomfortable in the post-war world. The new political fears (of Communism and the Bomb) are less important to them than their own psychological problems in the new American society. (p.176)

Although they belong to different moments and contexts, the comparison between the *Lost Generation* and the *Beat Generation* seems to be inevitably attractive. If one was very elegant and worried about glamour and appearance in the twenties, the other did not worry about such things in the forties and fifties. Quite the opposite; it was formed by college students who would wear a pair of jeans, t-shirt and a backpack. Ann Charters, who is a specialist in Jack Kerouac's life and work, writes in the introduction of *On the Road*: "[…] *The Sun Also Rises* came to be regarded as the testament of the Lost Generation, so it seems certain that *On the Road* will come to be known as that of the Beat Generation."

Needless to say, literature was not the only artistic form to undertake important part in the history of postwar America. Painting and music were remarkable as well. The Beatniks were really in love with jazz. According to Lima (2002), the rhythm of the Jazz, the thematic of the Blues and the Black music references were to the Beat Generation, the true American music.[21] There were many jazz clubs in New York where they used to meet to drink, chat and get inspired by the rhythm of good jazz. Bill Morgan, in the book entitled *The Beat Generation in New York: a walking tour of Jack Kerouac's city*, shows Kerouac's love for New York City by presenting a list of all places the writer and his friends enjoyed going to in the late 40s and in the 50s (some of the places are still there). For Morgan (1997), in 1940, Jack Kerouac was a student and

[21] P. 78. Translation Mine.

had to write an interview of George Avakian (a music critic and a jazz authority) for the school newspaper. Kerouac met Avakian at "Nick's Jazz Club", and had his "first in-depth lesson on the history of the music." (p.70)

In *On the Road*, the passion for Jazz is visible in many parts and names as Charlie Parker and Billie Holiday are mentioned like a celebration for their existence. Sal Paradise proves this by singing one of Billie Holiday's songs in the passage below.

> My mind was filled with that great song 'Lover Man' as Billie Holiday sings it; I had my own concert in the bushes. 'Someday we'll meet, and you'll dry all my tears, and whisper sweet, little things in my ear, hugging and a-kissing, oh what we've been missing, Lover Man, oh where can you be…' It's not the words so much as the great harmonic tune and the way Billie sings it, like a woman stroking her man's hair in soft lamplight. The winds howled. I got cold. (*OR*, p. 88)

By the end of the book, the reader may notice a lot of references to Jazz. Sal and his gang go to different jazz clubs, in different towns during their trips around the country and Mexico.

> Slim sits down at the piano and hits two notes, two Cs, then two more, then two, and suddenly the big burly bass-player wakes up from a reverie and realizes Slim is playing 'C-Jam Blues' and he slugs his big forefinger on the string and the big booming beat begins and everybody starts rocking and Slim looks just as sad as ever, and they blow jazz for half an hour […]. (pp 159-160)

After the Second World War, famous European artists like Chagall, Mondrian, Duchamp, Ernst and Dalí had emigrated from their countries to the United States due to their favorable economical condition and to escape from the war effects as well. (KRAUBE, 2000, p. 106) New York was the newest artistic metropolis in the forties. It was the new Paris, regarding the amount of collectors and art sponsors. According to Kraube, "in America, the financial

support to the Arts had a long tradition."[22] Since the 'Armory Show', which has made, in 1913, the European *Avant-Garde* famous in the New World; and people were interested in Art, preferring the Expressionist, Cubist and Surrealist. When reading *On the Road* is possible to notice references to Modern painters throughout the book, just like the way, for instance, Sal described Dean's girl: "Marylou was a pretty blonde […] and waiting like a longbodied emaciated Modigliani surrealist woman in a serious room." (p. 4)

Robert F. Kiernan (1983) sees the post-war fiction in the US as the "body of surrealistic writing which arises from the international modernism with some influences of the European Absurdist, Southern Gothics and the Beats from New York and California."[23] (p. 78) The Beatniks showed the American postwar society that they were different. They did not agree with the conformation spread throughout the nation. They believed in the force of spontaneity and freedom. Because of their behavior and ideas, the Beatniks' production is considered as a part of the American *Avant-Garde*. In *On the Road,* Sal Paradise shows the America from the late forties, interfering in the reader's view of the US. Paradise takes us thru a pathway full of hope and questions

1.4 The *Avant-Garde*

Literature is news that Stays News
Ezra Pound, *The ABC of Reading*

The Beat Generation translates a new form of seeing society and art. In the forties, they start an innovative way of treating literature, which consisted of

[22] Idem, p. 106.
[23] Translation Mine.

mixing spontaneous thoughts and the melody reproduced by jazz instruments. Kerouac is one of the most important names of his generation, and his fascination for jazz helped him to create his own writing style. Kerouac's and other beat writers are of fundamental importance to the new artistic scenery in the States of the middle of the century. In Europe, the artistic innovations took place much earlier than in America, thus the following part intends to briefly point out some of the important names and bibliographical references for a further study on the Beatniks (as the American *Avant-Garde*) in context to the European *Avant-Garde*.

The *Avant-Garde* happens in the beginning of the Twentieth Century, with the manifestations of its several movements, also recognized as *–isms* (Futurism, Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, etc). Originally, it starts in France and Italy, expanding for Russia during the years of the revolution, in the decade of 1920. Although in the end of the nineteenth century the concept of *Avant-Garde* was already used in cultural debates, as an innovative sort of art. The *Avant-Garde* conception was recognized for contradicting the traditional art and seeking a new means of artistic expression.

According to Lúcia Helena (1996, p.06)[24], in spite of several differences, all movements - Futurism, Expressionism, Dadaism, Cubism, Surrealism – questioned about the cultural inheritance they had in common. For the author, the *Avant-Garde* possessed the function of destabilizing the inheritance of the Classicism and Romanticism and of underlining the idea of the language as system. In addition, "many of their works became patrimony of the same museums for them refused." (p.39, Translation Mine)

[24] Translation Mine.

The concept of *Avant-Garde* is important and complex, because there are several authors who have theorized about it. Since the first decades of the Twentieth Century, are many the speculations on an *Avant-Garde* theory, which can be approached through political, ideological, philosophical, cultural and aesthetical point of views. However, some thinkers disseminated observations that had contributed to the general understanding of the period/movement.

In 1930, the American art critic, Clement Greenberg presented his thoughts in the famous article "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", in which he contrasted mass culture and *Avant-Garde*. His theory considered the diffusion of the avantgardist culture in the United States, with an interpretation based on the philosophy of Kant and Plato. The theory of Greenberg, however, had failed for pointing out only the French movement of the nineteenth century, which emphasis was the "Art for Art's sake." Later, the critic of Italian art, Renato Poggioli – conscious of Greenberg's ideas on mass culture – analyzed the impact of the same on the *Avant-Garde*; discussing in his "Theory of the *Avant-Garde*" (1968), what the *Avant-Garde* art reveals, starting from its own cultural situation. Poggioli intended to offer a sociological and psychological explanation on the appearance of the *Avant-Garde* phenomenon, however, he did not focus on the poetics, nor the aesthetics of the *Avant-Garde*; but, political and ethical subjects. The theory of Poggioli is not only interesting in the sense of the history of ideas – since he links *Avant-Garde* to the German Romanticism – but also, it is rich in historical details.

Peter Bürger's theoretical work has the same name *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, although, it tries to explain the phenomenon based on philosophical considerations. The German literary historian presents a theory - that also

seeks – to rehabilitate the position of the *Avant-Garde* in a Marxist conception of art, proposing a holistic interpretation of the relevance of the *Avant-Garde* and their possibilities in the future. Besides the Marxist theory; Adorno and Lukács also influenced Bürger's theory of the *Avant-Garde*, as well as the idea of "reconnecting art and life" – in a way art should not be destroyed, but understood as the "praxis of life" – sums up Bürger's theoretical thoughts.

For this work, what really interests is the place the *Beat* Literature takes in the new period of art and literature in the America postwar. The *Beat Generation* was born as a free medium to express one's feelings and beliefs, without concentrating on any sort of norm, whatsoever with no concern about rules. The *Beat* movement appears in the middle of the great ideological and political confusion in America having as its original avangardist premise: to take the position against the national order, whatever it was. (LIMA, 2002, p. 73)[25] For the *Beatniks*, improvisation meant the pleasure for the ordinary. Lima says that the *Beat* literature was "condemned by many scholars exactly for defending spontaneity", and he emphasizes the beat idea that "poetry, life and freedom must be together."[26] Ensuring what the spirit of the *Beat Generation* was all about: their literature fought for the right of freedom, they expressed their suspicious to the American Dream through a neo-romantic prose style and different kind of poetry. The *Beat* writing is defined by spontaneity and oral quality, just like the tune produced by a jazz musician when playing his instrument. The writers of this generation enjoy using daring expressions that would describe the reality in a very shocking combination.

[25] Translation Mine.
[26] Idem.

Lima highlights the reasons why the *Beat* literature can be considered avangardist by raising an interesting point: the *Beat* poets expressed in their verses the influence of Herbert Marcuse's and Norman Brown's ideas,

> Because of the confrontation they offered to Marx and Freud's books, and also by what they explored, in the sense of finding out the mechanisms, the roots or the meaning of phenomena, such as, domination, repression or alienation. Furthermore, the possibilities of a radical social transformation in the modern industrial societies.[27]

Following Lima, the great spiritual reference based on the oriental philosophy, the hippie pacifist manifestations, the concrete desire for freedom and for a meaningful way of art and life made the *Beatniks* the American *Avant-Garde*. However *On the Road* is considered the most known novel of the author and recognized by the critic as his best work, it is a good point to remember that the published version of book was written in three weeks onto a continuous roll of paper. *On the Road* is an innovative experiment.

One of the important elements for the *Avant-Garde* movements was "chance" (in the sense of luck, risk and fate), proposing the effects of casualism and irrationality as a way of penetrating the unconsciousness. The Dadaists, particularly, enjoyed the usage of "casualty" elements, as we read the "recipe" on how to make a Dadaist poem, for example, we see that the instructions are clear to the "chance" aspect. It suggests that a Dadaist poem can be made, simply, by cutting an article out of a newspaper, putting the words in a bag and shaking it. "[…] Next take out each cutting one after the order. Copy conscientiously in the order in which they left the bag […]."[28] Fate will compose art because art must not be planned.

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[27] LIMA apud. PEREIRA, 1983, p. 75. Translation Mine
[28] TZARA in TELES, p. 132. Translation Mine

I believe that “chance” is one of the avangardist characteristics presented in *On the Road*. It is very interesting how the action of traveling is connected with fate. Every possible trip ends up being an unexpected surprise to the participants, in the book and in the lives of the Beats.

> ‘What the cards say?’ ‘The ace of spades is far away from him. The heart cards always surround him – the queen of heart is never far. See this jack of spades? That’s Dean, he’s always around.’ ‘We’re leaving for New York in an hour.’ ‘Someday Dean’s going to go on one of these trips and never come back.’(*OR*, p. 186)

In the passage above, Sal and Galatea talk about Dean’s chance, which is represented here by the cards. Another sort of avant-gardism feature in the novel is well depicted by Sal’s dreams. He tells Marylou about them.

> I told her about the big snake of the world that was coiled In the earth like a worm in an apple and would someday nudge up a hill to be thereafter known as Snake Hill and fold out upon the plain, a hundred miles long and devouring as it went along. I told her this snake was Satan. […] A saint called Doctor Sax will destroy it with secret herbs which he is at this very moment cooking up in his underground shack somewhere in America. It may also be disclosed that the snake is just a husk of doves; when the snake dies great clouds of seminal-gray doves will flutter out and bring tidings of peace around the world. (*OR*, p. 155)

This extract can be pretty much understood as surrealistic, which eccentricity, absurd and richness of details remind us of a Dali’s painting. Besides causing the strange sensation of facing reality through the images of the unconsciousness, it also evokes enchantment.

Ann Charters writes the Introduction of the 1991 and 2000 editions of *On the Road* and proudly describes the scene when Kerouac and his girlfriend wait for the review of his novel in the *New York Times,* on September 4, 1957. As Charters says: “standing under a street lamp, they turned the pages until they found the column ‘Books of the Times’. The reviewer was Gilbert Millstein, and he had written,

> *On the Road* is the second novel by Jack Kerouac, and its publication is a historic occasion insofar as the exposure of an authentic work of art is of any great moment in any age in which the attention is fragmented and the sensibilities are blunted by the superlatives of fashion… [the novel is] the most beautifully executed, the clearest and most important utterance yet made by the generation Kerouac himself named years ago as 'beat' and whose principal avatar he is.[29]

[29] CHARTERS apud. MILLSTEIN In: KEROUAC, 2000, p.vii.

2 Walter Benjamin: the *avant-garde* philosopher and his *flâneur*

No man's knowledge here can go beyond his experience.

John Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*

2.1 The Contribution of Walter Benjamin

According to Hannah Arendt (1968), Bertolt Brecht upon receiving the news of Benjamin's death is reported to have said that this was the first real loss Hitler had caused to German literature. (p.2) On those days, Benjamin was not given the merit he was to deserve, and only a few would recognize his brilliance as a philosopher and critic. Some years later, Brecht would ratify his own saying, adding that the harm was not to German literature only, but also to the world as a whole. During his brief lifetime, the critic Benjamin contributed very rich material resulting from his reflections and inquietude on various aspects of human existence and of the modern world. Benjamin wrote many articles, essays and a doctoral thesis named *The.Origin of German Tragedy.*

The philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin was born into a Jewish family, in Berlin, in 1892. He married Dora in April 1917 and had a son, Stefan, one year later. He lived amid intellectuals, poets, other philosophers and modernists in different cities and phases of his life. Berlin, Moscow and Paris were the main places where he thought, lectured and wrote.

Unfortunately, this coexistence was not as peaceful as it should. Because Benjamin was Jewish, he suffered the consequences of the Nazi system. Benjamin lived in exile in Paris and, later, he tried to go to the United States via Spain. The day Benjamin planned to cross the Pyrenees, the Nazi soldiers were checking all the passengers. When Benjamin realized the frontier was blocked, he shot himself to death.[30]

Whatever the truth was, the fact is that the intellectual world regretted his death. Benjamin left a legacy of writings that has been highly appreciated and commented on by scholars from the entire world. Benjamin's criticism is sharp and creative. He enjoys using metaphors to point out opposite points of view, establishing the taste for allegories as the mark of his work.

Walter Benjamin's perception of his time is seminal to our understanding of modernization and all the changes that process brought along. Benjamin is indisputably the *avant-garde* philosopher, not only for his ideas on modernity, but also for his innovative reflections on this new age. Hannah Arendt develops her ideas and praises for Benjamin saying that he was "ahead of his time and

[30] Although this is the well acknowledged cause of Walter Benjamin's death, Caygill presents another version of the story in the book *Introducing Walter Benjamin* (2000). The reason for the suicide is the same, that is, the failure to cross the Spanish border, "the Spanish government had suddenly revoked all transit visas that might have got him to Lisbon and eventually to safety in America", says Caygill. What differs in this new version is that, to Caygill, Benjamin did not use a gun to die. He "swallowed an overdose of morphine tablets that night. The official date of his death on the Port Bou register is 26 September 1940." (CAYGILL, p. 171)

he was a born writer." (1969, p.4) In addition, he was the first to translate Proust into German. Arendt comments,

> His erudition was great, but he was no scholar, his subject matter comprises texts and their interpretation, but he was no philologist; […] he reviewed books and wrote a number of essays on living and dead writers, but he was no literary critic; he wrote a book about the German baroque and left behind a huge unfinished study of the French nineteenth century, but he was no historian, literary or otherwise. (1964, p.4)

In the work *Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century*, Benjamin analyzes a series of Parisian personalities, events and inventions. For him the creation of the Paris arcades represents the union of art, technology and modern life. Through the arcades, Benjamin reflects on changes caused by modernization, such as the development of the use of iron and glass in architecture. Benjamin also observes the panoramas, which are large portraits of nature, saying that: "as architecture begins to outgrow art in the use of iron construction, so does painting in the panoramas" (1978, p.149), the philosopher reflects on the value of them in relation to the new technology in photography and films. Benjamin argues that, "the panoramas, which declare a revolution in the relation of art to technology, are at the same time an expression of a new feeling about life."(p.150) The matter of whether photography is a form of art, and not only a technological advance is very well described in this essay. Benjamin remembers that when Arago presented photography to the world, guaranteeing its place in the history of technology, artists reacted by discussing the artistic value of the novelty. The famous World Exhibitions are also discussed in the same essay; the philosopher criticizes the attitude of the Saint-Simonian

movement, which considers such exhibitions a means of entertaining the working class. Benjamin adds,

> The Saint-Simonists predicted the development of world economy, but not the class struggle. Beside their participation in industrial and commercial enterprises about the middle of the century stands their helplessness in questions concerning the working classes.[31]

Among other important names, Baudelaire is highlighted as a special guest in Benjamin's reflections. The philosopher's admiration for the poet is no secret, and the utmost significance of Baudelaire´s poetry is appreciated in many of Benjamin's translations and works, including *Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century*, in which the *flâneur* is mentioned. For Benjamin, Baudelaire is an artist with the great talent of depicting the images of women, death and Paris, having "modernity as the main accent in his poetry."[32]

In *Hashish in Marseilles* (1929), Benjamin describes his experience in the French city under the effects of hashish. He starts by presenting the drug symptoms – according to Dr. Ernest Joël and Dr. Fritz Fränkel.[33] Somewhat later, Benjamin gives rich details about his walking around the places, observing the port, restaurants and people's physiognomy. According to Gershom Scholem[34], he intended to write a book on his hashish experience because he wished to prove the philosophical relevance of such perceptions, originated from a modified state of consciousness. An interesting point is raised when he reflects on space and time. Time is something that really interests the

[31] Idem, p. 152.
[32] Idem, p. 157.
[33] Doctors who helped Benjamin with the drug experiments. Idem, ibidem.
[34] Benjamin's friend and author of *Walter Benjamin*: die geschichte einer freundschaft (*Walter Benjamin*: a história de uma amizade), p.176.

modernists, not exactly by the chronological order of facts and happenings, but in the way it is processed through the different layers of consciousness.

> Against the background of these immense dimensions of inner experience, of absolute duration and immeasurable space, a wonderful, beatific humor dwells all the more fondly on the contingencies of the world of space and time. (BENJAMIN, p. 138)

The image of an Angel is another element that has always accompanied Walter Benjamin's thoughts. Susana Kampff Lages (2002), in her study on Benjamin, explains that, in 1933, when escaping from the Nazi, Benjamin traveled to Ibiza, in Spain. There, he writes the second version of *Agesilaus Santander* (p.103, where texts like "On the Mimetic Faculty*"* can be found). Gerschom Scholem writes an essay named "Walter Benjamin and his Angel"[35], in which, he investigates the title of Benjamin's essay and finds out Benjamin's passion for anagrams revealing that *Agesilaus* (the name of a Spartan king) and *Santander* (the name of a Spanish town), change into German as *der Angelus Santanas.* (LAGES, p.103) The angel's thematic, according to Lages, is a crucial point about Benjamin's reflections, and Scholem attempts to explain the fascination that Benjamin kept to the angel figure and what it represents, moreover, shows that Benjamin's personal obsession influences his theoretical reflection and how some of his personality traces – as patience and melancholy – are important to the turning from biography to theory.

On melancholy, Benjamin has reflected and elaborated what constitutes a new idea about the term. Since its origins in the occidental culture, "melancholy" has been a subject for doctors and philosophers. Jaime Ginzburg,

[35] Idem, Ibidem. Translation Mine

in his dissertation, points out a sort of timeline to what concerns the understanding of melancholy. Ginzburg starts with Hippocrates who was the one to create a concept to the problem, defining it with an aphorism: “if the fear and the sadness last long, such a state can be defined as melancholy”. Hippocrates refers to the melancholy ones as having, “their mental state disturbed.”[36] To Constantinus, the notion of sadness is developed as a theory of loss. “The melancholic are, among others, the ones who lost their children and dearest friends, or something precious that could not be restored.”[37] Either to Hippocrates or to Constantinus, melancholy is a disease. Lages sees the range of reflections on melancholy as very wide, varying from the temporary propensity to sadness, passing through features of a psychosomatic character, up to the most serious cases of psychic disorder (2002, p. 34).[38] She explains that, maybe, the Renaissance was the period in history in which melancholy was better incorporated, making it a fashionable disease. In addition, she says that the famous book *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, first published in 1621 by Robert Burton, was a very rich collection of causes of and suggestions on the treatment of the disease: “The Renaissance concept of knowledge is deeply linked to the idea of revisiting or translating the classics. (p. 37)”[39]

For Ginzburg, the modern reflection on melancholy issues is profoundly linked to its foundations. Freudian studies contemplate the history of melancholy in the twentieth century, and the connection between the experience of loss and the melancholy condition. Those studies are fundamental to the development of psychoanalysis.

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[36] GINZBURG, Jaime. *Olhos turvos, mente errante: elementos em Lira dos Vinte Anos de Alvares de Azevedo.* Porto Alegre: UFRGS, 1997(Tese de Doutorado).
[37] GINZBURG apud. CONSTANTINUS. Translation Mine
[38] Translation Mine
[39] Translation Mine

Freud's thoughts on this disease is in his article named *Melancholy and Death*, where he approaches distinctly the two possible attitudes towards the experience of a traumatic loss. Ginzburg points out that, one of them – experienced during the mourning period – opens the way to the acceptance of the loss after a period of suffering, making the individual strong enough to get over it and fulfill in replacing the lost object. The other – the melancholy attitude – on the contrary, does not accept the possibility of another loss. It seems preferable, to the melancholy person, not to have any strong emotional tie to the notion of suffering a second possible loss. The person with this attitude has no interest in the pleasures of life at all. In *On the Road*, the narrator's reminiscences suggest a feeling of melancholy when he tells about a friend or any situation he has been through. In the beginning of part one, for example, Sal Paradise tells the reader how he was feeling when he first met his friend Dean Moriarty: "I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up. I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won't bother to talk about, except that it had something to do with […] my feeling that everything was dead." (p. 3)

The presence of melancholy is evident in Benjamin's work; the mark of separation and loss during his lifetime is there. Moreover, the melancholy feeling that accompanies him through the end influences the images found in Walter Benjamin's work. As Scholem notes, Benjamin's writing consists of self-reflection, based on his personal condition of being a writer, and of being Jewish. In *Walter Benjamin and his Angel*, the philosopher sees himself as the 'son of Saturn', therefore recognizing his personal melancholy mood, whose

description coincides with the tradition of elements that link melancholy to Saturn.[40]

Benjamin's contribution to the Theory of Melancholy is very well presented in his writings, especially in his study about the German Baroque, in which he embodies facts related to the ancient and medieval understanding of melancholy. The philosopher approaches topics on Aristotle, Constantinus, and the planet Saturn, emphasizing his interest in the melancholy position on contemplation. Furthermore, Benjamin reaffirms the importance of a contemplative attitude to the melancholy condition.[41]

The bitter feeling of loss is also related to the Beatniks because, as they are involved in protesting against the conformation in the United States, they express through their lifestyle and work to be hopeless about American society and culture. By searching for freedom and higher spirituality, the Beatniks try to convey a principle of nonviolence towards the postwar resultant melancholy.

[40] LAGES apud. SHOLEM, *Walter Benjamin und sein Engel*.
[41] Cf. GINZBURG, p. 55-56. Translation Mine.

2.1.1 The Storyteller and the Concept of Art

> More and more often there is embarrassment all around when the wish to hear a story is expressed. It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences. One reason for this phenomenon is obvious: experience has fallen in value. (BENJAMIN, 1969, p. 84)

The quotation above belongs to Benjamin's essay *The Storyteller* (1936), where the philosopher develops his ideas on the pleasure of telling or listening to a story. He gets to the conclusion that the experience of telling a story has been weakened after World War I, when men would return from the battlefield in silence (after being exposed to unutterable emotions, that ranged beyond the verbal ability) and "poorer in communicable experience". Although the storyteller had become a rare figure, Benjamin's classification shows us that there are two types of storytellers: one who travels the world and, when back home, tells about his trip. The other, who never moves, stays at the same place for a long time and has the local stories and traditions to tell. Benjamin analyzes the significance of the storyteller and connects his ideas with the work of the Russian novelist Nikolai Leskov (1831-1895). He suggests that: "To present someone like Leskov as a storyteller does not mean bringing him closer to us but, rather, increasing our distance from him."

Throughout their travels, the Beat writers look forward experimenting new sensations and having new visions. According to what Benjamin says about the great value of the storyteller and the experience he passes on while telling a story, it is convenient to point out that the Beats are good storytellers,

once they enjoy passing their experiences on and telling about their adventures as well.

Walter Benjamin reflects on the value of experience in storytelling, as well as on the extinction of the traditional way of narrating, replaced by the invention of printing. By explaining the difference between narration and information, Benjamin establishes his point of view based on the loss of tradition when telling stories, and sees the symptoms that indicate the end of storytelling: “dissemination of information, and the rise of the novel at the beginning of modern times.”(1969, p. 87) Benjamin continues developing his thoughts on experience and says “the storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others.”[42]

Jack Kerouac is what may be, based on Benjamin’s words, considered a storyteller. *On the Road* is a narrative in which the storyteller, Sal Paradise, tells about his own life and travel experiences. All the narrative elements come from the author/narrator/protagonist’s practical experience, completed – sometimes – by other characters’ experience report. Benjamin also points that storytelling differs from information because “the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up for him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.” (p. 89) Sal Paradise points out: ”And this was really the way that my whole road experience began, and the things that were to come are too fantastic not to tell.” (*OR*, p. 9)

Benjamin reaffirms his sorrow for the loss of storytelling as he says,

[42] Idem, ibidem.

> It does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information, or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. [...] Storytellers tend to begin their story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow, unless they simply pass it off as their own experience. (p. 92)

Benjamin talks about the experience expressed, transparently, by the storyteller and worries about the end of this transmission of experience, which is the most important element of storytelling.

> […] With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road. Before that I'd often dreamed of going West to see the country, always vaguely planning and never taking off. Dean is the perfect guy for the road because he actually was born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1926, in a jalopy, on their way to Los Angeles. […] First reports of him came to me through Chad King, who'd shown me a few letters from him written in a New Mexico reform school. (*OR*, p. 3)

Before presenting the story of his traveling, Sal tells us about Dean, exposing the profile of the man who changes the course of his experience. The part above exemplifies what Benjamin means about beginning a story by presenting the circumstances where the storyteller meets what is to follow, from personal experience. In the case of Paradise, it comes from what he learned from Dean, and from his own experience. For Walter Benjamin, telling a story is the occasion to transmit life experience, that is the reason why he sees the storyteller as a "teacher or a sage", able to check his life's archives (filled with experiences, not only from him, but also from others). Benjamin finishes his essay, emphasizing the value of experience and saying, "the storyteller is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of history." (p. 109)

The art of telling a story, and the art of worshipping life through an uncommon status of consciousness, are only two examples of Benjamin's

approach to art. According to Jeanne Marie Gagnebin, Benjamin, in one of his letters to Ardono (in June, 1936), mentions the parallels between the *Storyteller* and *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*: “Recently I wrote a work on Nikolai Leskov (*The Storyteller*) […] It presents some parallel with 'the loss of aura', due to the fact that the art of storytelling is reaching the end.”[43]

Throughout his lifetime, Benjamin dedicated many works to reflections on the facets of art and art criticism in modern society. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) is one of his most read essays. Here Benjamin studies the process of reproduction of art; he compares the print to photography, and talks about the cinema. The fact that reproducing art is not new does not really interest him. The consequences of such mechanical advance are the object of his concern. The value of the authenticity of art, which is directly linked with its history, is seen by Benjamin as an important issue to be discussed. He thinks that the reproduction of a work of art lacks the presence of time and space that is, the unique existence of the work of art (the unique existence determines its history).

> The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. (p. 221)

The concept of *aura* is something important to understand Benjamin’s ideas. According to him, the aura is a singular image, composed by spatial and temporal elements, the appearance of a distant thing, even if it is near. Caygill has a simpler explanation to the matter of the aura. He asks “what happens to an ‘immortal’ painting – say, Van Gogh’s *Sunflowers* – when it is mechanically

[43] BENJAMIN apud GAGNEBIN In: *Magia e técnica, arte e política*: ensaios sobre literatura e história da cultura, 1996, p.12. Translation Mine

reproduced on postcards, posters or even postage stamps without regard to its original size, location or history?" Benjamin would have answered: "it will lose its aura." (2000, p. 134) According to Caygill, aura refers to "a customary historical role played by works of art – their 'ritual function' – in the legitimation of traditional social formations." (p.134)

> Throughout the history of culture, works of art depended on a status: they owed their existence primarily to their implication in the processes of social integration. As an object of religious veneration and worship, the work of art acquires a 'halo' of uniqueness and authenticity. And so, Benjamin arrives at his famous definition of the aura. (p. 135)

Benjamin (1969) says, "mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art" (p.234), and "the mass is a matrix from which all traditional behavior toward works of art issues today in a new form. Quantity has been transmuted into quality." (p. 239) The philosopher is especially concerned about the film's importance in the new mass society. The film reaches a greater audience than painting does, for example. The reflection on the performance of a theatre actor being different from that of a film actor is also raised in the essay.

> The characteristics of the film lie not only in the matter in which man presents himself to mechanical equipment but also in the manner in which, by means of this apparatus, man can represent his environment. […] For the entire spectrum of optical, and now also acoustical, perception the film has brought about a similar deepening of apperception. It is only an obverse of this fact that behavior items shown in a movie can be analyzed much more precisely and from more points of view than those presented on paintings or on stage. (pp. 235-236)

2.1.2 Baudelaire in Paris

It is strange to come across a lyric poet who addresses himself to this, the least rewarding type of society.

Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*

The quotation above is found in *On some motifs in Baudelaire*, where Benjamin studies the work of the poet.—When studying Baudelaire, Benjamin focuses on his perspicacious eye for the simple things of life. Baudelaire's poems portray the ordinary and the outcast – personalities who apart from the fine society because of their decadent habits; the mundane receive a detailed analysis, rather than the aristocratic characters and customs. The poet penetrates the feelings of a drunken man, a prostitute, or anyone differing from the social conventions. Their routine is presented in a lyrical and profound way. According to Professor Fowlie, "Baudelaire composed lucidly, and with unwavering frankness, from his own (albeit sometimes hallucinatory) observations."[44] Baudelaire is interested in finding out – among the outcast – the modern hero. Contemplations about women's social function also belong in his reflective agenda. Walter Benjamin analyses, in *Fleurs du Mal,* the enchantment of lesbian love, so well depicted in the poem *Lesbos,* where a lesbian is chosen as the heroin of modernity – representing the historic (the greatness of ancient world) and the erotic (the woman who testifies masculinity). According to Benjamin, this makes the lesbian position in *Fleurs du Mal* unmistakable.

Mother of Roman games and Greek pleasures,

[44] FOWLIE, Wallace. In: BAUDELAIRE, Charles. *Selected poems from Flowers of Evil*. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1995.

> Lesbos, where kisses, languid or joyous,
> Warm as the sun, cool as watermelons,
> Are the ornament of nights and glorious days;
> Mother of Roman games and Greek pleasures, […][45]

The philosopher is emphatic to say Baudelaire does not see the lesbian woman as either a social or a natural problem, thus – as an ordinary man – he was not related to her. He concerned about observing and contextualizing her in the image of modernity. Benjamin saw Baudelaire as the key to understand modernity, so the recognition of time becomes fundamental for a better view of modern society. As we can find in the work *Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century*, in part five, subtitled: *Baudelaire, or the Streets of Paris*, the philosopher's reflection on the uniqueness of Baudelaire's poetry, in which images of woman and death "are permeated" by the image of Paris. Benjamin points out that "what is decisive of Baudelaire's 'deathly idyll' of the city is a social, modern substratum. Modernity is a main accent in his poetry." (p. 157)

Modern works frequently tend to order not in the sequence of the historical time or in the character's progressive sequence, but to operate spaciously or through the layers of consciousness, towards a logicity of the metaphor or form.[46] Time is related to transformation and movement due to the velocity that life reaches, and that is the reason why the notion of time is directly connected with the notion of space. In Walter Benjamin's essay, time is discussed through Bergson's reflection, in which two types of memory are approached: the voluntary and the involuntary; that is, subjective time is marked

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[45] BAUDELAIRE, 1857-1861, translated by Wallace Fowlie, 1995, p.43.
Mère des jeux latins et des voluptés grecques
Lesbos, où les baisers, languissants ou joyeux,
Chauds comme les soleils, frais comme les pastèques
Font l'ornement des nuits et des jours glorieux;
Mère des jeux latins et des voluptés grecques, [...] (*Fleurs du Mal*, 1994, p.128)

[46] Cf. BRADBURY& MCFARLANE In: RITTER, 2002, p. 27. Translation Mine

by personal experience and memory. To Bergson, the present experience comprises all the other past experiences. According to Malcolm Bradbury (1994), the philosophy of Bergson was of "'interior time,' interposing between individual and interior world a concept of consciousness and inner memory that would strongly influence fiction." (p. 27) Baudelaire starts the second part of *Spleen*, saying: "*J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans*." (p. 69)

Tim Hunt, in his study on Kerouac's work, analyses the development of *On the Road* saying that, ''Kerouac is still troubled about the relationship of his writing to the dichotomy between the truth of the outside world and the truth of the inner world of the child, expressed here as 'lyric-alto knowing.'"(HUNT, 1996, p. 118) What Hunt mentions here has to do with Berson's *interior time* because Kerouac's past memories have always accompanied him through his adult life and influenced his work. Hunt adds, ''Kerouac here shows a new sense that the two [kinds of truth] must be brought together and reconciled even though he is uncertain about how it is to be managed.'' (p.118) One example of this *interior time* and *inner memory* in *On the Road* is the passage where Paradise is on the road and says, ''I lay in the back seat, exhausted, giving up completely, and sometime in the afternoon, while I dozed, the muddy Hudson zoomed by the tents outside Sabinal where I had lived and loved and worked in the spectral past.''(p. 153)

For Benjamin the concept of experience is very important, and he insists on the value of a story superior to the value of the information it conveys. He says: "the replacement of the older narration by information, of information by sensation, reflects the increasing atrophy of experience" (p.159) and continues,

> In turn, there is a contrast between all these forms and the story, which is one of the oldest forms of communication. It is not the object of the story to convey a happening *per se*, which is the purpose of information; rather, it embeds it in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening. It thus bears the marks of the storyteller much as the earthen vessel bears the marks of the potter's hand.[47]

Proust's work, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, is an example of the assimilation between time and experience, as a means of reviving the true story and the storyteller, the philosopher argues, "where there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past."[48]

As one can observe, in Benjamin's study on Baudelaire, the interest in issues related to the modernization process as well as to modernity itself is extremely relevant. In *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire*, written between April 1937 and September 1938, Benjamin exposes ideas regarding themes that are presented as a means of interpreting that epoch of transition. Lesbians, and other *different* kinds of people (the detective, the dandy, the Apache, the prostitute, the *flâneur*,) are used to represent the modern social stereotypes.

In *On the Road*, Paradise observes different sorts of people and approaches death. During his stay in Denver, for instance, he analyses the people around him and his momentous feeling, "Near me sat an old Negro who apparently watched the games every night. Next to him was an old white bum; then a Mexican family, then some girls, some boys – all humanity, the lot. […] It was the Denver night; all I did was die." (OR, p. 164) Besides the analysis on

[47] Idem
[48] BENJAMIN, op. cit., p. 86.

the social types, Paradise follows saying or singing, repeatedly, two melancholy lines:" Down in Denver, down in Denver. All I did was die."

To Flávio Kothe, Benjamin apprehends all this as a way through which the mediation between text and context is elaborated in order to characterize the metamorphosis from *word* to *commodity* and from *poet* to *worker*. (1991, p. 13) Benjamin is concerned with the value of poetry – words – in an age of industrialization and technology. Baudelaire is approached here as the artistic and intellectual initiator of modernity. His words fill in the problematic of subjectivism in modern poetry. In Baudelaire's poetry, the "self" and the dispersion towards the other (God, Woman, Crowd) coexist. The image of "Evil" is highlighted – as indicates the title of his best known book –, inverting Rousseau's central idea about natural goodness, and ensuring the fall as the origin of degradation. The poet does not define the priorities between eternal and transitory, aesthetical and historical.[49]

THE VOYAGE

For the child, in love with maps and prints,
The universe is equal to his huge appetite.
Ah! how large the world is under the lamplight!
In the eyes of memory, how small the world is!

One morning we leave, our minds full of fire,
Our hearts heavy with anger and bitter desire,
And we go, following the rhythm of the wave,
Rocking our infinity on the finiteness of the sea:

Some, happy to escape from an infamous land;
Others, from the horror of their cradles, and a few,
Astrologists drowning in the eye of a woman,
A tyrannical Circe with her dangerous perfumes.

In order not to be changed into beasts, they are enraptured
With space and light and burning skies;
The ice which freezes them, the sun which bronzes them,
Slowly efface the mark of kisses.

[49] Cf. SISCAR, 2003, p. 52.

But the real travelers are those only who leave
In order to leave; light hearts, similar to balloons,
They are never separated from their fate,
And, without knowing why, always say: let us go on!

Those whose desires have the form of clouds,
And who dream, as a recruit dreams of a cannon,
Of vast, changing, and unknown raptures,
And whose name the human spirit has never known![50]

This poem comprises eight parts. We take, here, only the first one as an example of how Baudelaire's words evoke a dance of images, sensations and a mix of perceptions belonging to a different dominion; which may provoke either delight or repulse to the senses. Caygill comments, "Baudelaire's last poem in *Fleurs du Mal*, 'The Voyage', ends with summons, 'O Death, old captain, it's time, let's weigh anchor!'" and, right after, he answers his own question: "But what is his destination?" "To the depths of the Unknown, in quest of something new!"' (p. 161)

Benjamin understands 'death' as the last journey of the *flâneur*, and the 'new', as its goal. In the seventeenth century, allegory is the canon of dialectical imagery; in the nineteenth, it is *nouveauté*. (pp. 157-158)

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[50] BAUDELAIRE, *The Voyage* (Part I), translated by FOWLIE, p. 39.
(Le Voyage – Pour l'enfant, amoureux des cartes et d'estampes,/L'univers est égal à son vaste appétit./Ah! que le monde est grand à la clarté des lampes !/Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit!
Un matin nous partons, le cerveau plein de flamme,/Le coeur gros de rancune et de désirs amers,/Et nous allons, suivant le rythme de la lame,/Berçant notre infini sur le fini des mers:
Les uns, joyeux de fuir une patrie infâme;/D'autres, l'horreur de leurs berceaux, et quelques-uns,/Astrologues noyés dans les yeux d'une femme,/La Circe tyrannique aux dangereux parfums.
Pour n'être pas changés en bêtes, ils s'enivrent/D'espace et de lumière et de cieux embrasés;/La glace qui les mord, les soleils qui les cuivrent,/Effacent lentement la marque des baisers.
Mais les vrais yoyageurs sont ceux-là seuls qui partent/Pour partir; coeurs légers, semblables aux ballons,/De leur fatalité jamais ils ne s'écartent,/Et, sans savoir pourquoi, disent toujours: Allons!
Ceux-là dont les désirs ont la forme des nues,/Et qui rêvent, ainsi qu'un conscrit le canon,/De vastes voluptés, changeantes, inconnues,/Et dont l'espirit humain n'a jamais su le nom!)
Baudelaire, p. 121-122.

In *On the Road* there are many moments in which Sal Paradise or one of his friends reflects on death. Here, Paradise recollects a dream he had and makes him connect, somehow, to the subject of death. He questions himself and the reader about wanting to die,

> The one thing that we yearn for in our living days, that makes us sigh and groan and undergo sweet nauseas of all kinds, is the remembrance of some lost bliss that was probably experienced in the womb and can only be reproduced (though we hate to admit it) in death. But who wants to die? In the rush of events I kept thinking about this in the back of my mind. I told it to Dean and he instantly recognized it as the mere simple longing for pure death […]. (OR, p. 112)

2.2 The *Flâneur*

Throughout Benjamin's work, several thoughts on modernity and its features were developed (many of them supported by Baudelaire's poetry and criticism, as we have seen before). For Baudelaire, it is important to be as a hero to live modernity, due to all the difficulties and changes it proposes. This "hero condition" is found in the figure of the *flâneur*. In some of his essays[51], Benjamin exposes the figure and concept of someone who, touched by the transformations of the *fin-du-siècle* and the novelties of a new time, finds himself contemplating the streets of Paris: the *flâneur*. Baudelaire sees him as the "man of the crowd" – the idler; the urban stroller.[52]

> Baudelaire's genius, which is fed on melancholy, is an allegorical genius. In Baudelaire Paris becomes for the first time a subject of lyric poetry. This poetry is not regional art; rather, the gaze of the allegorist that falls on the city is estranged. It is the gaze of the *flâneur*, whose mode of life still surrounds the approaching desolation of city life with a propitiatory luster. The *flâneur* is still on the threshold,

[51] *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*; *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire*; *Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century*, *The Arcades Project*.
[52] Cf. CAYGILL, p. 160.

> of the city as of the bourgeois class. Neither has yet engulfed him; in neither is he at home. He seeks refuge in the crowd. (p. 156)

What Benjamin indicates above symbolizes his attempt to address the modern age, with its loads of impressions about fashion and commodities. Paris has become the big window of the modern world. The city is full of life surrounded by the fresh air of technology. In the essay named *The Painter of the Modern Life*[53], Baudelaire praises the work and character of his friend Constantin Guys (1805-1892) and referred to him as the *flâneur*, the man in the crowd.

According to Baudelaire, *the crowd is the flâneur's universe, like the air is the birds', like the water is the fish'.* For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate observer, it is an immense happiness to take up residence in the numerous, in the waving, in the movement, in the fugitive and in the infinite. (1988, p. 170)

The *flâneur* walks around people in the city - he enjoys doing his *flânerie* in cafés spread throughout the boulevards – observing the industrial civilization and breathing the modern experience. Baudelaire's *flâneur* was Benjamin's inspiration, but the *flâneur* is not considered the poet's friend nor a self-portrait. However, the pleasure of looking (observing) is very clear in both: the poet and the hero of his poetry.

Benjamin is serious about the moment Baudelaire abandons his bourgeois existence: "it is when the streets of Paris become a refuge for him." The streets and the Arcades, where the crowd would transit, were the places for the *flânerie*, and the *flâneur* would not feel bored, because

[53] Article included in the volume *L'Arte Romantique*, published in 1869.

he enjoys trespassing the public routes. “Giving the crowd a soul is the *flâneur*’s mission.” The Parisian Arcades are something really important for a better understanding of Benjamin’s ideas on the *flâneur*. Between 1927 and 1929, Benjamin planned an essay with the title of *Paris Arcades: a dialectical fairytale*, which has become *The Arcades Project.* What first made the writing on arcades interesting was the fact that in the nineteenth century it was very fashionable to build arcades in Europe, especially in Paris, which emerged the new possibilities of iron and glass technology. Hannah Arendt says that,

> The arcades which connect the great boulevards and offer protection from inclement weather exerted such an enormous fascination over Benjamin that he referred to his projected major work on the nineteenth century and its capital simply as “The Arcades” (*Passagenarbeit*); and these passageways are indeed like a symbol of Paris, because they clearly are inside and outside at the same time and thus represent its true nature in quintessential form. (1969, pp. 21-21)

What attracts Benjamin about the arcades, according to Caygill, is the simultaneity of being both outside and inside, the Neapolitan experience of ‘porosity’ again, but especially the fashionable rows of shops with their dazzling displays of commodities behind glass façades.

Along with modernization, the individualist mood seems to interfere, more than ever, in people’s routine. This causes the *flâneur* to travel through phantasmagorias. These phantasmagorias embrace the dreams of modern life, – dreams such as fashion, technique, architecture, urbanism, and the dream of the arcades[54], where all unreal energies get condensed in the city. Benjamin

[54] Paris was Benjamin’s ‘chosen city’, as Martin Jay writes, ‘both as the site of his exile and as the controlling metaphor of his work’. This is evident in his passion for the ‘allegorist’ poet of Paris, Charles Baudelaire. But the idea for an article on the Paris arcades began on a walk with his friend

says that, “in these transitory arcades, even in the fleeting fashions on display in its shops, we find traces of a utopian wish for a completely satisfactory system of social production.”[55] Benjamin understands that the arcades are passages covered by glass and marble, and in which both sides, the most elegant shops are located. The arcades are, as a result, like a miniature world, in which, the *flâneur* is at home.

Baudelaire worked on the translation of Edgar Allan Poe’s stories, becoming very fond of *suspense. Les Fleurs du Mal* offers many elements of that genre: the victim and the place of the crime, the murder and the crowd.[56] According to Benjamin, “the detective story, the most consequent among Poe's accomplishments, it is part of a literature that assists to Baudelaire's postulate.” (p. 40) Another work representative of Poe´s style, *The Man of the Crowd*, also impressed Baudelaire; providing him with important ideas about the *flâneur*. The novella is about a man (the narrator) who examines London’s agitation through the passer-byes in a Café.

> In the late afternoon hours of an autumn day he installs himself behind a window in a big London coffeehouse. He looks over the other guests, pores over advertisements in the paper, but his main focus of interest is the throng of people surging past his window in the street. (p.170)

According to Benjamin, the intriguing thing about this story *is* the narrator’s gaze at the crowd, a gaze that is penetrating and very intense. The crowd is the most important factor, and the narrator succeeds in interpreting its fascination. Furthermore, the fascination of the crowd is the leitmotif for Poe’s

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Franz Hessel, then, in 1926, collaborating with Benjamin on the translation of Marcel Proust’s *Á la Recherché du Temps Perdu* (CAYGILL, p. 146).

[55] Cf. CAYGILL, p. 153.

[56] See BENJAMIN, 1989, pp. 40-41.

story, and for Baudelaire's life work, as Benjamin says: "Baudelaire enjoyed loneliness, but wanted it in the crowd." (1989, p. 45) Kothe (1989) refers to the part of Benjamin's reflection entitled *The Flâneur*, in which the *flâneur* is analyzed among Baudelaire's personal experience and poetry as well as Poe's fiction. Kothe says,

> […]'*The flâneur*' highlights this social type in which the intellectualized citizen is about to be transformed into commodity without recognizing himself as such. […] The 'city jungle' is transformed, then, in literature, originating the detective story. Key-elements of the literary series are compared. The elements that belong to the detective story, in a piece of fantastic criticism, are detected in Baudelaire's poetry. Context becomes text and text becomes verbalized context. A new understanding about poetry is, this way, accomplished.[57] (p.13)

Baudelaire depicts his *flâneur* inspired in Constantin Guys and Poe. Benjamin elects the figure of the *flâneur* inspired in Baudelaire and in what Baudelaire had written. Both saw in that type of individual a soul that would reflect on the anxieties caused by the process of modernization and the transformations yet to come. In addition, the *flâneur* is the one able to walk down the streets and arcades and think freely about modernity. The *flâneur* is pretty much like what Teixeira Coelho (1988) defines as the view of the artist as the hero of modernity: "[…] able to realize the "particular beauty' of the new times." (p. 14. Translation Mine)

2.2.1 Sergio Rouanet's thoughts about the *Flâneur*

In the beginning of the 1990s, Sergio Rouanet (1993) wrote a book about the importance of Traveling, stating that, "the human condition is still connected

[57] Translation Mine.

to the condition of the traveler."[58] (p. 7) The author believes that when we travel the fantasy we bring with us travels along; that is, it is our fantasy that really travels, because it is only from there that the pleasure and melancholy of traveling come out. Besides the reflection on traveling, Rouanet contemplates the rich contribution from Walter Benjamin on the theme. Moreover, he invites the reader to follow the steps left by Benjamin's ideas on experience and the significance of the *flâneur* in an enjoyable and clear way.

Writing about Walter Benjamin, Rouanet discusses the kind of travel the *flâneur* is up to, the kind of travel where hallucinations do not come as drug effect, but from the hallucinatory effects caused by the city (referring to Benjamin's essay about the hashish experience). By wandering around this city, the *flâneur* gets the 'profane illumination', which will serve to brighten the very city and reveal it through its allegorical truth. According to Rouanet, when in Paris, the *flâneur* makes himself at home, because he owes his own existence to it. However, the *flâneur* is not only interested in the city space, but also in its history. For him, every street hill leads down to the past – his and the city's. (ROUANET, p.22, Translation Mine) Paris is the place elected and celebrated by the *flâneur.* Rouanet emphasizes that: "the *flâneur* is the traveler of modernity." According to him, the modern traveler wanders around the city crossing the left and right margins of the Seine as a pirate in the unknown seas – promoting the *flânerie*.

Rouanet explores Max Weber´s and Walter Benjamin´s view of 'modernity'. To Weber, 'disenchantment' is a pre-condition to Capitalism. Benjamin, on the other hand, understands that Capitalism re-enchants society,

[58] Translation Mine

eternalizing the myth, instead of secularizing the world.[59] Also based on Benjamin, Rouanet discusses the qualities of the *flâneur*, insisting on the premise that he is like a Mohican, because he is the detective of the city, as the Mohican is the detective of the savannah. Rouanet quotes Benjamin about the *flâneur*,

> His idleness is apparent, he dedicates himself to the oldest activity in humanity, the hunt, and no prey can escape from his lynx eyes. That Mohican can also read the traces in people's faces, he is the great observer of the crowd.[60]

Rouanet tells us that, besides being the modern hunter and the modern traveler, the *flâneur* is the city allegorist; the one who narrates what he has learnt by crossing urban modernity (Paris), as well as following suggestions from the flâneur's bedside book, *The Arcades Project,* by Walter Benjamin.[61] The work on the *Arcades* is divided in topics relevant to the issues of modernity or places in Paris, in which Benjamin shows the *flâneur*'s itinerary. The *flâneur* starts his *flânerie* at the *Passage Vivienne*, gazes over the museum, the subterranean, the station, etc. He ends at the Passage of Cairo. During all the observing process, the *flâneur* shows the streets of Paris and some of its particularities inquisitively. However, he does not ask for any answers.

According to Rouanet, Benjamin's project on the Arcades is a study about the images of the dream provoked by capitalism; consequently, a study of the expressions in the collective consciousness and the material life of the nineteenth century. Architecture, fashion, politics, urbanism are part of the dream, but they are real too. The *flâneur*'s itinerary has been constructed in

[59] Idem, p. 11. Translation Mine
[60] BENJAMIN apud ROUANET, p. 22. Translation Mine
[61] See ROUANET, p. 23.

order to illustrate the dialectics of these two levels of reality, objective and dreamlike, in which his perception acts in two stages.[62]

> The *flâneur* walks on the street, and there is nothing more material than the street. But on the asphalt materialism comes out to the dream of labyrinth. The labyrinth contains the desire of arriving, the impulse of achieving a goal, and this is Utopia. It includes therefore the danger to be led astray, the risk of not reaching the end, or getting to an undesired end. In this sense, it is myth. (ROUANET, p. 55)

Many places in Paris are the *flâneur*'s target for his thoughts. Benjamin points out the Arcades, the department store, the bridge, the School of Fine Arts, the museum, the station, and some consequences of the existence of such places, as fashion, lightening, the bus, the subterranean, among others. The panoramas also mean a lot to the *flâneur*, because through them – as Rouanet says – the inhabitants could see the landscape. The panoramic dream represents an utopian encounter with nature, and "the mythical curse of an impossible encounter, or possible only by means of phantasmagoria."[63] Caygill says,

> Phantasmagoria, a term used in Marx's *Das Capital*, were optical devices for rapidly shifting the size of objects on a screen. Here was Benjamin's clue to depicting sensual immediacy. Capitalist modernity had come to focus in Paris under the monarchy of Louis Philippe (1830-48) and the Second Empire of Napoleon III (1852-70). How could he show the *regressive elements and utopian potentials* of this culture in graspable, powerful 'dialect images'? He began systematizing his mountain of research notes into color-coded index cards. Another guide to this vast unending maze of materials was a 'blueprint' outline that he provided for Adorno and the Institute in 1935, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century'. (CAYGILL, p. 151)

[62] Apud ROUANET, p. 55. Translation Mine.
[63] Op. cit., p. 57.

The subterranean world of Paris was very important to the *flâneur*, due to the fact that the sewerage system, the catacombs and the metro were like a labyrinth, the entrances to the bowels of the city.

> That labyrinth shelters inside, not one, but dozens of blind bulls whose thirst for revenge is quenched not by a Theban virgin once a year, but every morning by dozens of anaemic *midinettes* and sleepy employees.[64]

The figure of the prostitute is also questioned by the *flâneur.* According to Rouanet, the dream of prostitution beckons to the utopian image of a maternal nature as well as the mythical image of an alienated nature, "the mother's transfiguration in a courtesan."[65] Rouanet emphasizes the relationship between man and the city, based on Benjamin's work on the arcades and the *flâneur.* For him, men do not live in the city because in the condition of a dream city, it is connected to the dynamics of unconsciousness, and resides in it. The city lives in men because it is part of their dream life. Rouanet concludes, "This is the relationship between man and the city in *The Arcades Project*: the physical entity in which he lives, and the dreamlike entity that lives in him." (p. 59)

Along with Parisian places and activities, many other allegories (the player, the collector, the ruins) illustrate Benjamin's reflections. The *flâneur* – the city allegorist – detains all urban significations. Rouanet is emphatic to say that the *flâneur* recognizes all parts of the city from different angles; from its proximity or distance, from its present or its past – always from its true face: a surrealist face. "The *flâneur* assumes responsibility for his condition of traveler of modernity and decides to tell us what he sees throughout his perambulation."

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[64] BENJAMIN apud ROUANET, p. 38. Translation Mine.
[65] ROUANET, p. 59. Translation Mine.

(p.23) However, the *flâneur* does not talk about, he prefers to show, instead. His element is image; and, because of that, his method is the *montage.*

Rouanet studies Benjamin's thoughts and, through the *flâneur*, he builds his conception of what the German philosopher means by being a "modern hero". The *modern hero* is the one who walks through the mass – the man of the big city, – the crowd duelist. Rouanet says that, according to Benjamin's ideas, "the crowd hero has more conscience than memory, he is more capable of noticing than remembering, he is more sensitive to the existing discontinuation than to the experience of continuation." (p. 64)

Benjamin thinks that the modern hero lacks contact with tradition, and becomes a victim of amnesia. In British modern literature we have Leopold Bloom, the protagonist of James Joyce´s *Ulysses* to fill this role. In American literature – that is more pragmatic, simpler and more allegorical, we have Jack Kerouac´s *On the Road.*

2.2.2 Of Benjamin and Kerouac

> *Allegories are in the realm of thoughts what ruins are in the realm of things*
>
> Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*

Walter Benjamin and Jack Kerouac have come from very different backgrounds, and never met. Both seemed to have reserved personalities that the closest friends did admire and respect. Benjamin lived in the period between 1892 and 1940; Kerouac lived from 1922 to 1969. Their lives lasted practically the same, a little bit less than fifty years. The philosopher felt the consequences of the World War I and Nazi persecution in Europe. The American writer could

witness the horror of World War II, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and the ways in which their results affected his country and his generation.

Benjamin and Kerouac loved traveling. They were very fond of scrutinizing the world and what it had to show: different cultures, people, costumes, and a diversity of things. For them, traveling was like a beautiful and pleasurable sensation of searching for answers to their inquisitive minds. Kerouac used to hitchhike through the US, or rented a car with some friends and traveled to Mexico. Another way of hitting the road was actually the sea on a merchant boat. Kerouac made many trips working on boats, and in 1957 he bought a ticket on a Yugoslavian freighter bound from Brooklyn Busch Terminal for Tangier, Morocco, as he tells us in his book of travel memoirs, *Lonesome Traveler* (1960).

> A February morning in 1957 we sailed. I had a whole double stateroom to myself, all my books, peace, quiet and study. For once I was going to be a writer who didn't have to do other people's work. (KEROUAC, 2000, p. 118)

After spending some time in Africa, Kerouac goes to France, to Marseille. Just like Benjamin, he wandered through the city. "I went to a kind of bar that was open early Sunday morning where I sat on a table and drank hot coffee served by a dame in her bathrobe." (p. 132) Paris also fascinated Kerouac when he decided to spend some time in the 'Queen of the Cities'. He visited many places, and like Benjamin, he tried to get the secrets of the French capital revealed.

Benjamin once said: "traveling overcomes the old passions rooted in customary surroundings and gives one the chance to develop new ones."[66] According to Caygill, "Benjamin spent his life in nomadic quest for authentic

[66] CAYGILL, 2000, p. 78.

modern experience". For him, traveling was 'an international cultural action', one of the definitive forms of experience.[67]

Although they lived in distinct contexts, Benjamin and Kerouac also shared - besides the passion for traveling – a special way of seeing the conflicts and glories of their lifetime. Benjamin is the *avant-garde* philosopher, and Kerouac is one of the representatives of the *neo avant-garde* manifestation, the *Beat* Movement in America. The thoughts they had about many social and artistic aspects they witnessed in their lives were, surely, ahead of their time.

Benjamin and Kerouac also dealt with drug experiences. The two of them believed in inspiration through an altered state of consciousness. Writing about their visions and sensations under drug effects was something they seemed to enjoy, at least in the beginning. Walter Benjamin wrote about his experience with hashish, in which he had two doctors monitoring him in his research on the experimentation. Kerouac enjoyed smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol. However, one of his favorite drugs was 'Benzedrine' or 'speed'.[68] According to Ellis Amburn, the drug produced a feeling of excitement, confidence and an urge to convey seemingly new insights, "which made it irresistible to a compulsive writer as Jack Kerouac." (p.98) He wrote *On the Road* accompanied by 'Benny' (Benzedrine's friendly nickname). Hunt observes that Kerouac had a supply of Benzedrine, which helped him to type one hundred words a minute in a roll of shelf-paper. Kerouac announced,

> I'm going to get me a roll of shelf-paper, feed it into the typewriter, and just write it down as fast as I can, exactly like it happened, all in a rush, the hell with these phony architectures and worry about it later.[69]

[67] Idem, ibidem.
[68] See AMBURN, 1998, p. 97.
[69] KEROUAC In: HUNT, 1981, p.110.

Besides their same taste for Paris, their simple but genial and profound character, and their experiments with drugs, I would say that Kerouac and Benjamin had strong beliefs. The former was born into a Catholic French-Canadian family, in Massachusetts, and died a Catholic in Florida, after devoting a long period of his life to the Buddhist philosophy. The latter was interested in theology, and was introduced to the studies of Kabala by his friend Scholem. “Scholem had introduced Benjamin to the Kabala, an esoteric system of Jewish Gnosticism, and its classic text, the 13th century *Zohar*, written in Spain” (p. 144), as says Caygill.

2.2.3 On the Spontaneous Prose Style

Jack Kerouac had a particular way of writing his books, he was committed to letting his thoughts and feelings go freely. That was how he carved his style in the stone of *Beat* literature. The process of writing whatever comes to his mind, the carelessness about punctuation and form, he denominates as his “*spontaneous prose style*.” Spontaneity was, by the way, the basis of *Beat* behavior and writing. That was their differential trait in those years, the use of an unusual pattern that was in many ways aggressive to the American way of life.

This *spontaneous style* is characterized by a continuous flow of narration and, according to Kiernan: “it suffers all the mystical and aesthetical impulses, including the mundane and picaresque, too.”[70] It is more than an exercise of writing down the words; the technique searches to capture and express what is

[70] KIERNAN, p. 75. Translation Mine.

hidden in the deeper layers of consciousness. The use of drugs helped them to reach deeper levels of emotion, and because of this sort of experiences, Benjamin and Kerouac are seen as neo-romantics.

On the Road had a couple of versions before the one published in 1957, which is the fourth version of the novel. However, six years earlier, Kerouac worked "spontaneously" on one of them. Hunt comments on the April 1951 version of the novel,

> The April 1951 work on *On the Road* has become something of a legend. In later years Kerouac and some of his friends characterized the April work as a conscious act of literary revolution, a decision to write spontaneously and solely from inspiration rather than from preconceived notions about one's material. (1981, p. 110. See Appendices)

Kerouac wrote an article to the *Black Mountain Review*, in 1958, named *Essentials of Spontaneous, Prose* where he developed his ideas on the subject concerning the conscious critical mind, which might censor the richness of imagination. According to Hunt, he insists on the writer's obligation to explore the entire range of experience whether currently fashionable or not. In addition, Kerouac defends the way he sees spontaneity "as a matter of being free from society's perceptions." (p.118) However, before nominating his writing process as "spontaneous prose", Jack referred to it as "sketching". Hunt explains that sketching means a new relationship for Kerouac to his writing, because writing is no longer 'horizontal'; it becomes 'vertical' and involves 'wild form', a form 'beyond the novel'. Hunt quotes what Kerouac wrote:

> […] Wild form's the only form holds what I have to say – my mind is exploding to say something about every image and every memory…I have an irrational lust to set down everything I know …at this time in my life I'm making myself sick to find the wild form that can

> grow with my wild heart…because now I KNOW MY HEART DOES GROW.[71]

Hunt is emphatic to say that Kerouac's decision to sketch means trusting his own artistic impulse over any preconceived or learned sense of what writing novels involves.

Charters points out the significance of "just writing" for Kerouac. Due to his lack of interest in theorizing about his work, his *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* was written because of a request of Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs, after they had read the manuscript of *The Subterraneans* (which had been written in three days). Kerouac made a list of the *essentials*, in the article "*Belief & Technique for Modern Prose*"[72] published in the *Evergreen Review II*, in 1959. By listing thirty "tips" of what is, essentially, his secret for writing, Kerouac shows the basis for his method. Some of them: "try never to get drunk outside your own house", "be in love with your life", "something that you feel will find its own form", "write what you want bottomless from the bottom of the mind", "remove literary, grammatical and syntactical inhibition", "like Proust be an old teahead of time." (CHARTERS, p. 483)

These examples of what Kerouac thought about his own writing technique prove the geniality and innovation of what other great names as Percy Bysshe Shelley or James Joyce had also conceived in their respective time and as aesthetic moment. Shelley preached the predominance of inspiration and feeling, Joyce experimented on the *inner monologue*, so similar to spoken language. All great modernists, from Proust to Musil, to Virginia Woolf, to Guimarães Rosa, rely heavily on the "stream of consciousness"

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[71] KEROUAC In: HUNT, p. 121.
[72] See Appendices for the complete list.

technique. According to Woolf, “both in writing and in reading, emotion is what must come first.” (RITTER, 2002, p. 19) As Ritter says: “in and in tune with the modernist spirit of her time, Woolf proposes a new narrative” (p.20),

> Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon consciousness.[73]

The concept of Stream of Consciousness was developed in psychology. It covers the notion that one’s thoughts are not in fact orderly and well-formulated, but more of a jumbled-up sequence of associations, whereas the *inner monologue* is a narrative technique. In my point of view, Kerouac’s style has to do with both. Furthermore, it embraces the idea of following the flow of thoughts, associations and images uninterruptedly and stylistically influenced by the Buddhist idea of spontaneity. As Gotama Buddha says: “If you are now desirous of more perfectly understanding the Supreme Enlightenment, you must learn to answer questions spontaneously, with no recourse to discriminative thinking […]”[74] Kerouac also compares the influence of his process to a jazz musician who would blow his instrument as penetrating profoundly in the melody.

In the essay *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose*, the author defines nine important features to his style: the setting-up, the procedure, the method, the scope, the lag in procedure, the timing, the center of interest, the structure of the work and the mental state. About “method”, Kerouac cites William Carlos Williams and writes,

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[73] WOOLF In: RITTER, p. 20.
[74] Cf. KEROUAC In: CHARTERS, p. 486.

> No periods separating sentence-structures already arbitrarily riddled by false colons and timid usually needless commas – but the vigorous space dash separating rhetorical breathing (as jazz musician drawing breath between outblown phrases) – 'measured pauses which are the essentials of our speech' – 'divisions of the *sounds* we hear' – 'time and how to note it down.' (quoted from William Carlos William)[75]

Although Kerouac does not particularly like to write about his writing, he succeeds in exposing his ideas, in several essays, about himself as a writer and as a critic. *The first word: Jack Kerouac takes a fresh look at Jack Kerouac*[76] is a good example of his concern about his place in literature. Here he develops his view about the spontaneous writing, its proposal and meaning, by making an observation: "In another sense spontaneous, or ad lib, artistic writing imitates as best it can the flow of the mind as it moves in its space-time continuum. In this sense it may be called Space Age Prose someday […]."[77] The author associates the writing process to astronauts in space: "they have no chance to stop, reconsider and go back." (p. 488)

Soon after the publication of *On the Road*, Truman Capote made the following comment: "This is not writing, this is typewriting". To me, this shows a surprising lack of information of what Kerouac is doing, on Capote's part, and denotes a bit of envy as well. The fact remains, anyway, that Kerouac's spontaneous way of registering his thoughts, like a nonstop flight to the unconsciousness, has brought about the most varied kinds of reaction on the part of his critics. In the same essay (*The First Word: Jack Kerouac takes a fresh look at Jack Kerouac*), when he is feeling depressed, Jack writes,

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[75] KEROUAC, 1967, In: CHARTERS, p.484.
[76] Idem, p. 486-488. Published in Escaped XII, in January 1967.
[77] Idem, ibidem.

> And now my hand doesn't move as fast as it used to, and so many critics have laughed at me for those 16 originally-styled volumes of mine published in 16 languages in 42 countries, never for one moment calling me 'sensitive' or artistically dignified but an unlettered literary hoodlum with diarrhea of the mouth […] (1967)

In *Are Writers Made or Born?*[78] Kerouac defines 'genius' as someone who "originates something never known before" and ponders about talent and originality as he mentions various important names of literature. The matter concerning "genius" comes out with the romantics who rely heavily on inspiration, what – in a certain way – is followed by their successors, the Moderns. James Joyce is included in that category. Kerouac comments, "Take the case of James Joyce; people said he 'wasted' his 'talent' on the stream of consciousness, when in fact he was simply *born* to originate it."[79] Jackson Pollock, another among Kerouac's idols, received praise and respect in the article for his wonderful "crazy method."

Pollock's technique of throwing and splashing paint in the canvas was probably meaningful for Kerouac. "Action painting", that expression would define Pollock's style: it was a way of getting spontaneously involved in art, never predicting what the result was going to be. This painter's procedure – like Joyce's – might have influenced Kerouac's style.

[78] Kerouac's article published in January 1962, in *Writers' Digest* XLII, 1.
[79] KEROUAC, 1962 In: CHARTERS, p. 488.

2.2.4 The *Beat*niks in New York and San Francisco

The interwar libertarian culture in the United States becomes stronger with the *Beat Generation.* Initially, it consists of a group of friends; later it turns into a movement that would change people's behavior and attitudes, as well as influence the following counterculture movements yet to come. *Beatnik* is the mixture of the words *Beat* and *Sputnik* (the Russian satellite). According to High, the *Beat*s were the new rebel-heroes that Norman Mailer described in his essay *The White Negro.* They called themselves *Beat*s because they felt *Beat*en (defeated) by society, and because they loved the strong, free *Beat* of jazz. "For them, fear of the future was part of the illness of modern society." (HIGH, p. 190)

The *Beatniks* originally start hanging around in New York. Kerouac dates and lives with Edie Parker in her New York apartment, between 1943 and 1945. There he is introduced to Lucien Carr, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs. He meets Neal Cassady a little bit later. This apartment becomes the birthplace of the *Beat Generation*. Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassady and

William Burroughs used to live or walk in Greenwich Village, where they would meet at coffee houses, jazz clubs or someone's place. Many of them met at the University of Columbia, where Kerouac received a football scholarship to carry on his studies.

Besides New York – a place so much imbued with the spirit of Jazz that it got, from Jazz musicians, the nickname of the Big Apple[80] –, the *Beatniks* found place and in San Francisco, as well. The Zen atmosphere in the Californian city inspired the *Beatniks* into a mystical experience. Buddhism influenced them and their work. Amburn comments, "In 1955, Kerouac, a homeless wanderer, would shortly popularize *Beat* Generation concepts in San Francisco and begin to disseminate a message of mystical-religious awareness." (p.218) The key to the *Beatnik* spirit is, however, exactly the nomadic characteristic. They could be in New York, Colorado, California, Mexico or Europe – anywhere could be a good place for adventures and for fighting against the "Establishment". The road was very meaningful to them; it was a reliable "exit", a relief from boredom. The metaphor of the *road* symbolizes an escape, in which experience ca be reached. It is always ready when one needs to hit it.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti was one of the California poets, and his bookstore "The City Lights Bookstore" was a great mark to the *Beat* history. In fact, Ferlinghetti was responsible for publishing many *Beat* books. Amburn wrote,

> A thirty-six-year old former New Yorker, Ferlinghetti had earned his doctoral degree at the Sorbonne before settling in San Francisco and starting the magazine "City Lights", named after a Charlie Chaplin movie. The magazine operated out of the second floor of a building at Broadway and Columbus in North Beach. Ferlinghetti later opened the City Lights Bookstore on the floor below and kept it open until midnight and 2 A.M. on weekends. He also established a

[80] The jazz musicians used to call every city where they would perform as "apple", thus New York was the *Big Apple*.

> book publishing company called City Lights, which published Ferlinghetti's *Pictures of the Gone World* in 1955 in the Pocket Poet Series. (p.225)

Amburn quotes Ferlinghetti: "The *Howl* reading…immediately dissolved the rust of a couple of decades of American poetry [which was] really in the doldrums at the time." (p. 225) Ferlinghetti got himself into trouble, by the way, when he published Ginsberg's poem *Howl* (1956). *Howl* was considered obscene for its raw words and content. Although it was influenced by Walt Whitman's style, Ginsberg put together free form with polemical ideas, such as drug-taking habits, homosexuality and political attacks. *Howl* was dedicated to Carl Solomon, whom Ginsberg met in a Mental Hospital, in New York.

> I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,
> Dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix
> Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable dollars!
> Children screaming under the stairways! Boys sobbing in armies!
> Old men weeping in the parks![81]

Ferlinghetti also wrote poetry, as High says: "he is another *Beat* movement poet. In *Coney Island of the Mind* (1958), he describes the poet as a public performer."(HIGH, p. 192) Actually, *Beat* poetry performance must be effective and provocative.

> Constantly risking absurdity and death
> whenever he performs above the heads of his audience
> The poet like an acrobat climbs on rime
> to a high wire of his own making
> And balances on eyebeams above a sea of faces […][82]

[81] GINSBERG'S poem *Howl* In: HIGH, p.191.
[82] FERLINGHETTI'S *A Coney Island of the Mind* In: Idem, ibidem.

Kerouac's first book of poetry is *San Francisco Blues* (1954). According to Ann Charters, there were many reasons why Kerouac was attracted to the blues: "perhaps because he felt that its structure allowed him the most free and spontaneous approach to the merging of text and sound." (p. 449) He wished his poems to be heard with a jazz background.

(1)

I see the backs
Of old men
Rolling slowly into
Black stores
Line-faced, moustached
Black men
With Army weathered brown hats
Stomp on by with bags
Of burlap and rue
Talking to secret companions
With long hair
In the sidewalk on Third Street
San Francisco
With the rain of exhaust
Plicking in the mist
You see in black store doors
Heading trucks plopping
Vastly city[83]

About his poetic "system", Kerouac says,

> In my system, the form of blues choruses is limited by the small page of the breastpocket notebook in which they are written, like the form of a set number of bars in a jazz blues chorus, and so sometimes the word-meaning can carry from one chorus into another, or not, just like the phrase-meaning can carry harmonically from one chorus to the other, or not, in jazz, so that, in these blues as in jazz, the form is determined by time, and by the musician's spontaneous phrasing & harmonizing with the *Beat* of the time as it waves & waves on by in measured choruses.
> It's all gotta be non stop ad libbing within each chorus, or the gig is shot.[84]

The *Beat*niks enjoyed their reading encounters, where they would exchange ideas and talk about their free writing style. Sometimes they would

[83] KEROUAC In: CHARTERS, p. 453.
[84] Idem, ibidem.

meet in different states. Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady loved to cross the country to join other members of the "gang".

William Burroughs is an important name in the *Beat* scenery. From 1944 to 1957, Burroughs was a heroin addict and the experience was important to his fiction. As High says, "his novels are a complete dream world, filled with terrible nightmares."[85] *Junkie* (1953), his first novel, was originally entitled *Junk.* Burroughs becomes famous in America and in Europe as an *avant-garde* writer. His collection of short stories, *The Naked Lunch*, is also important for his career and for the new direction of American Literature in the sixties and seventies.

> There is only one thing a writer can write about – what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing...I am a recording instrument I do not impose 'story', 'plot' or 'continuity'.[86]

Despite his homosexual preference, Burroughs married Joan Vollmer – a journalism student. And due to a legal problem related to drugs, they spent a period in Mexico City with their children. Joan had one child with her previous husband and another with Bill (as she called Burroughs). William Burroughs' passion for drugs and guns was notary and helped to cause his wife's death as consequence of their William Tell number. Bill and Joan enjoyed playing that trick in front of their friends. In order to demonstrate his shooting ability, he would shoot a glass located on Joan's head. Until, one day, he failed.

In the movie *Beat*[87], Kiefer Sutherland plays William Burroughs, and Courtney Love plays Joan Vollmer. Besides showing the event, this production highlights Vollmer's solitude and devotion to Bill, which seems to have been

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[85] See HIGH, p.193.
[86] BURROUGHS In: HIGH, p. 193.
[87] One of the few about the *Beatniks* available in the Brazilian videostores. *Beat* (*Anos Loucos*) was released in 2001 and directed by Gary Walkow.

very close to the real facts. After the tragic outcome of such crazy and risky play, Burroughs went to court and was absolved. In the eighties, Burroughs participated of a theater project, in which he rewrote a German folkloric tale about a clerk who makes a Faustian pact, giving the text a more contemporary format. Along with the composer Tom Waits and some famous producers, the play was a success in America and is still being performed in Europe.

Some of the *Beat* writers spent a while in Paris living in a hotel like real Parisian artists, away from moralistic America. The hotel was perfect for their lifestyle because there were no strict rules to be followed there, and, according to Leonor Amarante[88], the owner – Madam Rochou – treated them very nicely. I had the opportunity to visit the hotel, which is located on *Gît-le-Coeur* St., and as I entered the lobby in 2001, I could see some of those *Beat* years through pictures of Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg on the wall.

Many times the *Beatniks* were seen as mad people, but their "insanity" was fundamental to build the history of this phase of American literature, culture and art. Their spontaneity has been imitated by many writers, composers, artists, and by those willing to speak up their minds freely.

[88] AMARANTE, *A Paris beatnik,* available at the website: http://www.capitu.com.br, in December 2003.

3 A Critical Analysis: *On the Road* and the *Flâneur*

Opinions are to the vast apparatus of social existence what oil is to machines: one does not go up to a turbine and pour machine oil over it; one applies a little to hidden spindles and joints that one has to know.

Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*

3.1 *On the Road* within the tradition of Travel Literature

On the Road is a beautiful adventure about passion, and it is important to make clear what passion means here: the passion for the unknown, for the differences and similarities among members of the human race, for the simple things, for nature, for music, for freedom, for friendship, for youth, for life. The novel exhibits a complete search for the self and for the meaning of existence.

> It was with a great deal of silly relief that these people let us off the car at the corner of 27th and Federal. Our battered suitcases were piled on the sidewalk again; we had longer ways to go. But no matter, the road is life. (*OR*, p. 192)

What Sal Paradise says about the road, in the passage above, is, in my view, the essence of the book. “The road is life” translates the expectations of one entire generation.

For a long time, this premise that *the road is life* has fed the tradition of Travel Literature. The road could be considered life in different aspects, and understood as life, through different viewpoints. The life on the road becomes history when pilgrims travel long distances to be closer to their religious beliefs; when expeditions travel the sea for months or years to discover and colonize different lands; when people - because of wars, plagues or famine - run away from their own country and look for new conditions of living in another place; when personal, or business interests move families from a place to another. There are uncountable reasons for traveling, and many kinds of travel: pilgrimage, exploration, escape, exile, emigration, adventure, and tourism. It is appropriate to mention here that, in North American culture, traveling is very important and it is related to the formation of the myth of the American Dream, of which the positive and negative implications constitute the Beatniks’ focus of interest.

The function and way of traveling changes through time, and along with those changes, a new genre of literature hits the publishing market, as well as the readers’ attention. Several books on the theme, or related to it have become bestsellers in different moments of literary history. Homer’s *Odyssey*, Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, Jules Verne’s *Around the World* in *Eighty Days*, Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, just to cite some of the books which deal with travels.

Poem, fiction, journalism and memoirs are forms of writing about life on the road, connecting that with fantasy, science, history, or personal experience. Peter Hulme, professor of literature at the University of Essex, says that,

> Travel writing provides some of the most powerful, elegant, and engaged texts in all contemporary literature. Drawing on political journalism, romantic interlude, philosophical meditation, autobiographical memoir, literary criticism and ethnographic record, travel writing ranges across the whole of the modern world, dealing with issues as varied as the environment, indigenous cultures, postcolonial history, and contemporary genocides.[89]

The material produced by traveling writing authors offers the readers a vast imaginary through the most various narratives, plots and characters. There are ways to divide the kinds of travel stories in distinct categories, therefore the right place for a narrative as *On the Road* is in the road trip category, whereas *Moby-Dick* is in the sea and *Gulliver's Travels* in the outer limit category, for example. Obviously one story can fit more than one travel literature category. Since the first records on the genre, writers have been making a point throughout their traveling works, and the range of this kind of literature has dealt in many directions. However, the last decades have altered the tradition of travel writing and reinforced the tendency of travel books specialized in tourism, which bring suggestions about plenty of hotels, restaurants, shopping areas, in specific places.

On the Road takes an important place in the tradition of travel literature, not only because of the adventures throughout America presented and told by the first person narrator Sal Paradise, but also because the novel features elements that

[89] HULME In: *Contemporary Travel Writing*, available at http://courses.essex.ac.uk, visited in January 2003.

allow the reader to share the emotions and feelings with the characters in the book. It feels like hitchhiking with them around the US and Mexico, enjoying the jazz beat in the same clubs they go to or, yet, experimenting the sensations of being on the road without leaving home. If it is true that, when one plans a trip, one's spirit goes first, so the good travel story functions similarly to that, making the reader's imagination visit and feel the landscape and places that are being mentioned. Furthermore, it is valid to refer to Rouanet's idea again, that the human condition is still connected to the condition of the traveler. (p.61) For Wladimir Krysinski,

> The travel implies the progresses of the literary discourse. The travel conditions the reports and the symbolic forms that intervene among the traveler-narrator, the space and the time. Those reports and those forms are driven by a discourse that inserts its subjectivity in the objectivity of the real, historical, social and political."[90]

In *On the Road*, Sal Paradise travels from one side of the country to the other, observing different aspects of national usages in each state he passes through, questioning identity and cultural differences among his own compatriots. It is common for travel narratives to depict the thematic of otherness, contrasting situations such as the differences from two nations or the sense of identity between margins and center. Except for the trip to Mexico, Kerouac shows his concerns about how Americans face the social circumstances of post-war reality. When in Mexican territory, Sal and Dean take advantage of the cheap living standard and the poor conditions of that country by adventuring on its roads, dealing with its people, and its women. The Mexicans are the 'other' for them. On the other hand,

[90] KRYSINSKI In: Organon, n° 34, 2003, p. 23. Translation Mine.

to the Mexicans, they are placed in the role of the other. As Paradise comments below,

> Everybody became so high that usual formalities were dispensed with and the things of immediate interest were concentrated on, and now it was the strangeness of Americans and Mexicans blasting together on the desert and, more than that, the strangeness of seeing in close proximity the faces and pores of skins and calluses of fingers and general abashed cheekbones of another world. (*OR*, p. 258)

As an autobiographical work, the novel features many possibilities of reading, but it is important to notice that, above all, it dominates a generation's lifestyle in the fifties. The Beat writers found their identity as an artistic movement traveling in the States, which inspired Kerouac to put reality and fiction together in order to claim that social and artistic changes were necessary. Furthermore, the novel is about the most complex kind of travel: the search for the self, a trip which the main purpose is to get in contact with inner feelings by crossing unvisited limits and broadening personal horizons. *On the Road* is a landmark in traditional traveling literature for its confessional simplicity.

Kerouac wrote other books about traveling. *Lonesome Traveler*, for instance, is about some of his trips inside the United States, to Mexico, Morocco and Europe. The author presents his own work in the book's introduction: "*Lonesome Traveler* is a collection of published and unpublished pieces connected together because they have a common theme: traveling." (2000, pp. 9-10) He describes the content of the book, as follows,

> Railroad work, sea work, mysticism, mountain work, lasciviousness, solipsism, self-indulgence, bullfights, drugs, churches, art museums, streets of cities, a mishmash of life as lived by an independent educated penniless rake going anywhere. Its scope and purpose is simply poetry, or, natural description. (2000, p. 10)

In *Satori in Paris* (1966), another example of Kerouac's travel literature, the days spent in the French capital are described in the sense of a "spiritual journey", rather than only a geographical report.

3.2 The relevance of authorship in Kerouac's work

The experience of traveling is not only related to knowing different landscapes, cultures and customs, but also to a great opportunity that an individual has – in the middle of a bustling life – of being closer to his deeper feelings and thoughts. Therefore, this could be called a self-knowledge trip. Michel Peterson (2003) says that,

> The travel concerns the *autopoiesis* – borrowing Francisco Varela's term –, in other words, the process of reproduction of the self by the self, is what makes the encounter a proper moment of self-transcendence, aepiphanic instant that, sometimes, authorizes the quantum jumps, through which we accede to the stranger without burning the lands already cultivated. (Translation Mine)

By writing, Kerouac investigates something in his interior; something to calm his anxieties towards society and himself. Philippe Lejeune says, about the genre of autobiography, that: "there must be identity between the *author*, the *narrator*, and the *protagonist*."[91] This remark seems to be a little simplistic when approaching an autobiographical narrative; anyway, it proves the identity unity of Kerouac's work, in which the triad author-narrator-protagonist (Kerouac-Paradise-Paradise) transmits the same discourse. Although, some critics see Dean Moriarty (Neal Cassady) as the protagonist of the story, in this research, I will treat him as

[91] LEJEUNE In: ANDERSON, 2001, p. 02.

an indispensable character in the novel, but not as the protagonist. In my opinion, Sal Paradise is the one who guides the reader throughout his adventures with Dean and his well-aimed displacements in the narrative space.

According to Linda Anderson, the "autobiography" has been recognized as a distinct literary genre since the eighteenth century and, as such, becomes an important testing ground for critical controversies about a range of ideas including authorship, selfhood, representation and the frontiers between fact and fiction.[92] Anderson, based on Laura Marcus' thoughts, says that,

> The nineteenth century saw a gradual alignment of autobiography with the value accorded to authorship. If one of the anxieties around early discussions was the public exposure of the private self, it is also the case that autobiography gradually comes to be the site where genius, and in particular literary genius, could be established as 'internally' valuable, without reference to other 'outside judgments'.[93]

Linda Anderson (2001) has collected, in her book, much of the autobiographical writing history, from Saint Augustine's *Confessions* – through Freud, Lacan, Barthes, Derrida and other theorists' collaborations for the study of the genre – up to other authors' interesting thoughts on the subject. According to Anderson, Julia Swindells has raised a "more wide-ranging but similarly optimistic account of the new radical uses of autobiography,

[92] Cf. ANDERSON, p. 01.
[93] MARCUS apud ANDERSON, p. 07.

> Autobiography now has the potential to be the text of the oppressed and the culturally displaced, forging a right to speak both for and beyond the individual. People in a position of powerlessness – women, black people, working-class people – have more than begun to insert themselves into the culture via autobiography, via the assertion of a 'personal' voice, which speaks beyond itself.[94]

As a Beat writer, Kerouac is culturally displaced; actually, he and his friends are recognized as part of the American counterculture, hence Swindells' commentary can help to better understand Kerouac's project in *On the Road*. In the novel, Kerouac sees, through the gentle neo-romantic narrator/protagonist Sal Paradise's critical point of view, more than hitchhiking adventures on American routes. He writes about the relationship between individualism and society in the US of the 40s and 50s. The Beat Generation is remarkable for having been resistant to values of the Western world; they were not used to having steady means of making money and living a regular life. Such similarities are expressed through all characters' life style in the novel. Clearly, the author cares about lending his voice to depict an important moment of American social-history.

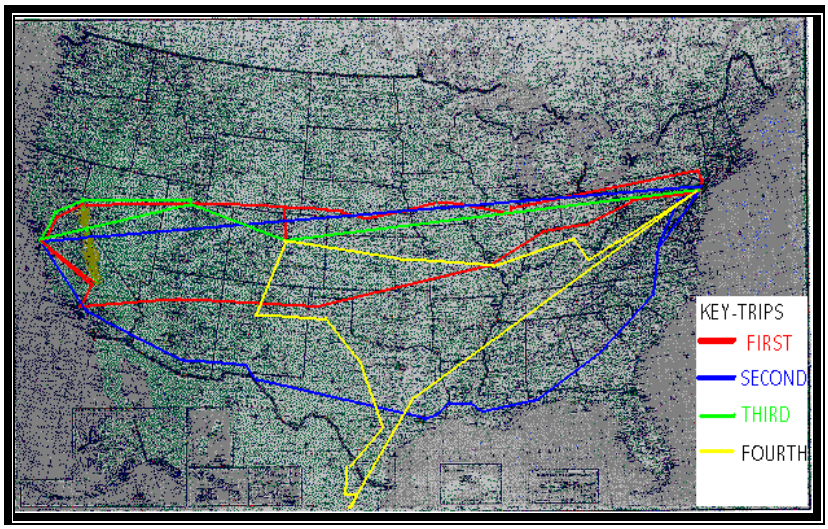
Kerouac has written about his writing and how he felt about giving confessional value to his work. For Olney, autobiographies are seen as providing proof of the validity and importance of a certain conception of authorship: that authors have authority over their own texts and, that their writings can be read as forms of direct access to themselves.[95] I assume that Kerouac worries about the nearness between his text's artistic refinement and the idea from which it

[94] SWINDELLS, 1995, In: ANDERSON, 2001, pp. 103-104.
[95] OLNEY, In: ANDERSON, p. 03.

originates, as well as a narrower gap between art and life. In one of his articles, Kerouac wrote about the importance of telling the truth,

> If you don't stick to what you first thought, and the words the thought brought, what's the sense of bothering with it anyway, what's the sense of foisting your little lies on others, or, that is, hiding your little truths from others?[96]

Kerouac's *On the Road* can commonly be divided in four parts equivalent to the numbers of trips Paradise and his 'pals' take. This way of dividing the novel comprises: the first trip, from New York to Denver, to San Francisco, to L.A.; the second trip, from Virginia to New York, to New Orleans, to San Francisco; the third trip, from New York to San Francisco, and back again; and the fourth is New York to Denver and, finally, to Mexico.



[96] KEROUAC, *The first word:* Jack Kerouac takes a fresh look at Jack Kerouac. In: CHARTERS, p. 486.

Paradise's itineraries are diversified by other stops in places like New Jersey, Illinois, Michigan and Texas. However, it is interesting that Paradise always returns to the origin point, that is, New York. According to Tim Hunt, a careful examination of *On the Road* shows that Kerouac deliberately organizes the four trips as distinct stages in the narrator's growth, and carefully borrows classic American motifs to measure the novel's incidents and characters.[97]

During these trips (or parts), Paradise sees new places and different people. This allows him to achieve new experiences and knowledge about life. Throughout the narrative, Paradise transits from the condition of a naïve boy to the condition of a man who, after passing through many situations, is capable of reflecting on important subjects concerning his country, other people and the complexity of fulfilling himself.

At the beginning of part one, Sal Paradise is sad because of the separation from his wife. He recovers his enthusiasm with the idea of writing his book and going West:

> So, leaving my big half-manuscript sitting on top of my desk, and folding back my comfortable home sheets […]. I left with my canvas bag in which a few fundamental things were packed and took off for the Pacific Ocean with the fifty dollar in my pocket." (*OR*, p. 11)

During this trip, he has, for the first time, a real contact with himself, "I didn't know who I was […] I was half-way across America, at the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future […]." (*OR*, p.16) Paradise spends a while in Colorado with some friends and, then, goes to California, where Moriarty

[97] See Tim Hunt, p. 03.

intends to meet him. In the second and third trips, Paradise travels around several towns with some of his friends, decides to finish his book. His friendship with Dean Moriarty gets stronger. Paradise talks about Dean's visit to Sal's aunt in Long Island: "We were so used to traveling we had to walk all over Long Island, but there was no more land, just the Atlantic ocean, and we could only go so far. We clasped hands and agreed to be friends forever." (*OR*, p.224) In the fourth trip, Paradise has already sold his book, "I came into some money from selling my book. I straightened out my aunt with rent for the rest of the year." (*OR*, p. 227)

In Mexico, Paradise has the chance to deal with the feelings of deception and frustration, when finding out that Dean Moriarty is not as trustful as he wished him to be. At the end, Paradise shows to be a human being who understands and forgives the others.

In the preface of the *Book of Dreams* (1961), Kerouac starts by explaining to the reader what the book is all about, and refers to the characters in his novels. The author also states that the "spirit never rests" and gives a list of characters. Kerouac refers to people he met in real life that inspired him to the creation of the characters in the books *On the Road*, *The Subterraneans* (1958) and *The Dharma Bums* (1958). The characters are forged upon Kerouac's impressions from people of his relations. In *On the Road*, Sal Paradise mirrors Kerouac himself. Dean Moriarty is based on Neal Cassady; Carlo Marx on Allen Ginsberg; "Old Bull" Lee on William Burroughs; Camille Moriarty on Carolyn Cassady; Sal Paradise's aunt on Grabielle L'Evesque Kerouac (Kerouac's mother), for instance.

Another interesting point about this novel is the presence of several references to music, movies, writers and philosophers, which determine Kerouac's real taste for jazz, cinema and literature, through Paradise's fiction. Thomas Wolfe is one of Kerouac's important influences, and he is mentioned in *On the Road* more than once when Sal narrates: "No, no, no, you're talking bullshit and Wolfean romantic posh!' said Carlo." (*OR*, p. 44) Ellis Amburn, who was Kerouac's editor in the 1960's, emphasizes Wolfe's influence in Kerouac's life, as he refers to the outcome of an argument between Jack and his father, Leo:

> Hinting that Jack was no longer welcome at home, Leo suggested he look up his childhood friend Mike Fournier, who might help him to find a job as a gas-station attendant in East Hartford, Connecticut. In a late September 1941 letter to Sammy, Jack described how he glided out of New Heaven aboard a train bound for Hartford, the autumn air pregnant with the enchanting and numinous feel of his favorite month, October. He urged Sammy to read *Of Time and the River*, Wolfe's autobiographical saga of a young man's search for fulfillment in which Wolfe wrote, '*All things on earth point home in old October: sailors to sea, travelers to walls and fences…the lover to the love he has forsaken*.' The novel's mysterious refrain, '*of wandering forever and the earth again*', appealed strongly to the future author of *On the Road* […] Kerouac called Wolfe the first of his many literary angels. (AMBURN, p. 58)

In addition to Thomas Wolfe, we can trace other influences like: Jack London, Hemingway, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Rimbaud, Dostoevski, Hart Crane, all mentioned in the novel and – somehow – important to the author during his life. The movies *Sullivan's Travels* and *Of Mice and Men* were also something that Kerouac enjoyed and, in a way or another, played an important part in his life, to the extent of being included in his novel.

When authorship is concerned, another important question shall be asked: to what extent is writing a sort of *catharsis* to the author, through this connection of

fiction and life? Perhaps, it is a *catharsis* to the extent that he can put in words all his thoughts, feelings and fears when he is not on the road. The road seems to be a process of catharsis both to Kerouac and to his character Paradise.

Kerouac's first attempts to write *On the Road* took place – according to Ann Charters – during his first trips across country with Cassady, between 1947 and 1950. However, in April 1951, he writes a roll manuscript of *On the Road* in three weeks, in New York City. In October of the same year, Kerouac starts to rewrite *On the Road* as the book *Visions of Cody*. In 1957, *On the Road* is published by the Viking Press in New York. Therefore, *On the Road* was not written in three weeks in a nonstop crazy typing act, "but had evolved over several years of hard work and experimentation" (HUNT, p.xv), as wrote Tim Hunt. The process of writing the novel reinforces Kerouac's authority over the work, because he is very worried about the novel's consistency in accordance with his own life. Hunt adds,

> Kerouac's 'spontaneous prose' wasn't simply – or even primarily – a matter of writing quickly; it also seemed to offer a way to clarify his metaphors for writing and define the actual terms of his practice – his sense of style, his stance, his central concerns.[98]

Looking again at Benjamin's essay *The Storyteller* in which he highlights the importance of experience to storytelling due to the fact that it grants what to tell, I would say that the author of any work of art really owns the voice of it, when he exposes his experience to the reader.

For Benjamin, the storyteller's experience reflects on the art of storytelling. Kerouac's *On the Road* is, indisputably, a narrative of his own experiences,

[98] Idem, p. xvi.

therefore, – in my point of view – a good and complete storytelling. Hunt says Kerouac's letters and journal show that he adapts his experiences to serve his thematic ends, that is: "he omits or modifies events that would undercut the reader's impression of Sal's naiveté." (HUNT, p.5) Hunt tells us that,

> In March 1951, just before drafting *On the Road*, Kerouac read Murray's introduction and underlined "Melville was not writing autobiography in the usual sense, but, from first to last, the biography of his self-image". Kerouac also is writing a "biography of his self-image." Autobiography in the "usual sense" is unreflexive and anecdotal. This is certainly what is meant when *On the Road* is criticized as being superficially autobiographical. But biography is reflexive and interpretive. Details of the life are selected and arranged according to some principle of illustration. In *On the Road*, Sal is certainly an image of Kerouac but an image which Kerouac uses to measure his own growth and to explore his interaction with his cultural heritage.[99]

Having established a difference between "autobiography" and "self-image biography" towards the work of *On the Road*, Hunt makes the question of authorship even more intriguing. Kerouac, through his narrator and characters, re-visits the story of his life, based on events that happened in the narrative period between 1947 and 1949. This narrative offers a combination of memories and aspirations in the stages of a personal path. Paradise's dreams, emotions and frustrations demonstrate not only the character's search, but also the author's own personal search for "purity of perception and expression." (HUNT, p.119) At the beginning of the book, Paradise is a student who decides to take some time off. During the story, the character grows, progressively, by learning through his trips around the country and with his hero, Moriarty.

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[99] Idem, ibidem. (According to Hunt, the book's reference is: MURRAY, Henry. *Introduction to Pierre* or *the ambiguities by Herman Melville.* New York: Hendricks House, 1949.)

In 1973, in a letter to Kerouac, the writer John Clellon Holmes (Kerouac's friend) writes,

> The experience [Kerouac] flings into *On the Road* was always associated in his mind with Neal; the vision of America and the West and the footloose life of Road all came initially from Neal – that is, it was Jack's fascination with Neal's persona that opened all that up to him. So that after he had gotten down the surface of the life, the 'road experience,' he found that he hadn't really caught the kernel towards which that experience had been driving him all along – that is, the [to him] mystery of Neal's character, the sources of his freedom, what drove him, etc. I think it was out of this feeling that he hadn't accomplished what he'd wanted to in Road that he gravitated naturally back to Neal [in life] and thus went on writing about him. (HUNT, pp. 118-119)

According to Hunt, before *On the Road*'s publication in 1957, Kerouac sees writing as an act of perceiving the internal and external worlds, and also, an act of self-affirmation and a gesture toward the social world. When questioning his motives for writing, says Hunt, "Kerouac feels the need to discovery new ways to address his audience." (p.119) In October 1951, Kerouac discovers his own method and, since then, he becomes against the changes he has to do in his text when reviewing it to be published because, for him, refining a text goes against his aesthetical convictions.

In conclusion to this part on the matter of authorship, it is adequate to reinforce that when Kerouac created his 'spontaneous style', he made his mark in the American literature, and when he said, "always considered writing my duty on earth", he seemed to be aware of his responsibilities to his work, and the consequences to come. Kerouac invented a "new way of writing by fusing local

talk, blown jazz, a scribe's eye, relentless self-examination, the grammar of the dreams, memory glee, and gloominess about our short lives."[100]

3.3 The role of the *Flâneur* in *On the Road*

As seen before, *On the Road* is full of self-image content what makes possible to say that Kerouac's self-image character, Sal Paradise, has the power to determine some of his attitudes and social behavior by living a fictional life in a very similar way as the writer's own life. Sal enjoys life on the road and is very fond of getting to know other places, as well as observing the people around and his own sensations towards the country's political, social, cultural and artistic novelties. As it has been mentioned before, "Kerouac sees spontaneity as a matter of being free from social perceptions and of looking freshly at his material." (HUNT, p.118) Evidently, Paradise is the spontaneous result of that look.

The *flânerie* here refers to observing and feeling people, places, symbols and life not only through the eyes, but also through one's heart. Walter Benjamin used the term *flâneur* for nominating someone who, in the end of the nineteenth century, would walk down the streets of Paris to contemplate the city, paying attention to monuments, places, different types of people, architecture, fashion and, most of all, the changes made throughout the years of modernization. The

[100] MARION, Paul, 1999, In: KEROUAC, 1999, Introduction.

scenery of that time is reflected on Baudelaire's poetry, in which the *flâneur* appears as the one who breathes the city and wonders about life.

For Benjamin, the *flâneur* model is also the one who wanders through the streets of Paris, questioning about modernization and its consequences, exactly as he did himself. My point is that, like Benjamin, Kerouac also has his *flâneur*. The context and questions may be different but the inquisitive spirit is, indeed, very similar. Sal Paradise is the *flâneur* in the novel, and his role is to show, as Kerouac's self-image, what he sees in and how he sees that society. In *On the Road*, the presence of the *flâneur* is strong and remarkable; he is not only walking around the big city, but he is also around the whole country and outside the national boundaries. He walks, hitchhikes, and travels by car or by bus. He is free to wander as he pleases. Even though he practices his *flânerie* in Mexico and Europe, the *flâneur* is contextualized in the American postwar II, and his main concern is in/about New York and San Francisco. Benjamin wrote,

> […] There was also the *flâneur* who demanded elbow room and was unwilling to forgo the life of a gentleman of leisure.
> Let the many attend to their daily affairs; the man of leisure can indulge in the perambulations of the *flâneur* only if as such he is already out of place. He is as much out of place in an atmosphere of complete leisure as in the feverish turmoil of the city. (1969, pp. 172-173)

Jack Kerouac lived in many places: Massachusetts, New York, California, a period in Europe, and in the end of his life, in Florida (with his mother), where he died. His spirit was unquiet, he could not settle in the same place for long. Kerouac's need to move was his way of provoking the American patterns; during

his youth he did not want to follow the American way of living by taking up residence in only one place. The movie *Heart Beat*[101], a production based on the lives of Kerouac, shows this restlessness very well, as it refers to Neal Cassady and his wife Carolyn Cassady (represented in *On the Road* as Camille). The movie, however, presents the idea that, deep inside, Kerouac's dream was settling up and having exactly what he avoided during his lifetime: a wife, kids, a house and a steady job. Nevertheless, as a Beatnik, Kerouac's geographical and spiritual search for freedom is factual.

> You embark upon the Voyage, face eager, eyes aflame with the passion of traveling, spirits brimming with gaiety, levity, and a flamboyant carelessness that tries to conceal the wild delight with which this mad venture fills you. […] You see the old familiar things: streets with time-worn names, houses with barren roofs and upthrusting chimneys, staring tiredly at the same old sky, the same old heavens, the same old ashen emptiness. (KEROUAC, 1999, p.57)

The extract above is from Kerouac's *Where the Road Begins*, part of the selection of some early short stories and writings in *Atop an Underwood*, edited by Paul Marion, in 1999. Through fictional characters, Kerouac tells about his impressions when leaving to college in New York.

Hanna Arendt wrote in the introduction of Benjamin's *Illuminations* that,

> The wasteland of an American suburb, or the residential districts of many towns, where all of street life takes place on the roadway and where one can walk on the sidewalks, by now reduced to footpaths, for miles on end without encountering a human being, is the very opposite of Paris. What all other cities seem to permit only reluctantly to the dregs of society – strolling, idling, flânerie – Paris streets actually invite everyone to do. Thus, ever since the Second Empire the city has been the paradise of all those who need to chase after no livelihood, pursue no career, reach

[101] Directed by John Byrum in 1980, with Nick Nolte as Neal Cassady, Sissy Spacek as Carolyn Cassady, and John Heard as Jack Kerouac. Title in Portuguese: *Os Beatniks.*

> no goal – the paradise, then, of bohemians, and not only of artists and writers but of all those who have gathered about them because they could not be integrated either politically – being homeless or stateless – or socially. (ARENDT, 1969, p.21)

Mrs. Arendt offers an accurate remark according to Benjamin's impression about Paris. The philosopher saw the city as the perfect place for the *flâneur*. Independently of Benjamin's opinion, it is known that Paris is a very exciting city that has been the home of many thinkers and intellectuals. New York City has become the New World's capital of the bohemia, and it was on Times Square that the Beat Generation was born. If Paris was Baudelaire's and Benjamin's ideal place for the *flâneur* in the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, New York was perfect for the *flânerie* of the members of the neo *avant-garde* in the forties and fifties. New York has accommodated many cultures, costumes and dreams. For Arendt, the American suburbs were not at all the places for the *flâneur,* but in NYC reality was different, it provoked the gathering of many people from different backgrounds and for the most distinct reasons.

According to Bill Morgan, New York City has always been a shining magnet for writers, and that is why it attracted the writers of the Beat Generation. Morgan(1997) argues that: "Every major writer of that movement lived in or visited New York. They all had a love-hate relationship with it." Morgan quotes Kerouac,

> I roamed the streets, the bridges, Times Square, cafeterias, the waterfront, I looked up all my poet beatnik friends and roamed with them, I had love affairs with girls in the Village, I did everything with that great mad joy you get when you return to New York City.[102]

[102] KEROUAC, in: MORGAN, p. xi.

Kerouac practices the *flânerie* in New York for authentic experience. In the city, he is able to observe the architecture, urbanism, art and the social-political situation. Paris was for Benjamin the capital of the nineteenth century. In the same sense, we can say that New York is, for Kerouac, the capital of the twentieth century.

> Suddenly I found myself on Times Square. I had traveled eight thousand miles around the American continent and I was back on Times Square; and right in the middle of a rush hour, too, seeing with my innocent road-eyes the absolute madness and fantastic hoorair of New York with its millions hustling forever for a buck among themselves, the mad dream – grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City. The high towers of the land – the other end of the land, the place where Paper American is born. (*OR*, p.96)

The *flâneur* is the man of the crowd; he likes to observe the street movement and what experience he can get from that. Caygill says that: "The *flâneur* merges with that undomesticated conspirator, the bohemian artist, of uncertain economic status." (p. 160) Neal Cassady, Kerouac's friend and hero also is, like Kerouac, a bohemian artist. In fact, Cassady is not an artist in the sense of writing (like Kerouac), but for having a spontaneous and free way of expressing himself what inspires Jack to transform him in the novel's fundamental character Dean Moriarty. Kerouac and Cassady adventured together in many trips, on the road or under drugs. Both of them enjoyed smoking marijuana, drinking heavily, and having sex with beautiful girls, actually, they fell in love with the same woman. Carolyn married Cassady and kept having a love triangle relationship with them, as well as between Jack and Neal, too.

Hunt sees Cassady as Kerouac's subject, muse, and alter ego. I must agree with him, but – based on Benjamin's essay *The Destructive Character*, which

presents a discussion about someone whose only preoccupation and activity is "making room and clearing the way" respectively – I am influenced to suspect that Cassady's character is a "young and cheerful destroyer." Benjamin notes: "What contributes most of all to this Apollonian image of the destroyer is the realization of how immensely the world is simplified when tested for its worthiness of destruction." (1986, p. 301) Cassady seems to be very inconsequent and selfish, leaving his friends – including Kerouac – behind, whenever he has to. In *On the Road*, Kerouac tells through Paradise what he thought when his friend Moriarty leaves him sick in Mexico and goes back to New York,

> Twelve hours later in my sorrowful fever I finally came to understand that he was gone. […] When I got better I realized what a rat he was, but then I had to understand the impossible complexity of his life, how he had to leave me there, sick, to get on with his wives and woes. 'Okay, old Dean, I'll say nothing.' (*OR*, p. 276)

Although he is not the kind of person someone could expect much or count on, Kerouac makes of him his muse and hero. Kerouac and Cassady are together in an important aspect of what Benjamin's understanding on the detective by analyzing Baudelaire,

> Em tempos de terror, quando cada qual tem em si algo do conspirador, o papel do detetive pode também ser desempenhado. Para tal a *flânerie* oferece as melhores perspectivas. "O observador – diz Baudelaire – é um príncipe que, por toda a parte, faz uso do seu incógnito." Desse modo, se o *flâneur* se torna sem querer detetive, socialmente a transformação lhe assenta muito bem, pois justifica sua ociosidade. Sua indolência é apenas aparente. Nela se esconde a vigilância de um observador que não perde de vista o malfeitor. Assim o

> detetive vê abrirem-se à sua auto-estima vastos domínios. Desenvolve formas de reagir convenientes ao ritmo da cidade grande.[103]

In the novel, Paradise is the *flâneur* who accepts the role of the detective to the extent that Moriarty is okay to deal with his own condition of the "malefactor" (or the destructive character) who has been watched by Paradise.

It is curious that the name Dean Moriarty – which is given to Neal Cassady in *On the Road* – is the same as the name of the main enemy (Professor Moriarty) of Sherlock Holmes in the stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. I cannot affirm what Kerouac's intention was when choosing his character's name, but certainly, this is an interesting possibility of analysis under Benjamin's ideas on the *flanêur* in relation to the "destructive character".

Being up to the *flânerie*, Kerouac's restless spirit is always ready to broaden his perceptions. San Francisco also is a place to stroll and observe. The fantastic architecture and curious topography of the city fascinate the *flâneur.* Paradise tells about a day with Moriarty, "We were standing on top of a hill on a beautiful sunny day in San Francisco; our shadows fell across the sidewalk." (*OR*, p. 173) The streets of the big cities are the *flâneur*'s home: Poe's London, Baudelaire's and Benjamin's Paris, and Kerouac's New York and San Francisco. In the Californian city, Kerouac lived for a while in the "Cameo Hotel", according to Amburn, in a

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[103] BENJAMIN, (*Charles Baudelaire*: um lírico no auge do capitalismo), p. 38.

In times of terror, when each one has inside something of the plotter, the detective's role can also be carried out. For such the flânerie offers the best perspectives. "The observer - Budelaire says - is a prince that, for the whole part, makes use of his incognito."This way, if the flâneur becomes unintentionally a detective, socially the transformation fits him very well, because it justifies his idleness. His indolence is just apparent. It hides the observer's surveillance who does not miss the malefactor. This way the detective sees to open to his self-esteem vast domains. It develops forms of reacting conveniently to the rhythm of the big city. (Translation Mine)

three-dollar-a-week room, where he wrote the book of poems *San Francisco Blues*. One of the times Kerouac went to San Francisco, his feeling was "a renewed love for the city and for civilization generally."[104] The *Six Gallery* is also a place for the *flâneur*, among writers, poets and local intellectuals. Kerouac feels a special energy in the air, as Amburn points out, "San Francisco was celebrating poets and poetry in a way the world hadn't seen since the heyday of Lord Byron." (p.25) Paradise, in the novel, also enjoys strolling in the streets of San Francisco and describes one night he and Moriarty were drunk,

> […] And so we picked up our bags, he the trunk with his one good arm and I the rest, and staggered to the cable-car stop; in a moment rolled down the hill with our legs dangling to the sidewalk from the jiggling shelf, two broken-down heroes of the Western night. (*OR*, p. 173)

The *flâneur* wanders contemplating the city's institutions while he questions about the social, cultural and artistic values of his time in comparison to the past. In San Francisco, Kerouac faces the start of the American "bohemian coffeehouse movement", when he and some other writers would read their texts in Cafés. Some of that kind of writing written by the "desolation angels" – as Kerouac used to call the San Francisco poets – pictured San Francisco's North Beach as "the subterranean mecca, with nightclubs […], coffeehouses, and low rents."[105] San Francisco becomes subject to art. That scenery also intrigued Kerouac because "soon he observed dissention and rivalry among the poets."[106] As if art had been

[104] KEROUAC apud AMBURN, p. 253.
[105] See AMBURN, p.255.
[106] Idem

transformed in commodity, since poetry readings became the fashionable place to be seen in San Francisco. Amburn writes that,

> With Kerouac (and other Beats) on the West Coast, their combined energy soon attracted the attention of sharp-eyed Manhattan trend-spotters and fashion-setters. Though impoverished poets represented the polar opposite of the then-current American model of success, *Mademoiselle* magazine, anxious to keep its audience of educated young women abreast of the latest cultural developments, dispatched a photographer to the coast to pose Kerouac and his friends for a spread on "Fleming Cool Youth of San Francisco Poetry." (1998, pp. 254-255)

According to Rouanet, the *flâneur*'s hallucinations come from the city, and on the asphalt where he walks his steps awaken surprising resonances. Kerouac is excited by the city and it would be proper to say that he creates, in his true story novel *On the Road*, a character to whom the "road" awakes significant resonances. In the novel, Sal Paradise's comings and goings through many towns, especially New York and San Francisco, classify him obviously as someone looking for something. Paradise assumes his condition of traveler and decides to tell the readers what he sees on the road. The part below describes how Sal feels about a certain situation. The *flâneur* is always reflecting about what he sees in the streets, and here he questions about how one could live like that,

> […] We wandered around, carrying our bundles of rags in the narrow romantic streets. Everybody looked like a broken-down movie extra, a withered starlet; disenchanted stunt-men, midget auto-racers, poignant California characters with their end-of-the-continent sadness, handsome, decadent, Casanov-ish men, puffy-eyed motel blondes, hustlers, pimps, whores, masseurs, bellhops – a lemon lot, and how's a man going to make a living with a gang like that? (*OR*, p. 154)

The novel's internal space – that is, the thoughts or questions the storyteller has about himself, other characters and situations – is revealed to the reader as much as the external space, in which the places, cities, location and the *flânerie* are described. In *On the Road*, the external space differs from that of Benjamin and Baudelaire (Paris), and here the *flâneur* does not cross Arcades, he hitchhikes across big cities and the countryside as he watches people's and places' peculiarities. Benjamin's *flâneur* sees many attractions in the city (streets, bridges, monuments, museums, public transportation, subterranean places). In Kerouac's novel, Paradise has as some of his major attractions bars, nightclubs, art galleries, cars and the road. According to Benjamin, the prostitute is another attraction for the *flâneur*, especially because he is interested in commodities, and like the waged worker, the prostitute is – at the same time – commodity and seller. The *flâneur* condemns the social causes that produced her, but his compassion does not prevent him from getting fascinated by the symbolism of prostitution. Based on Benjamin, Rouanet says about the flâneur, "Man of the city, he cannot help becoming interested in such a typical big city's phenomenon."[107] (p.46)

On the Road presents some passages in which the characters are having sex with prostitutes, or talking about them. When Sal, Dean and Stan go to Mexico, for example, they spend some hours in a whorehouse. Sal Paradise tells about his impressions,

> Through our deliriums we began to discern their varying personalities. They were great girls. Strangely the wildest one was half Indian, half white, and came from Venezuela, and only eighteen. She

[107] Translation Mine.

> looked as if she came from a good family. What she was doing whoring in Mexico at that age and with that tender cheek and fair aspect, God knows. (*OR*, p. 262)

In this moment, the *flâneur* questions himself about the girl's reasons for being in a place like that and imagines the kind of family she comes from as if he needs to justify his desire for purchasing such commodity.

Charles Baudelaire wrote that "for the perfect *flâneur* it is an enormous joy to take up residence in the numerous, in the movement and in the infinite."[108] (p. 170) The life on the road represents the infinite in the novel. Hitchhiking is the special means of achieving experience to be passed on later. Besides moving from a place to another for free, the hitchhiker has an opportunity to plunge into adventure and to get to know the most different types of people. When leaving home, in 1947, Paradise is filled with dreams of what he would do in Chicago, in Denver, and than finally in San Fran. He talks about some people he meets,

> A guy with a kind of toolshack on wheels, a truck full of tools that he drove standing up like a modern milkman, gave me a ride up the long hill, where I immediately got a ride from a farmer and his son heading out for Adel in Iowa. […], I made the acquaintance of another hitchhiker, a typical New Yorker, an Irishman who'd been driving a truck for the post office most of his work years and was now headed for a girl in Denver and a new life. (OR, p. 17)

As a matter of synthesizing the last part of this chapter, some aspects shall be reviewed. Kerouac creates, in his literary project, a character to describe events that happened in his real life story. Paradise is the authentic *flâneur* seeking to tell

[108] BAUDELAIRE, p. 170. Translation Mine.

and retell his experiences; he is the true storyteller. Benjamin understands that Paris is the place for the *flânerie*, where the man of the crowd circulates through modern civilization contemplating the streets and the Arcades. In this work, the *flânerie* embraces the streets of New York, San Francisco, the countryside and some parts of Mexico. The *flâneur* reflects on the differences between the present and the past. Paradise makes an interesting observation when passing the border to Mexico,

> Behind us lay the whole of America and everything Dean and I had previously known about life, and life on the road. We had finally found the magic land at the end of the road and we never dreamed the extent of the magic. […] We got out and went back to the car. One last glimpse of America across the hot lights of the Rio Grande bridge, and we turned our back and fender to it and roared off. (*OR*,p.251)

CONCLUSION

The United States of America is the cradle of the *Beat* movement, whereas the European continent is father to the first *Avant-Garde* manifestations. Walter Benjamin is the European philosopher whose visions about art and modernity inspired this endeavor to focus on the American visionary writer Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Benjamin's analysis on Baudelaire's work helps the philosopher to construct his reflections on the capital of the Second Empire and carry out the project on the *Arcades*, which is so successfully commented by Sergio Rouanet. Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs form, along with Kerouac, the important Beat trio in the vanguard of North-American literature. Benjamin and Kerouac are so attuned with their times that both have in common the gift of foreseeing consequences that would only be real within some decades. In the forties and fifties, the Beats had called for "spontaneity", in the middle of America's political-ideological confusions, preceding what would become – some years later – the *flower power* movement. In the sixties, College students fought

against the Vietnam War and the “Hippies” looked for new experiences through spontaneity, drugs and Oriental religions, wishing for a peaceful world.

All the context, events and personalities involving the lives and artistic aura of Benjamin and Kerouac are fundamental to the undertaking of this research, but the most important element, the link that ties each of them together and inspires the motif for my thesis, is the role of the *flâneur*.

The *flâneur* sees everything; his curious eye looks attentively at places in the streets of Paris (originally), and then in the streets of America. He feels at home when he transits in the crowd or observes life from the inside of a coffeehouse. He is always in search of authentic experience. The role of the *flâneur* is to tell about his experiences in order to show the new era’s soul; thus, he expresses his thoughts and impressions about socio-cultural and artistic transformations.

During his strolls across places in the American post-war, Jack Kerouac tells us about the travels he takes in search of new experiences, sensations and inner values. Kerouac’s pleasure for watching the things that may surprise him, or change his remote knowledge of understanding life is intrinsically pertinent in his work. What Ann Charters states in the introduction of *On the Road*, “writing *On the Road*, Kerouac finally found his own voice and his true subject – the story of his own search for a place as an outsider in America”[109], reinforces the initial idea that Kerouac is the *flâneur* who, wandering from street to street, looks for his place. In that condition, Kerouac recreates important events of his life and narrates them in

[109] CHARTERS In: *OR*, 2000.

his work. In *On the Road*, Sal Paradise is the character that represents this search for one's own hidden feelings, while walking down the streets of New York and San Francisco, taking rides with strangers, arriving in a new town, experimenting drugs, sleeping with prostitutes or writing his book. All his actions in the book lead the attentive reader to the reality of a writer who, in the middle of the crowd, tries to find his own self.

The role the *flâneur* plays in *On the Road* – besides promoting the excitements of life in the big city – shows the difficulties one can find in order to be different from the accepted social model while connecting with the underground version of the American Way of Life. Sal Paradise passes on Jack Kerouac's idea that, "I must take part in the sacrifice of my generation, otherwise I should not seek their love in the future. It is an ethical matter, of great importance, and of spiritual & social significance." (1957, p. 98) The sacrifice Kerouac mentions means to refuse America's puritanical values in order to build their own values. Being *on the road* is a way of escaping from imposed rules and "prophesying a new style for American culture."[110] Paradise's need to roam indicates that a whole generation of nonconformists expected social changes to come, even though he is not sure about how those changes will be. It is important to notice how the narrator reflects on his country when he finds himself in the Mexican territory; he feels like being closer to freedom – this is for him a rich opportunity to be an "outsider" who actually is *out*. The role of the *flâneur* in the novel is to transmit the author's understanding about his epoch, his visions on a real socio-historical moment

[110] KEROUAC, 1957 In: CHARTERS, 1996, p. 559.

blended with the light of fiction. The character's displacement in the narrative space symbolizes Kerouac's *flânerie* in search for the self and for acceptance. Becoming spiritualized, valuing friendship, freedom, spontaneity and love also are perfectly legitimate to this search.

The Beat writing provides a huge material to those whose interests meet their proposal of being and making different. Eduardo Bueno (2004) writes in the Brazilian edition of the novel:

> O fôlego narrativo avassalador, o imaginário proto-pop, o frescor libertário, o fluxo ininterrupto de sua avalanche de palavras, imagens, promessas, ofertas, visões e descobertas acabaram por tornar *On the Road* exatamente aquilo que o chavão define como "a bíblia de uma geração." (p.13)

On the Road allows access to a range of distinct interpretations and critical approaches but, here, the reading of the novel under Walter Benjamin's ideas is a suggestion on how one can follow the narrator's steps across America and investigate the significance of his search in the light of the *flâneur*. As a result of his "spontaneous style", Kerouac creates an experimental project, in which he externalizes – through Paradise – his point of view towards his friends, society, country, beliefs, and emotions. Kerouac's personal criticism on the American culture of his time supports the fictional aspects in the novel.

Coincidentally, this year a new Brazilian edition of *On the Road* came out, and this meets one of the purposes of this research, since a fresh look at the author and at the novel is in the air. For old Brazilian fans of the Beat Generation, this edition, after twenty years of the novel's first translation into Brazilian Portuguese, invites to a new sense of contemplating the novel, and for those who

are not in touch with Kerouac's work, the possibility of reading the novel is re-offered.

The writer Jacob Bronowski once pointed that, "The work of art only exists when it is recreated. The work of art is recreated when it is seen, read or heard, when it penetrates in the spectator's, listener's or reader's mind, and its words, its images suddenly acquire importance."[111] The recent edition certainly opens more space for the novel in the Brazilian market. However, besides the importance of increasing the number of readers, this thesis tries, somehow, to contribute to the recreation of *On the Road*. Furthermore, it expects that more literature students let Kerouac's art penetrate in their minds and other researches on the theme can be carried on, in order to bring into our academic community a variety of possible views on this author's novel as well as on other Beat productions.

[111] See BRONOWSKI, 1998, p. 186. Translation Mine.

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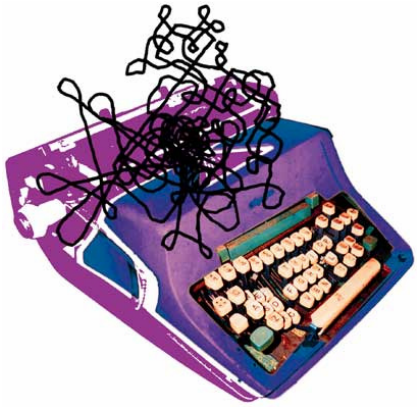

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