
The Working Class Beats: a Marxist analysis of Beat Writing and Culture from the Fifties to the Seventies.

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Introduction: a materialist concept of 'Beat'

The Beat Generation was more than just a literary movement; it was, as John Clellon Holmes, stated 'an attitude towards life'.¹ In other words, the Beat movement was a social, cultural *and* literary phenomenon. I will analyse what this Beat 'attitude' actually meant and also what the relationship between the literature and the Beat culture was. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms* Abrams defines 'Beat' as signifying 'both "beaten down" (that is, by the oppressive culture of the time) and "beatific" (many of the Beat writers cultivated ecstatic states by way of Buddhism, Jewish and Christian mysticism, and/or drugs that induced visionary experiences)'.² My focus will be on the *beaten down* aspects of Beat writing. I will argue that this represents a materialist concept of 'Beat' (as opposed to the 'spiritual' beatific notion) which aligns with Marx's ideas in *The German Ideology*.³ Given that 'beaten down' is defined in terms of cultural oppression I will put forward the thesis that the culturally oppressed writers of the Beat Generation were those of a working-class background (particularly Cassidy and Bukowski) and it was their ability to create a class-consciousness that gave Beat writing and culture its politically radical edge.

I question the extent to which the likes of Ginsberg and Kerouac were really 'beaten down'. Evidence will be shown to prove that most of these 'original' Beats had a privileged upbringing and a bourgeois/bohemian class status, therefore being 'Beat', for them, was arguably a 'hip' thing to be, an avant-garde experiment. In the figure of Beat poet Charles Bukowski, however, being beaten down really meant just that; it was not a life-style choice; it was born of economic necessity. Bukowski was continuously 'on the road' in the forties and fifties and was published in numerous Beat journals in San Francisco such as *The Outsider*, *Open City* and John Bryan's infamous *Notes from Underground*. Bukowski's 'Beatness' derived from the fact that he *had* to be on the road in order for him to search for work in city after city. Without the 'bum' factory work that Bukowski endured he would not even have been in a position to feed, clothe and house himself, that is, to satisfy these basic needs, that according to Marx, define the fundamental conditions of history. As Marx puts it 'men must be in a position to live in order to "make history" ' (Marx, K., p.48). If 'Beat' was defined in these historical materialist terms then it was the likes of Bukowski and Cassidy who were the true catalysts for the Beat movement. Therefore, this revolutionary catalyst was not to be found in the beatific 'mysticism' of the likes of Ginsberg and Kerouac.

Having established the materialist concept of Beat in this introductory section I will strengthen the Marxist-Beat discourse in section 2 with reference to the concept of praxis. In that section I will argue that, given the Beat project entailed connecting literature to a practical 'attitude towards life' then Beat culture can be understood in terms of Marx's notion of 'praxis' as set out in his paper 'Theses on Feuerbach'.⁴ In short, I will argue that Beat literature was a cultural product of its time and had a practical influence on the politics of the day. The issue of artistic freedom in the context of McCarthyism was a central cause of the Beats. They also played a significant part in creating an alternative independent book-publishing scene in America through the successes of City Lights and Black Sparrow Press. Such cultural factors are inseparable from the 'literature'; for this reason I will historicise the Beat phenomenon in the light of such cultural discourses.

Section 3 will introduce Marcuse's concept of the performance principle as found in the text *Eros and Civilization*.⁵ I will argue that this concept crucially links the Beats to a Marxist tradition, as a central aspect of Beat practice was to encourage a social revolution through sexual liberation. Such a 'sexual revolution' was also the cornerstone of Marcuse's ideas in *Eros and Civilization*. The sexual liberation that Marcuse envisaged did not just involve the practice of 'free love' but also, to the concern of McCarthyites, actually writing and publishing accounts of such 'obscenities'. The connection of the Marxist critic, Marcuse, to the Beats is not just related to the similarity of their ideas. Historically, they were both of the same generation of Americans. Marcuse, though born in Germany, had become an American citizen and his seminal text on sexual liberation *Eros and Civilization* was first published the same year as Kerouac's *One The Road* (1955) and only one year before Ginsberg's *Howl* shocked the American nation with its sexually candid content and radically flowing form.⁶ Given the similarity of ideas that connect Marcuse's work to that of the Beats and also given their historical and cultural relevance I will utilise Marcuse's text *Eros and Civilisation* as an example of the Beat notion of praxis. It will be argued, however, that there is an essentialism inherent within Beat writing and Marcusean theory that prevent both from having the sort of radical social impact that Marx envisaged.

Section 4 further supports Marx's premise that man needs to 'live' in order to make history. I will present evidence to show that for Bukowski and Cassidy such 'living' could not be taken for granted and therefore both writers had a very 'grounded' understanding of materialism which aligns with Marx's own ideas. Section 5 will address the Beats' attempt to liberate prose and poetry from its bourgeois and elitist assumptions of 'proper literature'. I will argue that the 'free-form' approach to Beat writing makes literature a more popular and accessible art form. Prose-poetry in particular will be presented as a literary product that is accessible to the less 'educated' working classes; and it can assist in engendering a class-consciousness.

In Section 6 there will be further analysis of the 'revolutionary' impact the Beats had on society, not only through the fifties, but also in the sixties and seventies. Marcuse's New Left concept of the deproletarianisation of the working class as found in his texts *One Dimensional Man, Counterrevolution and Revolt* and the paper 'The Reification of the Proletariat' will be a key idea that links the Beats' post-fifties writing.⁷ These New Left ideas have resonances in Bukowski's post-fifties writings, and both will be read as attempts to create post-industrial revolutionary action. Marcuse's writings from the sixties onwards, however, exposed an essentialism equal to that found in *Eros and Civilization*. In light of the importance of theory in Marx's notion of praxis sections 7 and 8 will focus on the more theoretically orientated revolutionary Marxism that can be found in the earlier work of Jean Baudrillard, particularly in his text *The Mirror of Production*.⁸ Baudrillard's New Left philosophy of 'dropping out' of the society based on the value system of production will be linked to Marcuse's own notion of 'the great refusal' of the capitalist state. Both of these New Left ideas will be tied in with the Beat philosophy of the refusal to work within the capitalist system.

Baudrillard's semiotic notions of a cultural revolution through a 'symbolic exchange' will be analysed as placing too much focus on the theoretic aspects of praxis and far too little on the actual materialist and economic conditions of society for his ideas to have any serious revolutionary impact (Baudrillard, 1975: 143).

In the light of Marx's dialectical/historical materialism I will argue that Baudrillard's emphasis on the socio-linguistic practice of literature, for example, needs to be mediated through a Marcusean materialism in order for it to have a revolutionary impact. Therefore my argument for a revolutionary concept of praxis is neither reducible to a Marcusean essentialism nor a Baudrillardian socio-linguistic framework. It is only through the dialectal mediation between both nature and language that a revolutionary discourse can manifest itself. It is my argument that the working-class Beats gave Beat culture its essential material base through which the educated Beats (Ginsberg, Burroughs, Kerouac) acted as the creative,

philosophical and theoretical vanguards from a more Baudrillardian socio-linguistic perspective.

Unlike Bukowski, the original Beats focused more on the spiritual, beatific aspects of Beat culture. This 'spiritual' influence on the Beats is reflected in most of the Beat scholarship to date. For example, in *The Penguin Book of the Beats*, Ann Charters argues that the 'shared experience for the Beat writers was historical and political' in that they rejected the American involvement in World War II and the ensuing Cold War anti-Communist hysteria.⁹ The assumption within Charter's text, though, is that this is a materialist reading of the Beats based on the ideas of Jack Kerouac who encouraged an alternative 'religious generation' as the fundamental response to the military-industrial complex of the United States. Unfortunately, Kerouac's advocacy of Buddhist meditation was in no way synthesised with any real political agenda. In fact, Kerouac was a politically conservative American patriot and supportive of the United States involvement in Vietnam. Lee Bartlett shows evidence of this in a letter Kerouac wrote to Ginsberg in 1965: 'My kid brother saw action in Santa [sic] Domingo - goes to Vietnam - me I'm all for the Marines now by god - fuck all you pacifist abusers'.¹⁰ This is hardly the kind of figure to appoint as the leader of a politically radical literary generation.

Other Beat Scholarship is too confessional and overly personal. This is the case with Barry Miles' *Ginsberg* which focuses on the Oedipal relations of Ginsberg to his mother and father.¹¹ There is also an approach to analysing Beat literature which focuses on a purely musical sense of the texts without considering the political implications of the writing or its relationship to music. Regina Weinreich's *The Spontaneous Poetics of Jack Kerouac* is an example of Beat scholarship that focuses on the musical rhythms of Beat writing as influenced by blues and jazz.¹² It is important to note that the historical and political significance of blues and jazz is largely ignored here, as it is in Kerouac's work itself when he makes reference to the bebop artists without any reference to the social history of black America. Given the lack of serious theoretical and critical approaches to the study of Beat literature I

will demonstrate the validity of a Marxist, materialist critique of the Beats with particular reference to Bukowski.

2. Praxis: a Marxist definition of 'Beat'

The concept of the Beat movement as a practical and historical phenomenon that can be aligned with Marx's concept of 'praxis' (German word for 'practice') is supported by James Campbell's book *This is the Beat Generation* in which Campbell quotes John Clellon Holmes's novel *Go*. Holmes defined 'Beat' not simply as literature but 'an attitude towards life'; and as for the hipster of the bebop jazz movement art was 'more than music', so to for the Beat Generation art was more than writing (Holmes, J., p.30). Tytell makes a similar comparison of the jazz hipster's art to that of the Beat writers and he talks of the hipster's art as being defined by 'a constant attempt to change his very nervous system'.¹³ The question then is not simply whether you write Beat literature or whether you play bop jazz but whether such art is part of a wider cultural attitude and whether it impacts on people in a material and arguably physical sense. The fact that Tytell links the Beat's approach to art with that of the jazz hipster in terms of the 'nervous system' suggests a radically essentialist argument for a cultural revolution which ties in with Marcuse's utopian ideas in *Eros and Civilization*. In this work, Marcuse argues that the proletariat can be liberated through the release of repressed sexual energy so that they can then enter a 'socialist' aesthetic realm where the division between work and play collapses. Marcuse argues that in such a 'socialist' realm of existence man lives by nature's 'sensuous rather than conceptual' code and this 'generates universally valid principles for an objective order' (Marcuse, 1955: 145-6).

Marcuse understands that art can illuminate the vision of this socialist utopia and help to bridge the gap between the repressive capitalist division of work and play and reveal that 'behind the aesthetic form [of art] lies the repressed harmony of sensuousness and reason' (Marcuse, 1955: 121). Marcuse's essentialism here is only useful to the degree that it gives a more 'materialist' and practical concept of 'Beat' rather than a spiritual one. Marx's notion of Praxis, however, is not reducible to sensuous nature. Sensuous nature only *becomes* the object that it is through man's thought and ability to generate socially productive practices. Marx states his

concept of praxis most explicitly through his criticism of Feuerbach's mechanical materialism. This is understood as 'the thing, reality, sensuousness, [which] is conceived only in the form of the object or contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice (Marx, 1845: 121). For Marx, the essential material base can only have a revolutionary effect on history when it impacts, dialectically, on social practices.

My argument for a 'beaten down' notion of praxis is that it should not be reduced to a Marcusean essentialism. It is only through the dialectical mediation between both nature and language that a revolutionary discourse can be manifest. The working-class Beats gave Beat culture its Marxist material base through which the movement as a whole could have a significant impact on history.

The Beat movement was not specifically a literary movement; it was politically practical because it actually impacted in people's lives as an attitude and as a way of life. Beat writing was one aspect of the movement but living the ideas of those writings within the social sphere was equally important. For example Barry Miles documented that the ban on Ginsberg's *Howl* in 1957 for its 'obscene' content resulted in a trial that Ginsberg won with the backing of the American Civil Liberties Union.¹⁴ The defence was based on the First Amendment (which protects freedom of speech and of the press) and *Howl* was deemed by Judge Clayton not to be obscene, but, indeed, to have 'social relevance'. The importance of such literary figures as Ginsberg, and also Henry Miller, in challenging the legal system at this time cannot be understated. Without their ability to effect social change through freedom of speech and press, then our contemporary notion of 'literature' might well be a lot more constrained and censored than it is. Marx states a similar aim of bringing ideas together with practices in the 'Theses on Feuerbach':

The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical question*. Man must prove the truth of theory, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over

the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question. (Marx, 1845: 120)

If we remove the word 'theory' from the above quote and replace it with 'literature' then the relevance of Beat culture to Marx's revolutionary notion of praxis becomes clearer. It is this notion of connecting theory and literature to the practical interests of the working class that will be analysed in the following section with specific reference to Marcuse's theory of the performance principle.

3. Liberation from the performance principle through a Marcusean sexual revolution

A useful way of engaging with the Beats in a practical Marxist discourse is by way of a Marcusean perspective. While a practical realisation of Marcuse's concept of a utopian sexual revolution would seem impossible, his ideas in *Eros and Civilization* do have radical and practical implications in their treatment of the alienating effects of labour on the working class and how this is imposed through a socially structured form of sexual repression, what Marcuse calls 'surplus repression' (Marcuse, 1955: 44). What Marcuse brings to the Marxist debate is that sexuality, and the repression of it, had a massive influence on the alienation and reification of the working class. The working classes were conditioned into 'performing' their work duties in such a repressive and restrictive fashion that they gained no pleasure from the experience of work. There was no expression of 'Eros' (Freud's concept of the life-principle which at its core is sexual) in the workplace due to what Marcuse called the repressive 'performance principle' of work (Marcuse, H., *Eros and Civilization*. p.44).

Marcuse managed to synthesise the sexual and the political by taking ideas from both Freud and Marx. In *Eros and Civilisation* two key Freudian concepts are used: *repression* and the *reality principle*. According to Freud, the individual has to repress instinctual urges for gratification in order for them to inter-relate in the social

world. The repression that the reality principle is anchored on is a universal and unchanging phenomenon for Freud. But as a Marxist, Marcuse historicises these two Freudian concepts, thereby placing them into social context:

(a) *Surplus-repression*: the restrictions necessitated by social domination. This is distinguished from (basic) *repression*: the 'modifications' of the instincts necessary for the perpetuation of the human race in civilization.

(b) *Performance Principle*: the prevailing historical form of the *reality principle*.
(Marcuse, 1955: 44)

Marcuse envisaged a sexual revolution which would result in a world of unrepressed 'polymorphous sexuality' where the boundaries between work and play would cease to exist. My concern here is less with Marcuse's utopianism and more with his focus on the proletariat's labour as the catalyst for a post-capitalist 'socialist' revolution. In *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse argues that with rapid development of the *forces of production* material scarcity would cease to be a problem and thus, as Held states, 'the historical necessity for existent forms of repression is undermined. Alienated labour is increasingly rendered unnecessary'.¹⁵ Marcuse's utopian notion of a revolution is based on the premise that man's needs are essentially natural and that through a more efficient productive system man can 'reactivate early stages of libido' and 'return' to living in a more 'natural' socialist existence.¹⁶ Marcuse's socialist revolution, therefore, is grounded on the physiological notion of sexual, libidinal economics. In fact, he goes so far as to say that unrepressed sexuality can in itself create 'highly civilized human relations' (Held, 1980: 125). However, as Marx argues in *The German Ideology*, 'the satisfaction of the first need [...] leads to new needs; and this production of new needs is the first historical act' (Marx, 1845: 49). In other words, the history of social, communal living is socially structured; it is not 'natural' as Marcuse argues.

Marcuse also believes that technological advancement can help reactivate man's unrepressed sexuality as advancements in the forces of production negate

the need for a repressive performance principle. Marcuse, however, is overlooking a crucial element to Marx's notion of the proletariat revolution, that is, it is not solely the *forces of production* that affect revolution but also the *relations of production*. As long as the capitalists manipulate the relations of production they will invent new socially constructed needs, thus ensuring that the proletariat will live out the fantasy of wanting more and more and the illusion that one day these wants will be satisfied.

Instead of addressing the problems presented by the relations of production Held points out that Marcuse envisaged that his project was about firstly, grasping the social world in its reified immediacy and, secondly, going beyond this to embrace 'the essence of the social whole' (Held, 1980: 244). The first of these is important to my call for a Marxist critique of the Beats as it signposts the way for the potential for revolutionary action; particularly as Marcuse gives an important role to the artist in assisting revolutionary action. Marcuse elevates artists into the position where they can challenge the domination of the repressive reality principle and lead the way into a new revolutionary discourse. He argues that through the artist's imagination a utopian phantasy can be 'reconnected' to a radical materialist transformation:

Imagination [of the artist] envisions the reconciliation of the individual with the whole, of desire with realization, of happiness with reason. While this harmony has been removed into utopia by the established reality principle, phantasy insists that it must and can become real, that behind the illusion lies knowledge. (Marcuse, 1955: 121)

Marcuse's notion of returning to the 'harmony' of a 'utopian' which is concealed behind the repressive domination of the reality principle points towards the assumption of a 'natural' truth that is concealed behind the reifying effects of capitalism. It is man that actively produces such a revolution rather than passively relying on nature to lead the way, and it is the latter that Marcuse's ideas suggest. The fact, however, that the artist, for Marcuse, is in a position to question the

established capitalist order and act as a vanguard for social transformation is cause enough to recognise that art can have an influence on social change.

Although *Eros and Civilization* is often rather fantastic in its vision of a future world without work, it does address the alienating realities of the post-war American blue-collar experience through the concept of the performance principle and its enforcement through surplus repression. The fact that Marcuse emphasises the importance of the artist in challenging this repressive performance principle makes a political analysis of Beat literature all the more pertinent. Art for Marcuse was not simply about relating the personal and sexual aspects of experience of the artist as he understood that such self-expression was interwoven with the historical and political aspects of society. This was why Marcuse had relevance to the Beats in the fifties as they were responding to Cold War oppression through writings based on experiences of sexual liberation. Even though the works of the Beats were highly and candidly 'personal' they are not simply to be understood in terms of confessionalism. If Bukowski writes about 'the job' as a function of sexual repression the latter has to be understood in its historical sense as well from the writer's own unique perspective. For example, we could say that the more our instinctual urges for sexual gratification become repressed, the more alienated we become from our own body, thereby reifying the subject into an automated work-unit: an exploitable commodity for the ruling-class to buy or sell, based on a value system that the proletariat themselves generate. It follows that the more repressed the individual is the better s/he can perform in the workplace and this is why Marcuse argues that repression does not just connote biological epistemology (as Freud argues) but that it is socially structured and functions in the service of a given political apparatus. The ruling-classes were enforcing a desexualisation of the polymorphous self through the performance principle (what Marcuse calls a *repressive de-sublimation*). As Paul Robinson stated 'libido became concentrated in one part of the body, namely the genitals, in order to leave the rest of the body free for use as an instrument'.¹⁷ In Marcuse's words:

The normal progress to genitality has been organized in such a way that the partial impulses and their “zones” were all but desexualised in order to conform to the requirements of a specific social organisation of the human existence. (Marcuse, 1955: 41)

The *Performance Principle* treats people as a fetishised vehicle for producing labour. They become metonymic part-objects - ‘a pair of hands’ in the automated production process. The Beat movement actively challenged this automated, fragmentation of life. In terms of the repressive political climate of the time, the Beats represented self-expression as a challenge to corporate exploitation and Cold War conformity.

For the Beats – particularly Ginsberg and Kerouac- the alternative to the regimentation and alienation of modern life was the naive belief in a return to an essential self. For example, Ginsberg laments ‘the broken consciousness of mid twentieth [sic] century suffering anguish of separation from my own body and its natural infinity of feeling its own self one with all self.’¹⁸ This was also true of Marcuse’s ideas as he envisaged nature having a liberating effect on humanity. In his text *Counterrevolution and Revolt* Marcuse states that ‘nature is susceptible to the project of emancipation, and that there are forces in nature which could support and reinforce the liberation of human beings (Marcuse, 1972: 36). The idea of human potential being directly linked to nature strikes a chord with the ideas of eighteenth-century Romanticism. Marx himself was critical of such a naturalist view of history. In his text *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Marx attacks Rousseau’s Romanticism because it defines man ‘not as something evolving in the course of history, but posited by nature’.¹⁹ Marcuse’s essentialism can often be accused of falling into the kind of romantic Rousseauian individualism that Marx attacks.

4. A beaten-down way of life for Cassidy and Bukowski

In *The German Ideology* Marx takes the position that if man is going to effect any radical change on history he must work from, and continually work with, a materialist premise which is grounded, but not reducible to essential needs. In *The German Ideology* Marx is criticising the Hegelian idealist notion of 'spirit' being the basis of history. Similarly, my thesis is a critique of the beatific spiritual ideas of the Beats and a defence of a 'beaten down' materialist concept. Bukowski and Cassidy were two Beat writers who had plenty of experience of living a life where they could barely satisfy the most basic of material needs. Their original understanding of being beaten down was not strictly conceptual as is the case in this thesis, it was a practical 'ground-level' experience of oppression. In the light of Bukowski and Cassidy's practical experiences of oppression I will now analyse how Marcusean theory actually relates to such practical experience.

Bukowski was brought up in Los Angeles in the thirties. His mother, Kate, was a seamstress and his father, Henry, an unemployed contract worker. For such a working-class family, the thirties depression was particularly tough economically. In a letter to relatives in Germany Kate wrote 'I won't forget the first eight months of 1936 in a hurry [...] We have suffered a lot. We nearly lost our house (and) couldn't make any payments for a whole year.'²⁰

After leaving Los Angeles High School in the summer of 1939 Bukowski found himself in a similarly oppressive financial situation as his parents as he drifted from job to job, finding work, for example, in a 'warehouse' in New Orleans; in a 'railroad gang' in Texas; and 'packing boxes' in St. Louis (Sounes, 1999: 21-22). Cassidy's working-class background was, if anything, even more 'beaten down' than Bukowski's. From the age of six Cassidy was raised solely by his father, Neal senior, after his mother, Maude, 'abandoned them drifting into the rough life' (Campbell, 1999: 55). Neal Cassidy Senior brought his son up on Denver's Larimer Street, the 'Skid Row' of Denver'. They lived in various 'flophouses, among snoring drunks'; one of whom was Neal senior himself who rarely worked and when he did it was as a 'third chair hairdresser'(Campbell, 1999: 55). From the ages of fourteen to

twenty-one Cassidy sank into a life of crime and incarceration having been arrested ten times and serving over fifteen months in 'reformatories' (Campbell, 1999: 57).

By bringing in biographical detail I do not intend to reduce my argument to a form of essentialism but hope to ground it on a material rather than a spiritual or beatific basis. By working out from this materialist base we can then understand the revolutionary dialectic between those 'vanguard' Beats (Ginsberg, Kerouac and Burroughs) that is, those with academic knowledge and those working-class Beats who were the agent and catalyst for the Beat movement.

What is largely ignored in Beat scholarship is the very fact that there was a working-class Beat Generation in the first place. The bohemian Beats did acknowledge this from time to time but it was in no way representative of the true working-class influence. Dean (the name given to Neal Cassidy in *On the Road*) was one of only a few of the original Beats who was truly working class and they all loved him for it because, as Kerouac states, 'Dean's intelligence was every bit as formal and shining and complete, without the tedious intellectualness' (Kerouac, J., p.10). Kerouac's statement here is only one of a few instances in Beat literature where any comment is made about the less formally educated working classes having any value within Beat culture.

5. Radical form, radical content: the Beat attack on conventional notions of 'literature'

Unlike Bukowski, however, Cassidy's working class intelligence was not utilised to express literary or theoretical ideas on the nature of beaten down oppression as experienced in America. Instead of embarking on a writing career Cassidy's life was an unremitting embrace of self-seeking hedonism. Ginsberg paints a more romantic view of Cassidy's Beat attitude in his poem 'How!':

Who went whoring through Colorado in myriad
Stolen night-cars, N.C., secret hero of these
Poems, cocksman and Adonis of Denver - joy

To the memory of his innumerable lays of girls. (Ginsberg, A., *Howl*, p.14)

Cassidy's 'Beatness', in the eyes of Ginsberg and Kerouac, was primarily defined by his polymorphously-perverse existence. There was more to being Beat, however, than to live such a radical life. Writing was obviously a key element to Beat culture – particularly their radical approach to the form and technique of writing. What liberates both *Howl* and *On the Road* from conventional bourgeois literature is that both texts radically challenge the established idea that as Ginsberg puts it 'that there's supposed to be a formal literature'.²¹ The 'spontaneous' outpouring of Kerouac's prose and the 'long line' of Ginsberg's poetry attempted to catch the rhythms of everyday speech. Rather than being stifled by the formal constraints of a sonnet, or following the line of the iambic metre Ginsberg adheres to a more spontaneous form that follows the rhythms of vernacular speech, and this arguably makes for more accessible reading to a wider audience. Such poetry and prose may be read and understood without having studied literature through a formal education institution. The implication is that the less educated working classes can gain insight through reading such literature and therefore gain more knowledge about their own exploited position within the capitalist class structure.

Ginsberg's prose-poetry, however, is more stylised and structured than he often claimed. His technique of removing connectives and prepositions from his poetry was less to do with the natural rhythms of thought processes and more to do with the established genre of poetry called Imagism. Formally, however, Ginsberg's poetry was radical, primarily because it was so fragmented and form-less and this in itself was enough to liberate poetry from its bourgeois shackles.

Bukowski also liberates poetry and prose from elitist assumptions of 'formal literature'. His prose-poetry is a lot less stylised than Ginsberg's, even to the point where Ferlinghetti commented that it was 'essentially stories, just like his prose' (Sounes, 1999: 82). That is what a lot of Bukowski's poetry is, in a manner of speaking, and that is its strength. Bukowski found a way of telling stories through the form of poetry and that was his intention as he strongly argues the case in his

collection of letters *Living on Luck*: 'What the hell's *wrong* with a 6 or 7 or 37 line long prose statement that is broken into the readable advantage and clearness of the poem-form?'²²

Bukowski is subverting the form of poetry to bring prose into a condensed and economic scale. This way, prose is made accessible in economically short pieces, so for example, the working classes who labour long hours can access literature without being intimidated by the investment of time needed to read a novel of the length of *War and Peace* without worrying about having a learned understanding of conventional poetic form.

The poetic content of Bukowski's work and the original Beats, as I have stated throughout this thesis, is significantly sexual. With Ginsberg this is expressed in an over-emotional and at times hysterical fashion. For Bukowski, however, the sexual content is often delivered in a laconic and minimalist way. In both cases, though, sexual liberation was a key element to any claim that their work was politically radical but without a theoretical or literary code to channel such liberating experiences then a 'sexual revolution' simply becomes an individualist sexual indulgence. The working-class life experiences of Bukowski, however, had a significant impact on American culture due to such experiences being represented through his massive literary output. The protagonist that features in most of his writing, 'Chinaski' is an obvious reference to the writer himself, given the similarity in the names 'Chinaski' and 'Bukowski'. Chinaski is the alter-ego through which Bukowski gives voice to his beaten-down experiences of blue-collar employment and they are particularly powerful portrayals in his novels *Factotum* and *Post Office*.²³ In Chinaski's world: 'The Job' as he called it can be nothing other than the performance principle. That is, as the quote from *Factotum* below will show, the performance principle impresses itself on leisure time for the working classes to such a degree that 'the job' stifles any attempt at what Marcuse calls 'play' when the working day has finished. There is no room for play under the conditions of the

repressive performance principle and Chinaski describes this in the most lucid terms possible:

I remember how my father used to come home each night and talk about his job to my mother. The job talk began when he entered the door, continued over the dinner table, and ended in the bedroom where my father would scream "Lights Out!" at 8 p.m., so he could get his rest and his full strength for the job the next day. There was no other subject except the job. (Bukowski, C., *Factotum* p.111)

It was not just Chinaski's direct family that was effected by the repressive nature of the performance principle but also his sexual life. In the novel *Post Office*, also narrated by Chinaski, the repressive work institution of the post office impinges on his life outside of work. There is one point in the novel where Chinaski calls in sick so as to spend some time with his girlfriend:

At the time, when you called in sick the post office sent out a nurse to spot check, to make sure you weren't night-clubbing or sitting in a poker parlor. My place was close to the central office, so it was convenient for them to check up on me. Betty and I had been there about two hours when there was a knock on the door.

"What's that?"

"All right," I whispered, "shut up! Take off those high heels, go into the kitchen and don't make a sound."

"JUST A MOMENT!" I answered the knocker.

I lit a cigarette to kill my breath, then went to the door and opened it a notch. It was the nurse. The same one. She knew me. (Bukowski, C., *Post Office* p.77)

The above quote is particularly Marcusean as there is an explicit link made between work and the suppression of sexual activity outside of the workplace. The issue of a

repressive work environment and its relationship to the performance principle is not an area of thought that the original Beats represent in any great detail but it is not completely absent from their work either. For example, Ginsberg shares similar sympathies with Chinaski and Bukowski's reticent work-ethic and his hate for the soul-crushing mundane factory work. In Ginsberg's poem, 'Paterson', for example, he attacks

old clerks in their asylums of fact, the slobs and dumbbells of the ego with
money and power
to hire and fire and make and break and fart and justify their reality of wrath
and rumor of wrath to wrath-weary man,
what war I enter and for what prize! the dead prick of commonplace
obsession.²⁴

For Bukowski the prize was simply 'The Job'. He does not look to 'get' anything from it other than the work itself. Ginsberg envisages 'the dead prick of commonplace obsession' for his reward. This, I suggest, aligns itself to Marcuse's performance principle. The 'dead prick' symbolises the desexualisation of the 'polymorphous self' as a result of the repressive reality principle devoid of any erotic element. 'Wrath-weary man' is an excellent expression for describing the nature of oppression under capitalism. Yet both Ginsberg and Marcuse's 'practical' code for challenging the oppression of post-war capitalism falls back on a static essentialist notion of man living at 'one with nature'. Neither provides a conceptual materialist notion of a system outside of capitalism. Although Marcuse addresses the concerns of the proletariat in *Eros and Civilization* - particularly with reference to Marxist's notions of alienation and reification - he provides no practical materialist alternatives for such working-class alienation.

Eros and Civilization focuses too much on the essentialist notion of satisfying needs. It fails as a practical materialist Marxist text because it does not recognise that, though materialism grounds its premises on satisfying essential

needs it is not reducible to them. Although Marcuse addresses the concerns of the proletariat in *Eros and Civilization* particularly with reference to Marxist's notions of alienation and reification he provides no practical materialist alternatives for such working class alienation. In fact Marcuse becomes so disillusioned with the idea of the proletariat being the agent of the revolution that in the sixties and seventies he begins to look elsewhere for a 'new working class'. This is reflected in his work *One Dimensional Man* and the paper 'The Reification of the Proletariat', both of which will be discussed in the following section.

6. The 'deproletarianization' of the working classes and its counter-revolutionary effects

In the previous section I have argued that the Beats did have radical political relevance by relating the concept of the 'beaten down' to that of Marcuse's performance principle. Marcuse's ideas in *Eros and Civilization*, however, are far from unproblematic. His quest for a world of playful abandon and of unlimited, unrestrained sexuality borders on the Beat's own mystical dreaming of beatific enlightenment. Both are really visions without a conceptual code. I will now turn to the less utopian and more politically practical ideas in Marcuse's later, post-Beat Generation, works of the sixties and seventies. A particular focus will be placed on his notion of the 'deproletarianization' of the working class and this will be linked to the Beat philosophy of dropping out of oppressive industrial work relations rather than seeing the industrial work-place as the locus for the revolution.

The original Beats' anarchic notion of dropping-out of conventional society is not a completely bourgeois activity. It can be read as a Marxist ideological stance in that the Beats were rebelling against the capitalist system, albeit not from a strictly proletarian point of view as it is more in line with the New Left ideology of questioning the relevance of a strictly blue-collar revolution. An example of this New Left critique of capitalism can be found in Marcuse's paper 'The Reification of the Proletariat'. Marcuse, here, argues that in late capitalism the concept of the working

class needs to be redefined because in the sixties and seventies it integrated large sections of non-proletarian workers into the working class such as white-collar workers, engineers and technicians and this leads to a more intellectual and productive working class. Marcuse points out, though, that this

System reproduces itself through the productivity of unproductive labour, which does not increase the social wealth, but rather destroys it through the production of waste, planned obsolescence, a self-propelling armament industry, management of consciousness and sub-consciousness, etc. (Marcuse, 1978: 289)

In the period of late capitalism, the working class was becoming more skilled and intelligent, yet their increased productivity did not make for a better society; it only furthered capitalists' needs for surplus value. Marcuse, here, has a much less utopian notion of Praxis than in *Eros and Civilization*, where he postulated the notion that production was simply a way of eradicating material scarcity. Marcuse's vision in 'The Reification of the Proletariat' is more pessimistic: he no longer believed that the proletariat's labour time is the bearer and agent of revolutionary meaning in the capitalist system. In the climate of late capitalism 'revolutionary theory assumes an abstract character and becomes the concern of minorities' (Marcuse, 1972: 37).

Advances in technology and mass media enabled capitalists to produce ever-increasing 'false needs' for the proletariat to satisfy. Marcuse argues that revolutionary potential then switches from the industrial proletariat to marginal groups such as students and intellectuals who he sees, along with the proletariat, as encompassing a much broader 'new working class.' But Marcuse does not share Marx's faith in the proletariat as the catalyst for revolutionary change. In his book *Counterrevolution and Revolt* Marcuse argues that only a small minority of students and intellectuals understand that there is:

A social wealth sufficient to abolish poverty; the technical know-how to develop the available resources systematically toward this goal; a ruling class which wastes, arrests, and annihilates the productive forces. (Marcuse, 1972: 7 in, Held, 1980: 75)

Although the working class, in late capitalism, is a much more diverse phenomenon than simply an industrial proletariat the gap between the new working class and the capitalist is arguably as big as ever. If the revolution is to occur it has to involve more than students and intellectuals. The danger for Marcuse here is that he risks conceptualising the revolution as mere 'scholastic' concern rather than it impacting on the actual social conditions of the working class (Marx, 1945: 120).

Marcuse, however, does see a revolutionary potential within the industrial working class in the late capitalist phase. The production of waste and surplus makes it strikingly obvious to the working class that the old division of labour between the proletariat and capitalist is no longer strictly related to production. Marcuse envisages a 'counter consciousness' within the new working class as, in late capitalism, they have an awareness of the disparities between valuable production and meaningless production (Marcuse, 1978: 289). Rudolf Bahro calls this working-class consciousness 'surplus consciousness' and defines it as 'the growing quantity of free mental energy which is no longer tied up in necessary labour and hierarchical knowledge'.²⁵

Marcuse sees an example of counter consciousness in absenteeism, strike action and unemployment. Russell Harrison argues that in Bukowski's case, such a 'counter-consciousness' arose through his realisation that 'the domination originally necessary- based on an economy of scarcity- has remained as that condition of scarcity is (potentially) no more' (Harrison, 1995: 129). In the poem below, Bukowski highlights just this point of how his absence from the workplace is a challenge to the old rules of socialism where labour time is understood as the centre-point for all social and economic meaning. Yet it seems, as Marcuse predicted, that Bukowski is part of only a small minority of the working class who

have any understanding of the New Left's 'counter-consciousness' as his fellow blue-collar workers are antagonistic towards his attitude:

the worst day

it was raining very hard

I didn't have a raincoat so

I put on a very old coat I hadn't worn for

months and

I walked in a little late

while they were working

I looked in the coat for some

cigarettes

and found a five dollar bill

in the side pocket:

"hey, look, ! I said, "I just found a 5 dollar bill I didn't know I had, that's

funny"

"hey, man, knock off the shit!"²⁶

In the poem, Bukowski makes *cultural* reference to the fact he is economically disadvantaged, that is, he cannot afford a raincoat and he wears tatty clothes. The fact that Bukowski deliberately employs a simple, sparse, economical language and a poetic form that is lacking in refinement and intricacy supports the idea that he is not using poetry that may be deemed intellectually superior to the workers. While this exhibits an overt awareness of class-consciousness it is only when the five-

dollar bill is mentioned that any real conflict comes into play. It seems that worker solidarity is absent, that they would prefer to argue amongst themselves about how their money should be valued and attack the poet's protagonist for attempting to question the capitalist value system. If it was put to the workers that the Board of Directors, who would probably be earning five to ten times their income, and 'throwing away' a hell of a lot more money on fancy cars and holiday homes - and be working a fraction of the hours of the blue collar workers to earn this money - then maybe they could begin to question the system.

It is not simply a case, however, of questioning the workers' intelligence because, if they are working ten and twelve hour days in mind-numbing production work then the chance to critically reflect that they may be *interpellated* by the ideological state apparatus into being a submissive and unquestioning worker for the capitalist, simply will not enter their minds.

Russell Harrison argues that Bukowski is not representing working-class oppression here because he employs the word 'they' which distances the poet from the workers and that this is a disassociation from the workers (Harrison, 1995: 73). Counter to Harrison's argument, here, I believe that Bukowski is not distancing himself from the workers. He is distancing himself from the worker's false consciousness that the harder they labour under capitalist conditions the more they will benefit. The workers in the poem are engaging in an ideology that perpetuates and increases surplus repression and instead he is engaging in a form of surplus consciousness that calls into question the value of production in the late capitalist society.

The effect of this is revolutionary rather than reactionary. I would argue that Bukowski's poem '\$\$\$\$\$' has a message of protest against capitalist exploitation as he is producing the kind of counter-consciousness that Marcuse predicted the new working classes could engender. Marcuse argued that surplus consciousness could neglect 'the reification which veiled the real mechanisms of domination behind the façade of free, objective exchange relationships' (Marcuse, 1978: 291). In the majority of cases, Bukowski's surplus-consciousness, which was produced through

absenteeism, would lead to the sack but if dropping-out is done with this sort of class-consciousness it can be read as a positive ideological action. In his introductory text on Marx, McLellan points out that Marx himself did not talk favorably of such a drop-out underclass, in fact he called them the 'lumpen proletariat' and described them as, 'a recruiting ground for thieves and criminals of all kinds, living on the crumbs of society, people without a definite trade, vagabonds, people without a hearth or a home'.²⁷

With the lumpen proletariat being composed of outsiders Marx believed they had little influence on history and its revolutionary discourses. In his book *One Dimensional Man*, Marcuse argues more favourably that such an anarchic minority of proletarians could have an impact on history given that in a world of technocratic exploitation, where the distinction between physical and mental labour becomes blurred, the industrial proletariat is no longer in a position to create class-consciousness. Instead it is those who are marginalised, blacks, women and the unemployed who hold the revolutionary potential for social change. McLellan states that Marcuse sees in this new breed of lumpen proletariat the potential to produce, 'the most advanced consciousness of humanity and its most exploited force.' (McLellan, 1975: 81). It is the lumpen proletariat (or Marcuse's 'new working class') as the producer of a class-consciousness which is probably the single most innovative aspect of the whole of Bukowski's writing, and the poem '\$\$\$\$\$\$' is a typical example of this.

The working class that Bukowski represented, however, was more of the blue-collar mass as a whole, the very same class that Marcuse lost faith in, in terms of their ability to affect social change. If Marcuse's ideas of the 'new working class' are to have any practical impact on social processes there should be more faith in the workers themselves and not just a reliance on a minority of radical intellectuals to act as the catalyst for socialist change. I have already shown evidence in this section, though, that the Marcuse of the sixties and seventies still foresaw the practical and revolutionary potential of the mass of the working classes affecting change through its generation of 'surplus consciousness'.

Where Marcuse's practical Marxism fails most roundly in his work after the fifties is not with his notion of a 'minority group' of working-class revolutionaries but the fact that he remains a staunch essentialist. Even though the Marcuse of the sixties and seventies accepts that a utopian society will not arise simply through ridding the world of economic scarcity he still holds to the essentialist notion that a revolutionary discourse entails man's integration with nature. By refusing to partake in late capitalism's excessively productive society man could, Marcuse argues, return to nature. David Held highlights the fact that Marcuse maintains his essentialist notion of a new revolutionary order even in the context of his late capitalist writings:

His advocacy of a 'great refusal' seeks a world that would negate capitalism, reduce over-development in the 'developed' countries, and pursue a 'pacified existence' –a non-instrumental relation between people and between people and nature. (Held, 1980: 76, referring to Marcuse, 1964: 240-1)

If people's thoughts collapse into nature, as the quote above suggests, then there would be no place for practical, critical thinking in Marcuse's notion of praxis. Thought systems would be lost in the swamp of 'intuitive' or 'instinctual' feelings. Marx's notion of praxis is an attack on systems of thought that remain completely detached from the materialist reality. The Marcusean notion of praxis, which over-emphasises the practice of essential living to such an extreme that we lose sight of the theoretical aspects of praxis, is not found in Marx's own writings. In the light of Marcuse's theoretical limitations I will now turn to another New Left writer - Jean Baudrillard - who, like Marcuse and Bukowski, advocated such tactics as absenteeism, strike action and unemployment as practical strategies to create a counter-consciousness within late capitalism. A significant relationship will be established between the theoretical ideas of Baudrillard and the literary ideas of Bukowski. Particular focus will be placed on both writers' belief of a total negation of the capitalist order. Unlike Marcuse, however, Baudrillard was radically anti-

essentialist and placed his faith in the revolutionary capacity of linguistic sign systems. In short, Baudrillard focused on the more theoretical aspects of praxis, particularly in his early works, to which I will now turn.

7. Refusal to work as an active ideology

Douglas Kellner makes a comparison between Marcuse and the early works of Baudrillard's (1968-75), in that both critically analyse the effect of reification on the labour force as a result of late capitalism's consumer culture.²⁸ Kellner points out that what Baudrillard means by reification is that 'objects come to dominate subjects, thereby robbing them of their human qualities and capacities'.²⁹ Similarly, David Held states that the aims of the Frankfurt School project, and of Marcuse in particular, was to liberate the individual from this process of reification through 'The material basis [...]that makes a rational society possible' (Held, 1980: 246). A problem with Marcuse's notion of 'material' here is that it is a non-dialectical essentialist concept rather than a social one. In *The Mirror of Production* Baudrillard's argument for a revolutionary agent that will assist a post-capitalist socialism is much more pessimistic than Marcuse's as he sees a 'total defeat of the subject by the object world' (Kellner, 1989: 19). The subject for Baudrillard only exists as a set of *differences* within the semiotic codes of language. But by dissolving the subject into language, wholesale, there is no revolutionary agent to resist power structures. Historical materialism simply becomes one more language within many languages.

Without starting from the premise that material needs are the base through which we affect historical change then any notion of praxis simply becomes pure theory (and in Baudrillard's case purely linguistic) without an object or agent to act as a revolutionary catalyst. Kellner makes a similar criticism of Baudrillard's notion of revolution through signification. Baudrillard argues that all material needs are socially constructed through language but as Kellner points out, in criticism of Baudrillard:

Marx argues that needs and use values are merely socially *mediated*, shaped and channelled by sociohistorical practices and conditions, and thus allows the formulation [...] of needs and use values that can be directed against the existing social system. (Kellner, 1989: 35)

For Marx then, sociohistorical practices - and we can include Baudrillard's system of signs within this - mediate in relation to material needs; such needs are not merely 'signifiers' within language. What is more fundamental than what Baudrillard calls 'sign-values' are the economic values of need, use and exchange.³⁰ Baudrillard is correct, however, in arguing that an understanding of socially constructed 'sign-values' is crucial if we are to grasp to the complex systems of value that saturate the post-industrial society. People buy coats, washing machines, cars etc., with an eye to the 'sign-value' of their brand-names and logos and such sign-values set up a hierarchy of recognition through 'conspicuous consumption'. As Bukowski points out, though, in his poem '\$\$\$\$\$\$', people also buy coats, for example, to stop them from getting cold and wet: 'it was raining very hard/ I didn't have a raincoat so/ I put on a very old coat I hadn't worn for/ months' (Bukowski, in Harrison, 1995: 73). Consumption is not simply reducible to linguistic 'sign values' but it ties in with the economic strategies of use/exchange and surplus value.

What both Marcuse and Baudrillard give to my argument for a 'Beat' notion of praxis is their call for a 'great refusal' to the capitalist productive system. Such a refusal is equivalent to the Beat philosophy of 'dropping out' of the capitalist system. Bukowski's ideology of dropping out of the productive relations of capitalism is at its most political and eloquent in his novel *Factotum*. Although, in the initial sections of *Factotum* Bukowski's ideology is more akin to classical Marxism. Here, he follows Marx's idea that in order for the capitalist to cover costs and to pay the wages of the workers the average working day should be no more than six hours. It is the very fact that the workers often labour for twice as long as this that the capitalist can produce a *surplus value* or profit which the workers themselves do not see anything of. This is one of the main themes of *Factotum* as the main protagonist, Chinaski, states:

The problem, as it was in those days during the war, was overtime. Those in control always preferred to overwork a few men continually, instead of hiring more people so everyone might work less. You gave the boss eight hours, and he always asked for more. He never sent you home after six hours, for example. You might have time to think. (Bukowski, C. *Factotum* p.57)

In the context of full-employment America in the late forties and early fifties it can be understood why Bukowski might adhere to the classical Marxist notion of the workers revolutionising the capitalist value system by creating an even distribution of wealth. *Factotum* does not just create a narrative for Bukowski's work experiences up until the fifties but right through to the seventies. Towards the end of the novel, when he is narrating his work experiences from the period of the seventies, his ideas conformed with the New Left ideology of attacking all systems of value.

There is a political ideology to *Factotum* which relates to what Marcuse calls 'the deproletarianization of the working class' (Marcuse, 1978). That is, by the 1970s the working-class revolution was no longer, strictly speaking, related to blue-collar work. The exchange value of capital in relation to manual labour became devalued and with it the whole capitalist system. Bukowski's literary ideas represent, for me, the concept that in such an economic climate, the refusal to work is the next step towards the proletariat revolution. Evidence of Bukowski's politically radical notion of refusing capitalist work relations can be found in the following quote from *Factotum* where Chinaski is confronted by his boss, who is about to sack him for not 'working' hard enough:

I stared down at my shoes for some time. I didn't know what to say. Then I looked at him. "I've given you my *time*. It's all I've got to give - it's all any man has. And for a pitiful buck and a quarter an hour". (Bukowski, C. *Factotum* pp.112-113)

As a worker in the 1970s Chinaski represents the ideology of working-class experience, in America. The boss had sacked him because of his low productivity levels. Chinaski is highlighting the fact that his productivity, or any blue-collar worker's productivity is becoming valueless as machinery replaces man. Following the sack Chinaski makes the demand that 'I want my unemployment insurance. I don't want any trouble about that. You guys are always trying to cheat a working man out of his rights. So don't give me any trouble or I'll be back' (Bukowski, C. *Factotum* pp.112-113). Bukowski, in the preceding quotation, is drawing attention not only to the devaluation of the worker but also to the demand for a place outside the means of capitalist production for the working class. In short, the revolutionary working-class no longer has to work and it is the refusal to work that produces resistance to capitalist exploitation. Russell Harrison sees *Factotum* as a turning point in American fiction as it represents, for the first time the, 'idea that the worker would prefer *not* to work [and this] goes against the grain of traditionalist socialist ideology, where work, and the worker, were glorified' (Harrison, 1995: 149).

8. Baudrillard's 'Beat' philosophy of dropping out of capitalist modes of production

A revolutionary critical thinker that ties in here with Bukowski's idea of the worker preferring not to work and attempting to find meaning outside of productive relations is Jean Baudrillard. In *The Mirror of Production* Baudrillard states that,

It is no longer then a question of an internal, dialectical negativity in the mode of production, but a refusal, pure and simple of production as the general axiomatic of social relations [...] This is what gives the new left or hippie movement its meaning. Not the open revolt of a few, but the immense, latent defection, the endemic, masked resistance of a silent majority.³¹

In contrast to Marx, Baudrillard questioned the whole notion of production being the vehicle through which social emancipation is achieved. Bukowski and Baudrillard, conversely, question the whole code of valuation that the capitalist system is built on and advocate Nietzschean strategies of destruction and disaffection. Bukowski's Beat ethic of dropping out of the capitalist system has clear resonances with Baudrillard's own notion of a revolutionary 'drop out' culture:

Revolt emerged against the integration of labor power as a factor of production. The new social groups, de facto drop-outs, on the contrary, proved the incapacity of the system to "socialize the society" in its traditionally strategic level, to dynamically integrate them, even by violent contradiction at the level of production. And it is on the basis of their *total irresponsibility* that these marginal generations carry on the revolt. (Baudrillard, 1975, in Rivkin & Ryan, 1998: 349)

The words 'total irresponsibility' are obviously italicised for ironic effect. It is such an accusation that is levelled at the Beats and hippies for 'dropping out' of the productive process. But unlike the lumpen-proletariat of Marx's day, the 'drop-outs' of contemporary capitalist society are large in number and do have an influence on the political climate of the day, as the Seattle demonstrations testified. And what interestingly links Baudrillard's ideas of 'dropping-out' to Bukowski's is that Baudrillard moves the focus of political radicalism away from modes of production to modes of *signification*.

A problem with Baudrillard's model for a cultural revolution in *The Mirror of Production* is that there is no agent for a revolution given that the working-class subject of industrial productivity is consumed by a linguistic code that he calls 'sign-value'.³² Without a use-ful subject to effect a revolution through productive relations Baudrillard envisages an anti-productive 'symbolic exchange' as the new revolutionary agent in which 'The symbolic social relation is the uninterrupted cycle of giving and receiving, which, in primitive exchange, includes the consumption of the "surplus" and deliberate anti-production' (Baudrillard, 1975: 143). This

'revolutionary' code, like Marcuse's lacks any real theoretical underpinning; it is more a negation of modes of production rather than a model in itself. It smacks of the Dionysian mysticism that the Beats claim as their own resistance to capitalism. The body-mysticism of Dionysus is comparable to Baudrillard's notion of a symbolic exchange as the latter entails 'a gratuitous and festive energizing of the body's powers' (Baudrillard, 1975: 43). Ultimately, Baudrillard's model for practical, social change is ahistorical in that he rejects Marx's notion of use value/ exchange value as the material basis for social meaning. Yet Baudrillard is central to the post-Marxist debate in that he took up Marx's prediction in *The Poverty of Philosophy* that consumption would one day dominate social meaning as much as production.

This is a time when the very things which till then had only been communicated, but never exchanged; given but, never sold; acquired, but never bought - virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience, etc [...] is brought to the market to be assessed at its truest value.³³

Baudrillard has addressed the fact that we now live in a consumer society but he has done so by largely ignoring the productive aspects of this late capitalism and particularly that of the working class. The Beats had so much effect on society because they revolutionised the value we place on literature and language in a Baudrillardian sense. They also placed an essential importance on the life experience of their writers which would side with a more Marcusean reading of revolutionary discourse.

The overall aim of this article was to show that the Beats were neither Marcusean nor Baudrillardian in their approach to counter-cultural praxis. The Beats' dialectical deployment of both linguistic and essentialist experiences explains why they had such a social impact, and this is particularly so given that the catalyst for their movement was crucially working class, a point that has so far been largely ignored in Beat scholarship.

Notes

¹ Holmes, J.C., *Go* (NY: Penguin 1952), p.30; in Campbell, J., *This is the Beat Generation* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1999), p.80.

² Abrams, M.H., *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (London: Harcourt Brace, 1993), p.14.

³ Marx, K., *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970 [1845]).

⁴ Marx, K., 'Theses on Feuerbach' in *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970 [1875]).

⁵ Marcuse, H., *Eros and Civilization - A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (London: Sphere Books, 1955).

⁶ Kerouac, J., *On the Road* (London: Penguin, 1991 [1955]); Ginsberg, A., *Howl* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1994 [1956]).

⁷ Marcuse, H., *One-Dimensional Man* (London: Routledge, 1991 [1964]); *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972) and 'The Reification of the Proletariat' in *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

⁸ Baudrillard, J., *The Mirror of Production* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975).

⁹ Charters, A., *The Penguin Book of the Beats* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. xvi .

¹⁰ Barlett, L., *The Beats: Essays in Criticism* (London: McFarland, 1981) p.3, original source not referenced.

¹¹ Miles, B., *Ginsberg* (New York: Viking Press, 1989).

¹² Regina Weinreich's *The Spontaneous Poetics of Jack Kerouac: A Study of Fiction* (New York: Shooting Star, 1994).

¹³ Tytell, J., *Naked Angels: Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs* (New York: Grove/Atlantic, 1991), p.25.

¹⁴ Miles, B., *Ginsberg – A Biography* (New York: Viking, 1989), p.227.

¹⁵ Held, D., *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), p.124.

¹⁶ Marcuse, H., *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960) p.229; in Held, D., *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (London: Hutchinson, 1980) p.125.

¹⁷ Robinson, P., *The Sexual Radicals* (London: Temple Smith, 1970), p.155.

¹⁸ Ginsberg, A., 'Kaddish' (San Francisco: City Lights, 1997), back cover.

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- ¹⁹ Marx, K. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (On-Line Version: Marx.org 1993 [Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1859]), appendix 1, section 1, no page reference.
- ²⁰ Sounes, H., Charles Bukowski: *Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc), p.14.
- ²¹ Ginsberg, A., 'Paris Review', incomplete reference, in Tytell, J., *Naked Angels: Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs* (New York: Grove/Atlantic, 1991) p.18.
- ²² Bukowski, C., *Living on Luck – Selected Letters 1960s – 1970s, Vol.2* (San Francisco: Black Sparrow Press, 2000), p.12.
- ²³ Bukowski, C., *Factotum* (London: Virgin, 1992 [1975]) and *Post Office* (London: Virgin, 1992 [1971]).
- ²⁴ Ginsberg, A., *Selected Poems 1947-1995* (London: Penguin, 1996), p.13.
- ²⁵ Bahro, R. 'The Alternative' *New Left Review*, no.106, Nov-Dec 1977 in Held, D., p.120.
- ²⁶ Charles Bukowski's '\$\$\$\$\$\$' in, Harrison, R. (San Francisco: Black Sparrow, 1995), p.73.
- ²⁷ McLellan, D. *Marx* (London: Fontana Modern Masters, 1975), p.45.
- ²⁸ Baudrillard's *The System of Objects* (1968); *The Consumer Society* (1970); *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972) and *The Mirror of Production* (1975) were all reworkings of Marx's critique of capitalism in the light of developments in the media, consumer and information societies. From *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976) Baudrillard moved away from his critique of political economy to postmodern notions of 'simulation' and 'hyperreality'.
- ²⁹ Kellner, D. *Jean Baudrillard: from Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) p.18.
- ³⁰ Baudrillard, J., *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St Louis: Telos, 1981) , p.66.
- ³¹ Baudrillard, J., *The Mirror of Production* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975) ; in Rivkin, J. and Ryan, M., *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p.333.
- ³² Baudrillard, J. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* p.66.
- ³³ Marx, K. *The Poverty of Philosophy*, in Marx-Engels, *Collected Works*, vo.6 (New York:International Publishers, 1976), p.113; in Kellner, D.

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