

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS/INGLÊS E LITERATURA CORRESPONDENTE

ON THE ROAD WITH A BEAT WRITER: JACK KEROUAC AND THE
CONSTRUCTION OF U.S. CULTURE'S *OTHER*

JULIANA SARTORI

Dissertação submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina em cumprimento
parcial dos requisitos para obtenção do grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

FLORIANÓPOLIS

Fevereiro 2006

Esta dissertação de Juliana Sartori, intitulada *On the Road with a Beat Writer: Jack Kerouac and the Construction of U.S. Culture's Other*, foi julgada adequada e aprovada em sua forma final, pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras/Inglês e Literatura Correspondente, da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, para fins de obtenção do grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

Área de concentração: Inglês e Literatura Correspondente
Opção: Literaturas de Línguas Inglesa

José Luiz Meurer
Coordenador

BANCA EXAMINADORA:

Eliana Ávila
Orientadora e Presidente

Anelise Corseuil
Examinador

Maria Clara Bonetti Paro
Examinador

Florianópolis, 20 de Fevereiro de 2006

For João Gabriel, Isadora and Pedro

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the following institution and people:

Capes, for the scholarship;

Prof. Eliana Ávila, for her committed guidance and kind attention during the development of this study;

My family, whose presence alone is always able to soothe my mind;

Carina and Célio, for being so understandable at times when I was no longer able to understand myself.

ABSTRACT

ON THE ROAD WITH A BEAT WRITER: JACK KEROUAC AND THE
CONSTRUCTION OF U.S. CULTURE'S *OTHER*

JULIANA SARTORI

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
2005

Supervising Professor: Eliana Ávila

During the 50s, the Beat Generation emerged on the literary scene of the U.S. as a representative of rebelliousness and non-submission to the politics of containment defined by the Cold War. After the publication of *On the Road* in 1957, its author, the Beat writer Jack Kerouac, became the spokesman of the generation and the novel was elevated to the condition of milestone to the subsequent counter-culture movements in that country. The objective of the present study is to demonstrate that *On the Road* echoes the same dichotomies that worked to define U.S. culture's Other within the containment discourse of the Cold War. In this light, this study approaches the novel as a conflicting text in which the supposedly progressive references to cultural and racial heterogeneity reproduce the dominant discourse instead of establishing the discourse of protest on which its reputation has been based. This study also perceives the novel's revolutionary appeal as a result of the mystification of techniques that commonly defined postwar aesthetics. In chapter 2, both the U.S. imperialist project of expansion and its federal policies aiming at the development of a hegemonic society are analyzed considering mainly their relation towards so-called minority groups. Chapter 3 examines *On the Road* as part of the utopian project of spontaneity, an aesthetic project that, aiming at evading the political conflicts of the time, ultimately reproduced

hegemonic conceptions concerning Otherness and the specialty of aesthetic movements. Chapter 4 presents possibilities for further research, as well as my conclusions as to how Kerouac's novel reproduces dominant discourses.

Número de páginas: 89

Número de palavras: 23.625

RESUMO

Durante os anos 50, a Geração Beat emerge no cenário literário estadunidense como representante de rebeldia e não submissão à política de contenção definida pela Guerra Fria. Após a publicação de *On The Road* em 1957, seu autor, o escritor Beat Jack Kerouac, tornou-se o porta-voz da geração e seu texto foi elevado à condição de marco cultural para os subseqüentes movimentos de contracultura naquele país. O presente estudo tem por objetivo demonstrar que *On the Road* ecoa as mesmas dicotomias que definiram o Outro cultural estadunidense no discurso de contenção promovido pela Guerra Fria. Desta maneira, *On the Road* é percebido como um texto conflituoso onde as referências supostamente progressivas à heterogeneidade cultural e racial reproduzem o discurso dominante no lugar de estabelecer o discurso de protesto no qual sua reputação foi construída. Este estudo também percebe o apelo revolucionário do texto como sendo resultado das mistificações referentes à técnica que definiram a arte no período do pós-guerra. No capítulo 2, tanto o projeto de expansão imperialista quanto as políticas federais que visavam o desenvolvimento de uma sociedade hegemônica são analisados a partir de sua relação com os então definidos grupos minoritários. O capítulo 3 examina *On the Road* como sendo parte do utópico projeto da espontaneidade, um movimento estético que, visando evadir os conflitos políticos e sociais da época, acabou promovendo concepções hegemônicas em relação à alteridade e à superioridade dos movimentos artísticos. O capítulo 4 apresenta possibilidades para futuras pesquisas assim como minhas conclusões sobre como o texto de Kerouac reproduz discursos dominantes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of the Problem.....	1
1.2. Context of Investigation.....	3
1.3. Review of Literature.....	5
1.4. Objectives and Hypotheses.....	10
1.5. Significance of the Research.....	12
1.6 Contents.....	13

CHAPTER 2. DISCOURSE OF THE COLD WAR

2.1. Discourse of Development.....	15
2.2. The Shift towards Mass-Consumption Society.....	24
2.3. Patriarchal Discourse.....	27
2.4. Racist Discourse.....	37

CHAPTER 3. DISCOURSE OF SPONTANEITY

3.1. About <i>On the Road</i> – Content and Writing Style.....	43
3.2. The Project of Spontaneity.....	45
3.3. Jung, Collective Unconscious, Otherness.....	49
3.4. Spontaneous Prose as Craft.....	61

CHAPTER 4 .CONCLUSION

4.1 Exoticism as a Literary Heritage: The Construction of U.S. Cultural Identity.....	69
4.2 Spontaneity as Control.....	72
4.3 The Mystification of Aesthetics.....	77

WORKS CITED.....	81
-------------------------	-----------

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS, APPENDIXES

Annex A85

Annex B.....87

Annex C.....89

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The Beat Generation is renowned for its literary movement that began in the early 1950s (Cold War period) with a small and very closely connected group of young writers. Though numerous other writers have been attached to the movement, the canonized group was formed by Jack Kerouac (1922-1969), William S. Burroughs (1914-1997) and the poets Allen Ginsberg (1926- 1997), Lawrence Ferlinghetti (1919-) and Gregory Corso (1930-2001).

This movement arose on the U.S. literary scene as a reaction against the increasing mass consumption and the hegemonic¹ process defined by Cold War politics. The Beats' opposition to the dominant culture² marked the development of a literary style defined as Spontaneous Prose.³ This writing form was an attempt to integrate “conscious and unconscious experience” (Belgrad 198), thus to attack the “‘well-crafted’ academic poetry” of their day, to “increase the reality content of their utterance” and also to challenge the “psychological splitting imposed by the Cold War cultural establishment” (Belgrad 198).

¹ In the realm of civil society, “the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons works not through domination but by what Antonio Gramsci calls consent. In any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others. . . the forms of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as *hegemony*” (Said, *The Edward Said Reader* 73).

² I use Edward W. Said's definition of culture: First, it means all the practices, “like the arts of description, communications, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social and political realms and that exist in aesthetic forms. . .” (xii). And second, “culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought. . . In time, culture comes to be associated often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates “us” from “them”. . . Culture in this sense is a source of identity. . .” (*Culture and Imperialism* xiii).

³ One of the many branches of the *Culture of Spontaneity*, the spontaneous creative act that was developed in the U.S. as an alternative “opposed both to the mass culture and the established high culture of the postwar period” (Belgrad 1). The principles for spontaneous prose were established by Kerouac in his essay “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose.”

Along with this preoccupation to communicate reality, the Beats challenged the hegemonic culture of the 50s by perceiving the racial heterogeneity of the U.S. as a perfect hideaway from the anxieties and constraints of white middle-class privilege. Being so, non-white groups became objectified and had their life style ultimately idealized and emulated by the Beat writers. By attaching themselves to the marginalized groups, the Beats also sought to get away from the increasing consumption behavior encouraged by the economy of the postwar in the U.S.

Despite the refusal to see itself attached to the dominant culture, the Beat Generation turned out to be co-opted by the mainstream media. After its first appearance to the mass public, the term Beat⁴ was eventually shaped by the press, becoming a label, a stereotype until the public absorbed a caricature of the “*Beatnik* – the guy with beard, rumpled clothes, sandals, bongo drum and a copy of the *Howl*” (Willentz). According to Mitchell J. Smith, *Beatnik* became then the marketable version of the Beat Generation and throughout the 50s and the 60s, the Beats had their images (re)created and constantly exploited by TV shows, the Hollywood movie industry and popular magazines (par. 5).

Thus, the Beat generation became the realm for curious ambiguities: while trying to react against the conservative society of the Cold War period through an approximation to the racial diversity of U.S. society, the Beat writers ended up contributing to the stereotyped representation of marginalized groups in the U.S.; and while trying to dispel the consumption society, the Beat Generation was ultimately consumed by it. Such

⁴ There seems to be an ongoing debate about the origins of the term *Beat* but it is generally accepted that Jack Kerouac came up with the word during a conversation with John Clellon Holmes in 1948. But the term was introduced to the mainstream public only in 1952, when Holmes wrote an article to the *New York Times Magazine* called “This is the Beat Generation”.

curious ambiguities suggest a complex intersection between the discourse⁵ propagated by the Beats and the one combated by them, that is, the discourse of the Cold War.

1.2. Context of Investigation

Conventional wisdom has it that dictatorial regimes and restricting political⁶ practices have always been a fertile ground for creative artistic booms. This conception could explain why, for example, the avant-garde movements arose during the in between-wars period in Europe; the Lost Generation developed in the U.S. of the twenties and the Magical Realism movement grew amidst the authoritarian societies of Latin America. In other words, during such harsh times, art and artistic activities are believed to be a legitimate realm either to reject or to confirm ideological⁷ positions. Many artists, bearing this understanding in mind, have supported the assumption of their being the antennae of the world, mostly in times when high restraining forces are acting in the social arena. It is important, then, to be aware of this particular dynamic and the ideological mechanisms that enable such movements and artists to perpetuate this aura of moral superiority and eventually to become the representatives of rebelliousness and protest.

Restrictive politics have taken part in the history of a number of different countries throughout the world. Even those nations that are considered to be the most powerful and democratic ones have not escaped from this sort of control. In terms of especial

⁵ I refer to the notion of discourses as put forth by Stef Stembrouck, following Michael Foucault: “knowledge systems which inform institutionalized technologies of power”. Stembrouck calls attention to the relevance of Foucault’s insistence on “a reversal of the subject-statement relationship: the subject has to conform to the conditions dictated by the statement before s/he can become the speaker of it” (Stembrouck 17).

⁶ I use Terry Eagleton’s definition of politics, translated by Waltensir Dutra as “a maneira pela qual organizamos conjuntamente nossa vida social, e as relações de poder que isso implica” (“the way by which we organize our social life, and the power relations that such organization establishes”). (268, my translation).

⁷ In this study, I will be using the term “ideology” to refer to “a set of beliefs underlying the customs and practices common to a given social group. To members of that group, the beliefs seem obviously true, natural, and even universally applicable” (Riquelme 607).

social circumstances and the artistic movements triggered by them, one particular moment of U.S history stands out.

The time I refer to is the fifties, when world reality was laid on a postwar hangover, and the new political order, which had split the world into two different economic blocks, known as Capitalist and Socialist, had come into action. The U.S., emerging as the leader of the Capitalist world, was dealing with a new reality in terms of political issues. According to Oliver Harris, the “disciplinary and demonizing feature” of Cold War culture defined a condition of severe communist fear and imminent “diabolic conspiracy” that ultimately set the average U.S. citizen in a state of “patriotic self-policing and voluntary self-censorship” (171). The same pattern of paranoid politics against the supposedly anti-god threat posed by the U.S.S.R. also enabled the U.S. to establish, in the international realm, its neo-imperialist politics that, disguised by a humanistic purpose, sought to define U.S. leadership in the capitalist side of the world. Therefore, while having its influence on and interference in external politics intensified day by day, internally, the U.S. was applying an intense “politicization of culture by the conscription of private life in the name of national security” (Harris 171).

Along with this restrictive program, “the federal government in its postwar policies gave crucial support to the emerging consensus favoring a mass consumption-driven economy” (Cohen 118). According to Lizabeth Cohen, “mass consumption in postwar America would not be a personal indulgence, but rather a civic responsibility designed to provide ‘full employment and improved living standards for the rest of the nation’” (113). This process imposed by the government on the social realm would, of course, reach all levels of influence: “Even social programs, such as unemployment insurance, social security, public assistance, and minimum wage legislation, it was recognized, helped maintain purchasing power” (118). The mainstream media played an important

role in boosting the consumption-driven economy of the postwar period. Magazines such as *Life*, an important opinion shaper of U.S. society, helped to perpetuate the idea that “the good purchaser devoted to ‘more, newer and better’ was the good citizen” (Cohen 119).

Along with an intense concern with the development of a mass consumption society, Cold War discourse also made central the maintenance of the traditional social roles defined by U.S. patriarchal society. This particular aspect becomes clear through the attentive observation of the federal policies designed to sustain the Consumer’s Republic.⁸ That is, the economic, social and political marginality historically imposed on the so-called minorities – non-white groups and women – was maintained even within the widely proclaimed economic inclusive society of the postwar U.S.

While asserting exclusionary practices within U.S. society and establishing a general panic against the U.S.S.R., Cold War logic also co-opted the educational system and the intellectual life of the U.S. According to Daniel Belgrad, during the postwar period, universities and grant agencies in the U.S. became strongly “characterized by the anxieties and rigidities of war corporatism” (197).

In response to such a restrictive and authoritarian program, it was expected that an artistic movement would emerge. Thus Robert Holton’s assertion: “And it should come as no surprise that a reaction against that conformity – Beat Generation – should arise and attain notoriety” (266).

1.3. Review of Literature

In this context, it is not striking that for quite some time the lifestyle of the Beat writers was much more appealing to the mass media than their literary production was to the literary critics (Theado 747). For this very reason, many of the texts published

⁸ In this study, I will be using Cohen’s coined term ‘Consumer’s Republic’ (114) in order to refer to U.S. society during the postwar period.

about the Beat Generation dealt with biographies and the life-stories of the major Beat figures. Though contributing to reveal, as Mel van Elteren explains, many details of the Beat writers' lifestyle (71), such publications also contributed to the perpetuation and construction of the, somehow, mythical image of this generation's writers.

It was only in the late eighties, when a significant number of scholars started to look more attentively to the Beat's literary production instead of to their private lives, that this situation changed and, as a result, a more critical approach towards the movement was launched. According to Matt Theado, these "critical studies have demarcated new directions in Beat studies, notably feminist criticism and cultural studies" (748).

Holton's "Kerouac Among the Fellahin: *On the Road* to the Postmodern" is one example of a critical analysis concerning the aligning of Kerouac's most famous novel, *On the Road*, with master narratives. In this essay, Holton questions the writer's idyllic depicting of racial diversity in the U.S. According to him, Kerouac's view of the marginal classes was limited by his own social condition and background: "the obvious problem with this notion is that it constructs *others* purely from the point of view of the alienated male observer and never from the point of view of others themselves" (273).

What Holton seeks, by analyzing Kerouac's *On the Road*, is to "rethink the white American male subject in relation to the racial diversity of the nation" (266). By illustrating his arguments with solid examples extracted from the novel, Holton fulfills his aim to demonstrate that *On the Road*, by portraying Kerouac's misrecognition of the "conventions and limitations" of racial identity, "legitimizes as much as it challenges the master narratives that postmodernism seeks to undo" (266). In other words, Kerouac's humanist project – based on the depiction of U.S. racial heterogeneity – is contradicted by the exoticizing narratives it relies on.

Despite demonstrating that Kerouac's humanist project is contradicted by its exoticizing narrative, Holton does not relate the reductive representations within *On the Road* to the minoritizing and excluding discourses propagated by imperialist logic, and keeps, therefore, referring to the Beat Generation as a "reaction against" the social conformity of the 50's (266) and to Kerouac as a "cultural revolutionary" (269).

Holton is not alone in the aim to reveal this backward look toward master narratives that the Beat writer took when dealing with racial diversity. James Campbell, in his article "Kerouac's Blues," points out that Kerouac displayed romantic beliefs when referring to black people as being "the essential American" (455) or when he sensed jazz and the black neighborhoods of New York as some kind of "reservoirs of primitive yet present rhythm" (453). It is exactly this representational feature in Kerouac's texts that raises Campbell's interest and suspicion about the Beat Generation's approach to racial diversity in U.S. society.

Campbell states that, despite being influenced by black culture, Beat writers, in general, seemed to have an ambiguous approach towards it. In his analysis of *The Subterraneans*, Kerouac's novel based on his real love affair with a black girl, Campbell justifies his arguments by saying that "in successive scenes in the novel, the narrator's desire is stripped with unsparing candor, to disclose a mortal fear of the very same exotic quality – 'blackness' – that had aroused him" (455).

Moreover, Campbell's article assumes a more denouncing tone in relation to the Beat's appropriation of some traditional elements of black culture. When referring to Kerouac's literary improvisatory technique, Campbell states that the writer had always had the feeling that "no one before him had seen the potential scopes of a jazz prose" (455). By citing Ralph Ellison's usage of improvisatory jazz⁹ as well as the

⁹ According to Campbell, Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* "employs the conceit of improvisatory jazz techniques to express the skills required by the Negro for day-to-day survival" (457).

incorporation of the rhythms of jazz and blues by African-American poets like Sterling Brown and Langston Hughes, Campbell concludes that Kerouac and the Beats in general showed no knowledge about black literature, despite that “being the time when the Negro writer had at last become visible” (457). He finishes his essay with the conclusion that the Beats built up blacks in different guises, “sometimes as an object of fear or revulsion, sometimes of condescension, sometimes of romantic affiliation, but rarely just as himself or herself . . .” (457). Although it strongly confronts Kerouac’s and the Beat’s purported project, still it cannot evade romantic connotations, mainly when Campbell recognizes the widely proclaimed rebelliousness of the Beats as derived from the “aspects of black life that had hitherto been concealed from whites” (453).

Mark Richardson’s “Peasant Dreams: Reading *On the Road*” approaches Kerouac’s novel in a different way. What Richardson questions is, to what extent *On the Road* “finally believes and in what sense believes, in the mythology of America on which it depends” (218).

For Richardson, at the same time that the novel expresses all the Cold War “restless anxiety, troubled optimism, delirium and depression” (221) it also believes in the mythical ‘lost America of love’” (222). Therefore, reading *On the Road* becomes a question of faith: those who refuse to believe will encounter only a post-teenage rebellion and those who believe will meet the longed-for “America”. This “America” is nevertheless fictional and this beautiful fiction, according to Richardson, does not sustain the oppression and limitations that stand out after the crossing of the color line. As Richardson explains, the many examples throughout the novel where Mexican-American’s and black farmer workers’ poverty are depicted as idyllic are only means to suggest that their lives are “charmed, free of the White sorrows, White responsibility, White inhibitions” (225). This was the way Kerouac found to drag them into the dream

of the “possible America he and they might inhabit together” (226). Though Richardson does not comment on it, it is absolutely disappointing that the only alternative found by Kerouac to include racial diversity in his proclaimed progressive narrative is through such a conventional and backward fashion as that of exoticizing and romanticizing Others¹⁰ with the effect of constructing a normatized self by contrast.

By analyzing the influence of jazz on Kerouac’s prose, Douglas Malcolm, in “Jazz-America: Jazz and African-American Culture in Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*,” criticizes the current critics who perceive Kerouac’s improvisational writing style as directly inspired by the jazz music genre. According to Malcolm in both these critics’ essays¹¹ and in Kerouac’s “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose,” the analogy to jazz is based on “little formal terminology” (186). For him, Kerouac uses the “behavioral aspects of jazz performance” (103) rather than the music genre to shape the narrative. Based on this observation, Malcolm questions the consequences of a “white cultural assumption about the music and about black culture” (97).

As a result of this white interference in black culture, Malcolm concludes that *On the Road* is a novel of contradictions for at the same time that it uses jazz as an important “ideological, behavioral and semiotic source” (109), it manipulates that use in order to imprint on jazz a “romantic ideology of primitivism” (109) that ultimately denies the cultural and musical complexity of the genre. Still according to Malcolm, the novel’s great achievement is the enlargement of the “scope of suitable fictional subject to include alcoholics, junkies, and jazz musicians” (109).

¹⁰ I use Simone de Beauvoir’s definition of Other as being “derived from existentialist philosophy and based on the binary of Self/Subject and *Other*. The Self/Subject is the active, knowing subject and is by default male.” For de Beauvoir, “the *Other*, who exists for the Self/Subject in an asymmetrical relationship, is female and feminized. The *Other* is not an equal complement to the Self/Subject, but rather serves as a projection of everything the Self/Subject rejects: immanence, passivity, voicelessness” (Scott, 1). In this study, I expand this term to refer to all the minority groups depicted by the Beat writers.

¹¹ In his essay, Malcolm makes direct comments on assertions by critics such as Edward Foster, Robert Hipkiss, Gerald Nicosia, Malcolm Cowley and Regina Weinreich, among others.

All these essays show the tendency of many contemporary scholars to reevaluate the Beat writers' relations and references towards minorities and therefore to question their revolutionary appeal. Surprisingly, all these scholars, despite disclosing the Beat writer's objectification of minorities, do not relate the representations within *On the Road* and other texts by Kerouac to the imperialist discourse perpetrated at the time, and go on endorsing the novel's and the Beat Generation's claimed anti-conformist cry. That the Beat literature despised yesterday has today, five decades after its emergency, become a rich field of analyses and debates in cultural studies, only proves its influential and still controversial role in U.S. society.

1. 4. Objectives and Hypotheses

In her extensive and interesting analysis of the discourses that structured the postwar period in the Americas, Maria Josefina Saldanha-Portillo states that, for its perpetuation and expansion, "capitalism has always relied on supplementary discourses" (19). After World War II, 'development', with its imperatives of "self-determination, independence, free trade, industrialization, and economic growth" (20), became the supplementary discourse that justified the economic interest displayed by the emergent nations in the former colonies and peripheral countries.

Still according to Saldanha-Portillo, development discourse became then the ideological tool that supported U.S. neo-imperialist practices of political and economic interferences in former colonies during the Cold War period.

Though development discourse replaced racist discourse which constructed subaltern¹² subjects as belonging to the so-called "lower-races," a term now replaced with the more political term "less developed countries," (21) it still carried within it a highly reductionist view of Others. For Saldanha-Portillo, this can be seen in U.S.

¹² Following Gayatri C. Spivak, I use the term *subaltern* to refer to the (re)production of socioeconomic inequality through Eurocentric discourses of knowledge (Spivak, 1988).

president Harry Truman's inaugural address¹³ that established as one of its main objectives the effort to make available to underdeveloped countries the "scientific advances and industrial progress" of the U.S. One could argue that this statement alone could only reinforce U.S. economic interest towards the former colonies, but Truman's justification for such a pursuit is overtly dehumanizing towards subaltern peoples: "They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant" or "Their food is inadequate" (qtd. in Saldanha- Portillo 23). Thus, words such as "victims," "primitive," "stagnant" converge to define a collective imagery of Otherness and also to construct a significant concept of the self by contrast in U.S. postwar society.

While in the international realm U.S. authority relied on a neo-imperialist politics that, disguised by a humanistic approach ultimately constructed a subaltern subject, in the national realm the conservative racial-gendered-based social roles were legitimated by the political, economic and social construction of the authority of the U.S. citizen as white and male.

While trying to react against the conformity of the 50's and its constraining effects, the Beat Generation found the perfect hideout in the realm of U.S. racial and cultural heterogeneity. By voluntarily marginalizing themselves in the realm of (not voluntarily) excluded minorities of the U.S. (African, Latin, Native Americans and women), the Beat writers misunderstood these U.S. citizen's lack of economic opportunities as a bucolic or bohemian lifestyle. For example, in *On the Road*, the references to the primitiveness of cotton-field pickers' lifestyle (92) or to the stagnancy of the raggedy colored neighborhoods (170) assume a romantic connotation, which ultimately contributes to the normatization of these minorities' marginalized social condition as well as to the construction of U.S. culture's Other.

¹³Saldanha-Portillo states that, in 1949, Truman's "inaugural address proposed, as an alternative to the 'false philosophy of Communism,' a four-point program for increasing the prosperity of the United States and the rest of the world" (24).

Following Holton, Campbell, Malcolm and others, this study should analyze representations of so-called minorities in Kerouac's most famous novel, *On the Road*. My objective is to demonstrate that such references echo rather than challenge the white male centrality presented in the dominant discourse perpetrated by the Cold War.

My study contributes to the already existent analyses of such representations within Kerouac's novel by seeking to verify the following unexplored hypotheses:

- 1) The racial and gender representations in *On the Road* echo the excluding and exoticizing logic of Cold War imperialist discourses towards minorities;
- 2) The novel's widely proclaimed revolutionary appeal is supported by the mystification of the spontaneous acts and techniques that defined artistic creation during the postwar years in the U.S.

1.5. Significance of the Research

An analysis that relates the reductionist and stereotypical representations of minorities in *On the Road* with the containment culture's imperialist approach towards heterogeneity perpetrated by postwar discourses opens way to a complex field of analysis concerning the construction, use and propagation of Otherness in both political and artistic realms.

Kerouac's narrative, by being part of the project of spontaneity, certainly emerges as a fertile ground to analyze the ideologies and mystifications surrounding the aesthetic experimentations that intensely marked postwar artistic trends. The disclosure of *On the Road's* imperialist subtexts as well as of Kerouac's mystification of technique should show that the Beats' most famous novel, far from being considered solely on the fact of its being attached to a project of protest, represents a complex narrative that calls for an attentive analysis concerning the intersection between art, politics, and ideologies. Such

a disclosure is highly relevant once we recognize that this particular text has been, and still is, considered a milestone for the youth counterculture movements of the 1960s.

1.6. Contents

This study has been divided to focus on both the Discourse of the Cold War and the Discourse of Spontaneity. This structure aims at suggesting the continuous and interdependent nature of the exclusionary discourses within political and civil society.¹⁴

In the first moment, I analyze the historical context in which the Beat movement developed, that is, the Cold War era. Since the Cold War is a complex moment in the history of the U.S., I have focused on texts that analyze, in a consistent and comprehensive way, the discourses that structured the federal policies that sustained the imperialist and economic project of the Cold War.

My departure point to understand the imperialist discourse defined by the U.S. government is Saldanha-Portillo's analysis of the dichotomous logic structuring the construction of a subaltern Other in opposition to a sovereign subject displayed by the discourse of the Cold War. In order to disclose the centrality of gender and racial issues regarding the distribution and maintenance of political and economic power during the Cold War, I have made use of Cohen's disclosure of the white male centered nature of the federal policies aiming at the development of a consumption behavior within U.S. postwar society. In what concerns this centrality, my work is also informed by David H. Onkst's analysis of the racial issues within the federal policies and Jessamyn Neuhaus' considerations on the (re)definition of conservative gender roles during the early postwar U.S.

¹⁴ I refer to Antonio Gramsci's division of society, which Said explains as being made up of civil society, the one formed by "voluntary (or at least rational and noncoercive) affiliations like schools, families, and unions," and political society, formed by "state institutions (the army, the police, the central bureaucracy)," with the clear aim of direct control (The Edward Said Reader 73).

In the second moment, I demonstrate that the development of the project of spontaneity, in which the Beat Generation is included, was culturally defined as well as limited by postwar imperialistic politics. I want to demonstrate that such a project represents an aesthetization of patriarchal and imperialist discourses of the Cold War. In order to recognize the formation of the project of spontaneity as well as its sources and influences, I have made use of Belgrad's work on the use and importance of experimental techniques by the artistic movements of the 40s and the 50s in the U.S. To counter-argue the inclusive feature of the movement, strongly defended by Belgrad, and to disclose the rhetoric behind the spontaneous project, I make use of Mutlu Konuk Blasing's analysis on the rhetorics and ideologies behind the experimental poetics adopted by U.S. postwar writers.

Following these two core chapters, I shall refer to Edward W. Said's concept of Orientalism in order to present my conclusions concerning how political and cultural practices take part, dynamically, in the process of creating and using the cultural Other. Finally, following Blasing's analysis of the mystification of techniques by postwar artists, I shall present my conclusions concerning Kerouac's poetics and spontaneous aesthetics.

CHAPTER 2

DISCOURSE OF THE COLD WAR

2.1. Discourse of Development

The Cold War is popularly known for having its origins in the difficulties of the Allied countries – U.S., U.S.S.R. and Great Britain – to conform to the deals set in postwar international agreements. As an example of divergences resulted by such settlements, Gisele Ricobom mentions the Yalta Meeting of 1945 which brought together Franklin Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill (72). According to Ricobom, the main cause of divergence resulting from the Yalta Meeting was the situation of Poland whose government was clearly favorable to the Soviet Union. The West Allies were not pleased with such a situation, which ended up causing mutual accusations between Churchill and Stalin (73).

Several other situations involving disagreement about government, influence and interference over strategic countries in Europe and Asia started to shake the already delicate relations established by the Allied countries. Still according to Ricobom, it was in 1946, after being beaten at the general elections in the United Kingdom, that Winston Churchill, during a speech in Fulton, Missouri, frankly opposed the Soviet regime (74). In his speech, Churchill accused the Soviet Union of establishing tyrannies in Eastern European countries with the clear objective of expanding its power and influence. For Churchill, this influence was a threat to the Christian civilization, and it was a duty of the English speaking countries to detain its advance and establish liberty and democracy in the world (Ricobom 75).

From that moment on, both the Great Britain and the U.S. government did not save time or efforts to build up a world panic against the Soviet intention of dominating the whole world. Of course, the main threat caused by the Soviet Union was its expanding of the socialist range of influence (Ricobom 76)

In order to assure its leadership in the capitalist block, the U.S. combined economic, military and ideological efforts. Internally, President Truman, in an attempt to avoid a crisis similar to that of the late 1920s, institutionalized an economic plan created by John Maynard Keynes that was based on the creation of full employment at high wages, expansion of production and the development of a strong consumption behavior (Cohen 116). Externally, by “rehashing the 1947 Truman Doctrine,” the president established at once the economic help to rebuild the European countries as well as Japan that had been severely destroyed by the war; the military protection to those countries that were mostly threatened by communist interests; and the foundation of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) that established the military treaty among the countries of the Northern hemisphere (Saldanha-Portillo 23).

By the clauses within the Truman doctrine, the U.S. established an aggressive politics that only testified to its interest in increasing its influence over the world. Therefore, it is no surprise that after such an initiative, the rivalry between the capitalist and socialist blocks intensified, leaving the whole world in the delicate situation of fearing an ultimate confrontation while living under a regime known as the Cold War.

It is clear that during the Cold War, each of the political blocks, then defining a binary set of modes of production and ideologies in the world, were seeking to increase their influence and therefore to aggregate countries under their respective regimes. The former colonies of America, Asia and Africa thus became of great interest to both the U.S. and the Soviet Union. By merging its economic interests in these potential markets

with its purportedly humanitarian mission of “assisting in the development of decolonizing space” (Saldanha-Portillo 19), the U.S. gave birth to the teleological discourse of development that would ultimately influence the world’s hegemonic production/exclusion of the subaltern subject.

According to Saldanha-Portillo, the discourse of development is a “supplementary discourse,” that, aiming at the perpetuation of capitalism, established one of the most effective ideological tools naturalizing exclusion by assigning subaltern subjects to a primitive past on a linear timeline that evades their contemporaneity. The discourse of development is also strongly attached to the economic entities that arose after World War II – IMF, IBRD/WB.¹⁵ By means of these economic institutions, the U.S. sought to intensify its presence in Europe’s former colonies in order to stimulate the development of the “resources and productive capacity of the . . . less developed countries.” For Saldanha-Portillo, this special aim of the WB was just a renewed version of the exploration promoted by British imperialism on former colonies.

While analyzing the discourse perpetrated by classic imperialism, Said states that the economic and political domination exerted by the 19th century empires was supported by effective ideological pseudo-scientific discourses where “words and concepts like ‘inferior’, ‘subject races’, ‘subordinate peoples’, ‘dependency’, ‘expansion’ and ‘authority’” were plentiful (*Culture and Imperialism* 9). According to Saldanha-Portillo, though the racist imperialist discourse on subaltern subjects was abandoned and expressions such as “lower races,” “indolence and torpor of character” were left aside, within the discourse of development there are still traces of this logic in the term “less developed countries” (21). For example, in his inaugural address, President Truman

¹⁵ IMF – International Monetary Fund; IBRD – International Bank for Reconstruction and Development; WB – World Bank. Both the IMF and the IBRD are financial institutions created after WWII: “after its mission of reconstructing Europe was fulfilled, the IBRD became what is today the WB” (Saldanha-Portillo 19).

“lamented that half of the world’s population lived in such areas” where life conditions approach misery, “food is inadequate,” and “economic life is primitive and stagnant” (23).

The constant use of such vocabulary to refer to subjects of the former colonies ended up creating a collective imagery of these peoples in the minds of U.S. citizens. This constructed Other was convenient for the political interests of the U.S. in two different manners: it reaffirmed the economic and technological superiority of the U.S.; and it also justified the allocations of money to foreign aid projects. Such allocations of money worked, nevertheless, as ideological propaganda for the U.S. as well as a justification for the U.S. presence in these foreign territories. According to Saldanha-Portillo, throughout the postwar years, the U.S. would increase foreign aid programs, mainly in Central and South America, as a means to respond to communist-inspired revolutionary movements. According to Said, so consistently was this ideological propaganda insisting on “American specialness, altruism and opportunity” that hardly ever did “‘imperialism’ as a word or ideology turn up . . . in accounts of U.S. culture, politics and history” (*Culture and Imperialism* 8).

As we can see, the Cold War development discourse initiated by Keynes was perfectly aligned to the economic and ideological moves of the U.S. towards the rest of the world. But, according to Saldanha-Portillo, in 1950, a “second generation of development theorists,” also known as modernization theorists, “responded to the failure of Keynesian economics to produce immediate results in the decolonizing world” (26). As opposed to the Keynesian understanding of development as a response to the “ill effects” of colonialism, this second generation of theorists perceived development’s emergence as a “series of discrete stages inevitably traversed by all *national* economies”. Still according to Saldanha-Portillo, though this second generation

displayed a “swerve . . . from the terrain of national economies towards that of human subjectivity,” it is still possible to notice “traces of colonialism’s racial legacy” in relation to the under-developed subject (27).

It becomes clear, then, that no matter how economic theories changed and different explanations for the emergence of development in postcolonial territories came up, the subaltern subjects would, throughout the Cold War era, always be addressed as underdeveloped, stagnant and primitive. Saldanha-Portillo states that after the ascendancy of modernization theory, two other adjectives thus come out in order to continue to reinforce the already suggested difference between the U.S. subject and its Others: *modern*, “the fully developed subject” represented here by the U.S. subject; and *pre-modern*, its “underdeveloped counterpart” (27). It is interesting to note the similarity between the nature of the discourse perpetrated by classic 19th century imperialism and that of the 20th century discourse of development. Both show a heavy reliance on intercultural dichotomies, constructed ideas, or on what Said refers to as “images and imaginings” about colonial subjects and their so-called first-world counterparts (*Culture and Imperialism* 9).

One of the most influential economists of modernization theory was Walt Whitman Rostow. Saldanha-Portillo states that, in *Stages of Economic Growth*, Rostow suggested the plain stage sequence that would lead a national country to the level of full development. For Saldanha-Portillo, by asserting that economic development was derived from “a succession of strategic choices made by various societies concerning the disposition of their resources,” (qtd. in Saldanha-Portillo) Rostow ultimately “displaces development onto a question of freely executing the proper will” (28). Therefore, he indirectly claims that the imagined U.S. subjectivity – autonomous, self-controlled – is the only one capable of reaching development. At the same time, by

detaching development from any “imaginable material or historical constraints” (29) and mainly attaching it to the signifiers of an imagined subjectivity, Rostow’s theory only empowers the notion that Cold War discourse was mostly dependent on the dichotomies that construct Otherness.

In this context, Kerouac’s novel *On the Road* (1957) stages not only the author’s overt project to open space for the multicultural American Continent in a heterogeneous U.S. society, but also the covert dichotomies that construct Otherness in the discourse of the Cold War. As I shall demonstrate, this conflict often leads to the inability of Kerouac’s narrator, Sal Paradise, to allow the narrative to evolve without the recurrent interference of the dominant discourse of the time. Considering that the novel is renowned to this day as a milestone of the counter-culture movements of the 60s, an analysis of how it addresses cultural heterogeneity among U.S. and foreign peoples is an optimal starting point for further considerations on the intersections of U.S. imperialist politics within cultural movements and their canonical texts.

In this first set of examples, I will demonstrate how the main character, Sal Paradise, reproduces instances of imperialist discourse toward foreign peoples, more specifically those constructed as subaltern. Sal’s reliance on the dichotomies that construct Otherness under hierarchized stereotypes is clearly seen in the passage below which describes his cross-cultural experiences in Mexico:

We had no idea what Mexico would really be like . . . But everything changed when we crossed the mysterious bridge over the river and our wheels rolled on official Mexican soil . . . Just across the street Mexico began. We looked with wonder. To our amazement, it looked exactly like Mexico . . . It was only Nuevo Laredo but it looked like Holy Llasa to us. (258)

What is noticeable in this extract is that Sal's hesitation in relation to what he expects from Mexico is abruptly left aside after leaving U.S. territory. On Mexican soil, Sal cannot evade his imperialist eyes thus he puts forth his constructed images of Mexico – “. . . it looked exactly like Mexico” –, and also registers his imaginings of a culture constructed as subaltern: “It was only Nuevo Laredo but it looked like Holy Llasa to us.” In the eagerness to make room for a culture perceived as defective under the auspices of Cold War discourse, Sal Paradise's enthusiastic (re)presentation merely assumes a different tone while it brings within it the same principles presented in Cold War discourse since it does not eliminate the process of constructing an image, or arbitrary imaginings, of the cultural Other.

The reproduction of the subaltern subject of Cold War discourse is so fixed in Sal's mind that the subsequent descriptions and representations of Mexico and Mexican citizens rely heavily on the concepts of stagnancy and primitiveness:

There's no *suspicion* here, nothing like that. Everybody's cool, everybody looks at you with such straight brown eyes and they don't say anything, just *look*, and in that look all of the human qualities are soft and subdued and still there. (262, original emphases)

In the example cited above, Sal shows his appreciation for Mexican people based on their “subdued” qualities, their lack of suspicion and their silence. Such soft violence surrounding the undisturbed and aestheticized representation of the Other is covertly aligned to the hierarchizing policies of the Cold War and its subalternizing effects. Indeed, by representing Mexicans through a depoliticized discourse, Sal and his friends are able to praise the very same alleged stagnancy by which Others are defined in imperialist discourses. In Kerouac's narrative then, the aesthetization of the same

features that constructed the Other in imperialist discourses is used both to normalize subalternity and to justify Mexicans' primitiveness:

[The Mexican Indians] 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 the poor broken delusion of it.
(281)

That Sal voices imperialist conceptions becomes evident once we perceive his certainty in representing Mexicans coming after "civilization." Whatever the narrator means here by civilization, it is certainly something Mexicans still haven't achieved and cannot develop or sustain on their own. Thus the supplicant image of Mexicans pleading, that is, holding "forth their hands" towards civilization. The construction of Mexicans as primitive is completed by the representation of U.S. subject and culture as superior, as becomes clear in Sal's assertion that "the Pan-American Highway partially civilizes this nation on this road" (280).

In the light of such imperialist assertions, it is no wonder then that the same narrator that so critically exposed the "broken delusion" offered by civilization – "They didn't know that a bomb had come that could crack all our bridges and roads and reduce them to jumbles . . ." (282) – becomes stone-blind when it comes to recognizing that the economic marginality imposed on Mexican citizens is the very result of the "civilization" he strongly criticizes. Sal's refusal to acknowledge the uneven conditions that maintain Mexicans off "civilization" allows him to recurrently reproduce the imperialist economic pattern of passive offering and active buying within the narrative without causing any apparent contradiction. One of these several money-related occurrences is described by Sal when he and his friends are hanging around in a whorehouse of some Mexican town:

My girl charged thirty pesos, or about three dollars and a half, and begged for an extra ten pesos and gave a long story about something. I didn't know the value of Mexican money; for all I knew I had a million pesos. I threw money at her. (271)

The superiority of Sal's economic condition in Mexico allows him and his friends to become active buyers, voracious to consume everything Mexico has to offer. It is amazing how Sal and his friends are able to pass through this country, where almost everyone is selling something along the road (their own bodies, crystal rocks, marijuana) in a desperate attempt to survive, and not become aware and disturbed by this socio-economic discrepancy. It is clear that Sal's remark is perfectly aligned with the imperialist U.S. discourse that constructed subaltern peoples as underdeveloped, stagnant and dependable, thus the passive offerings along the Pan-American Highway.

The dominant discourse wins another battle when, once more, Sal's narrative establishes the dichotomy primitive/progressive by echoing the quintessential scene of imperialist relations: the scene of exchange. This time, when Dean encounters an Indian child selling crystal rocks along the road, he is "touched" by that vision and decides to give the child his wristwatch in exchange for the rock:

Then Dean poked in the little girl's hand for the 'sweetest and purest and smallest crystal she has personally picked from the mountain for me'. He found one no bigger than a berry. And he handed her the wristwatch dangling. (281)

Such visions of subdued rather than resistant subalternity are almost always all that Sal and Dean are ready to see in Mexico, for they never acknowledge their eagerness and anxiety to construct this idyllic Mexican haven and much less their reliance on that Cold War construct of the pre-modern or primitive Other for their own benefit. Dean's characterization as being "touched" thus masks the subalternization of the Other in the guise of humanitarian benefaction, i.e., his own selfhood. What is left are imaginings of

a country that they are not able to grasp; this is, perhaps unconsciously, realized by Sal when he describes one of his uncanny visions on a road somewhere in Mexico: “Then I saw an apparition: a wild horse, white as a ghost, came trotting down the road directly towards Dean What was this horse? What myth and ghost, what spirit?” (278).

Indeed, this is an uncanny outcome considering the anxiety of control haunting Cold War discourse in the humanitarian guise of *anti-conquest*.¹⁶ Still, the anxiety for control trivializes the threat of the uncanny by dehistoricizing it, as if it pertained to a mythical, ethereal timelessness. Thus dematerialized, what can it matter?

2.2. The Shift towards Mass-Consumption Society

As commented above, it was not only in the external realm that the United States’ aggressive Cold War discourse arose. Internally, U.S. society was about to see an abrupt change in what concerned its private and public realms.

The primary and most effective change took place on the economic level. After the war, Truman initiated a national program aiming at full employment, production and consumption. The objective behind this program was both to absorb the working force that became available with the end of WWII, in order to increase production, and, mainly, to stimulate new buyers. Through federal policies such as the GI Bill of Rights or the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944,¹⁷ the U.S. government became able to guarantee the former servicemen’s purchasing power, to stimulate production and also to diversify and increase services. Economically designed to fulfill the major aims of

¹⁶ Mary Louse Pratt coins this term, referring to “the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert [metropolitan] hegemony. The term “anti-conquest” was chosen because . . . these strategies of innocence are constituted in relation to older imperial rhetorics of conquest associated with the absolutist era” (7).

¹⁷“The GI Bill of Rights essentially offered qualified WWII veterans . . . four ways to improve their social-economic conditions. The bill’s first benefit required the United States Employment Service (USES) to help veterans find jobs that would match their work skills. The second provision allowed unemployed veterans to receive up to a full year of unemployment compensation at the rate of twenty dollars per week. Under the third benefit, the Veterans Administration (VA) provided guaranteed home, farm, and business loans to veterans. And the fourth provision paid for a veteran’s education or vocational training for up to four full years” (Onkst 518).

Cold War economic policies, it is no wonder that the GI Bill of Rights also brought within it the white male dominant discourse that aimed to maintain the privileged position of this group within the social, political and economic scene of the postwar era. This is why the centrality of and gravitation around male dominance is central to my analysis of the construction of a cultural Other in Kerouac's novel.

The shift towards a consumption society was supported by federal policies, but it was also reinforced by a massive ideological campaign perpetrated by the media, political speeches and also by anti-communist discourse. One example of a mainstream magazine working towards the increase in consumption behavior was *Life Magazine*. According to Cohen, in the May 5, 1947 issue of *Life Magazine*, the magazine's editors argue that a "health and decency standard for everyone' required that every American family acquire not only a . . . [house] but all kinds of consumers goods to put in it" (113). The magazine, therefore, was teaching, in very clear terms, that massive consumption would increase the life conditions of every U.S. citizen; and it was also suggesting, by very appealing photographs, the gender roles perceived by this new economic order.¹⁸ Other media, such as the Walt Disney Company, also contributed to boosting consumer society. To give just one example, it created the popular character Uncle Scrooge, whose exaggerated saving habits were ridiculed.

The politicians, in their speeches, also refer back to the purchasing power of U.S. citizens as the condition that would lead the whole society to a more and more egalitarian level finally reaching a classless condition. The idea of reaching a classless society through a mass consumption driven economy was the politicians' most enthusiastic line against the communist promise of egalitarianism. Cohen cites vice-president Richard Nixon's words during the American Exhibition in Moscow in 1959 as

¹⁸ See annex A.

an example of this effort: after he “boasted that with three-fourths of America’s 44 million families owning their own homes along with 56 million cars, 50 million TVs, and 143 million radios,” Nixon claimed the aligning of his country with the ideals of a classless society. Besides that, Nixon also equated the great range of goods available to U.S. consumers as representatives of “our [the U.S.’s] right to choose” (126). By equating consumption with political freedom, the politicians of the U.S. were, once more, justifying the superiority of their economic policies, increasing the anti-communist campaign and, of course, stimulating consumption.

Thus, it became a political consensus that on the behalf of every sector of U.S. society, mass consumption was to be fully stimulated. According to Cohen, there were, nevertheless, some divergences about the way government should behave and act on this issue. The main argument was related to the extent the government should intervene in the process of stimulating mass production and consumption. This issue lifted polar opposite opinions on the conservative wing represented by businessmen and on the left wing represented by laborers and other segments. The conservatives were, of course, against any “intervention in the operations of free-enterprise” (Cohen 114); the laborers, on the other hand, claimed the need for the government to sustain mass purchasing power whether by direct intervention or by the establishment of basic rules. In between these two opposite opinions, there lay a series of moderate positions requiring, at times, more or less interference in the economy. Nevertheless, despite such divergences, the government sustained its belief in a mass consumption driven economy. By aligning its federal policies with the need for mass consumption to grow, and by institutionalizing strong and effective ideological propaganda asserting the freedom and democratic nature of the U.S., the government sought to turn the Consumer’s Republic into a

consensus. Moreover, it was expected that on the way to build a consensual society, some divergences should be denied or largely attacked and persecuted.

Therefore, the shift towards a consumer society brought along a new style of understanding nationalism: for the government, any criticism of economy or politics could be perceived as an “un-American activity”.¹⁹ Any reaction or request going against the official policies would receive an aggressive response from the government. As a result of such repression, during the Cold War era, any dissent was perceived as deviant and any social group’s activities were severely watched and under control. Schools, universities and other institutions were kept under the surveillance of the Committee of Un-American Activities, responsible for observing U.S. society in order to detect any sign of rebelliousness or dissent.

2.3. Patriarchal Discourse

As a result of such policies aiming at a consensus, in the land of freedom and democracy, both freedom and democracy became widely restricted. Such repression and persecution affected the private and public lives of U.S. citizens in such a way that even institutions that should guard against the suppression of civil liberties remained silent.

During this period, any activity that could offer the slightest threat to U.S. policies was accused of having communist affiliation. The anti-communist hysteria of the late 1940s, as Cohen points out, led to the burial of many effective organizations presented in the social realm. One example is the League of Women Shoppers, a highly active organization during the New Deal, that under the accusation of having “‘known Communists’ active in their ranks” ended up being dismantled. It seems providential that, at this point of the U.S. Consumer’s Republic, the League that had been known for

¹⁹ During the Cold War years, the U.S. government established Congressional committees that were responsible for the investigation of possible Communist affiliations or any other form of dissent. The activities considered against those officially accepted were considered ‘Un-American’. For further reading, see Roman 2001.

establishing a kind of consumer restraint by “controlling prices” and pointing “to inadequate grading and labeling” (Cohen 130) was accused of having communist tendencies. The witch-hunt, as the hunt for communists was popularly known, became so intense that according to Belgrad, people would join any church or religion in order to avoid any possible communist affiliation and, as we can imagine, the “Red Scare and the issues of naming names bred a cultural climate of fear and betrayal that affected an entire generation” (144).

Postwar liberals and university officials, according to Nicholas Wisseman, tended to “compromise their intellectual and political duties for their own self-preservation,” an attitude that was strongly criticized by Ellen Schrecker: “Here [at the universities], if anywhere, dissent should have found a sanctuary. Instead . . . all was quiet in the academic front” (qtd. in Wisseman 322).

Thus, during the period of shift towards a fully consumer nation, U.S. society became trapped within this massive restriction of civil liberties by the aggressive ideological discourse that proclaimed the U.S. citizens’ right to choose, assuming egalitarianism within this group. As I shall demonstrate shortly, this very discourse, based on the privileging of white male subjectivity, was also the setting for a series of important (re)definitions of gender, class and racial roles that ultimately influenced the ways U.S. society would struggle to perceive and articulate its own heterogeneity.

According to Cohen, it was in 1946, during a divergence over price control and government interference in the economy that an important redefinition of gender roles stood out in the postwar republic. During the wartime and throughout the in between war period, women had taken the lead over price-control organizations. Nevertheless, during the structure of the ‘new face’ of the U.S. consumer, these organizations were marginalized and sometimes had their traditional missions altered. That is to say, where

once consumer organizations were concerned with price-control and the quality of the products, during the late 40s, the activity was gradually replaced with that of buying guidance, showing the “infertility of the postwar soil for cultivating consumer consciousness” (131). In this context, in the year of 1946, when consumer organizations were trying to recover some of their old mission on price-control, the stage for the “rewriting of gender rules” was set. According to Cohen:

Pro-price control forces – overwhelmingly female, black, working-class, and progressive – were painted by the victorious opposition as weak, dependent, and feminine, while proponents of ending governmental regulation of the consumer marketplace portrayed themselves as strong, independent, and masculine. (134)

As a result of this gendered depiction, “both sides associated women with the forces seeking control and men with decontrol” (134). It is clear that, by defining women as controllers, postwar authorities were also subjectifying women as stagnant, as opposed to the progressive white-male subject. As Cohen points out:

As the price control struggle foreshadowed, the policies pursued and the values embraced in the Consumers’ Republic circumscribed gender roles in such a way as to delegitimize the civic authority that women had gained on the home front during World War II. (135)

Therefore, during the new postwar order, any public or institutional attachment to a female identification would be redefined with the pejorative label of weak. As a result of this new identification, women withdrew from civic activism and consciousness, thus dismantled within the political sphere. That this is a clear patriarchal discourse is further supported by Cohen’s observation concerning women’s role in U.S. postwar society:

When in 1948, for example, President Truman addressed a Department of Labor conference commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Seneca Fall Women’s

Rights Convention, he deliberately welcomed “homemakers, workers, citizens,” in that order, because “if it were not for the homemakers, we would have neither the citizens nor the workers.” Clearly, his “homemakers” were female, his “workers” and “citizens” male. (136)

Not only with words did the authorities of the Cold War period disregard women’s activism in society. Federal policies such as the GI Bill of Rights also contributed to the restraining of the economic and political spheres of female activity. As I have mentioned earlier, the GI was part of the Keynesian plan to restructure the postwar economy. The Bill sought to reintegrate servicemen and women in an economically active way within U.S. civilian society. It is largely commented that the Bill, by injecting a great amount of dollars into the U.S. economy, also helped U.S. citizens to adjust to the new order. Nevertheless, what is often ignored in such comments is that, by the way it was structured, “the bill favored some Americans over others and even some veterans over others” (Cohen 137).

Still according to Cohen, female veterans had to prove their independence from a male breadwinner in order to require their unemployment benefits. Such differences in treatment towards women veterans were due, she argues, to the “ambiguous status of two of the women’s services, the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and the Women’s Air Force Service Pilots (WASP)”. Neither of these was considered part of “full-fledged military units”. In order to avoid providing the benefits which the disabled were entitled to, Congress, in 1942, had “partly insisted on making the WAACs a civilian rather than military unit”. But even when the WAACs were defined as military units in 1943, “entitlements remained ambiguous” (138).

Besides being discriminated by the GI Bill’s provision of benefits, women still had to face higher difficulties when they decided to attend college or graduate study.

According to Cohen, when a significant part of the male population was involved in the war, women represented a majority of university students. Nevertheless, by the time the veterans returned home and required entrance into higher education, “many schools scaled back female admission to permit male attendance” (140):

Cornell, where women had been in the majority during wartime, cut female enrollment by 20 percent in 1946, while the proportion of Seattle women eighteen to twenty-four in school declined from 20 percent in 1940 to 14 percent in 1947. Many medical and engineering schools that had begun admitting women for the first time during the war slammed the door in their faces. (140)

Cohen comments that besides the GI Bill, other federal policies also contributed to restraining women’s activism in the public sphere. For example, under the new tax law, the Internal Revenue Act, adopted by most states during the late 40s, there was a clear patriarchal favoring towards “traditional married couples where the wife did not work” (145):

The Consumer’s Republic developed a structure of taxation that revealed the traditional household of male breadwinner father and homemaker mother, thereby making women financially dependent on men at a time when the transformations of depression and war time have encouraged alternatives. (146)

Though women’s participation in the labor force continued to increase throughout the postwar period, married women did not receive any incentive from federal taxation laws in order to actively pursue jobs. Cohen asserts that this disinterest towards women’s labor was ironic, for “not many years before,” the same government insisted “that the nation’s very survival in wartime depended on their wage labor” (145).

Neuhaus, who analyzes the domestic ideology presented in cookbooks of the 1950s, asserts that the society of the 50s was trapped in an “anxiety of a middle-class caught in

the throes of huge cultural change”. By that time, life was changing in different ways: “suburban living, the exponential rise in automobile ownership, the growth of ‘white collar’ employment, racial tension and the beginning of the civil rights movement”. Neuhaus asserts that in such a context, where women were also trying to recuperate and increase their participation in civic activities, it was expected that such a society, dominated by white, male-centered values, would manage to portray women “completely fulfilled by their roles as devoted and nurturing mothers” (537). This domestication process is also conspicuous in this short paragraph extracted from *The Seventeen Cookbook*, a publication whose target audience was composed mainly of teenage girls:

To many men (and *most* teen-age boys) cooking is one of the feminine mysteries, one they can heartily appreciate. With an ever-hungry young man, few things enhance a girl’s stock *as a girl* as swiftly, as surely, as something really good to eat she made herself. (qtd in Neuhaus 538, original emphasis)

That such a young audience should be lectured on domestication as a means to please men is highly elucidative of the general interest in their restriction from the political and social activism they had developed during wartime. And it is also clear that the pressures and actions to reiterate and reinforce that aim were based on a white-male objectification of women’s roles. All this reality, to a certain degree, comes to justify Cohen’s claim that Cold War policies were really those of a “corporation man” (141).

Due to this massive pull towards recovering traditional gender norms, white male authority unwittingly triggered the forthcoming civil rights movements which sought to invert the objectification of women, blacks and other groups produced as minorities.

The tendency to address women in terms such as ‘controllers’ and ‘stagnant’ as opposed to the privileging depiction of men as ‘decontrollers’ and ‘progressive’ is

noticeable in Kerouac's novel. As opposed to the stagnancy of women, men's behavior is almost always attached to expressions related to movement, velocity or activity – such as *zooming*, *going*, and *rushing*. The novel's central interest is in a group of men whose quest for freedom, liberty and agency helps to justify the supporting role to which the so-called minorities are reduced in the narrative. Therefore, I shall next analyze the narrative presented in *On the Road* taking into consideration the way its narrator, Sal Paradise, represents women.

In his journey through the U.S., Sal is eager to discover 'America'. Nevertheless, the only 'America' he seems able to find is the one he already has on his mind, the one that was built under the auspices of the male-privileging representations promoted by Cold War discourse, as mentioned earlier. Therefore, when referring to their women partners, Sal and his friends usually describe their attitudes based on gender-related expressions and beliefs. In innumerable moments in the novel, 'controlling' and 'dependable' behavior are often represented as underlying women's actions and decisions. For example, in a quite funny scene, Sal is narrating the trip his friends Dean Moriarty and Ed Dunkel took from San Francisco to New York in the company of Ed's new wife, Galatea. Since Galatea preferred to sleep in motels rather than on the road, her husband and his friend were able to solve the problem in the most convenient way – for them, of course:

Two nights she forced a stop and blew tens on motels. By the time they got to Tucson she was broke. Dean and Ed gave her the slip in a hotel lobby and resumed the voyage alone . . . and without a qualm. (107)

An interesting aspect of this scene is also related to the stereotype divergences between men and women, but it goes farther than the amusing reference above. By stating the stagnancy of women, the scene helps to build up the image of movement and

independence pursued by the male-privileging society of the Cold War. By depending on these contrasting relations, and by naturalizing such hierarchies through gender constructs, the narrator's depiction of the scene ends up reproducing and reinforcing the major dichotomies – progressive/ stagnant, independent/ dependent – that have justified U.S. hegemony since the Cold War period.

If Kerouac's narrator endorses the expectations for women's stagnant behavior he also takes on an aggressive tone against a more progressive attitude taken by women. A clear example is Sal's comment on Marylou's decision to leave him behind:

One night Marylou disappeared with a nightclub owner. I was waiting for her . . . when she suddenly stepped out of the fancy apartment house with her girlfriend, the nightclub owner, and a greasy old man with a roll . . . I saw what a whore she was. (163)

Considering such a comment, it is possible to notice Sal's misogynist opinion about Marylou's decision; for, besides expecting a passive role from her, he also morally evaluates her, crassly. In the novel, Marylou is an interesting character. Portrayed mainly as Dean's ex-wife, she eventually returns to him and follows one of the men's travels through the country. However, though her economic activity is never clearly mentioned in the novel, every time Marylou takes the decision to leave Dean and his friends, she is accused of being a whore: "And where's Marylou? I asked, and Dean said she'd apparently whored a few dollars together and gone back to Denver" (9).

After Dean abandons Sal and Marylou in San Francisco to go back to his second wife Camille (the first one being Marylou), Marylou decides to go on with her life and then leaves Sal behind. The scene that shows her decision is the one previously mentioned when Sal also accuses her of being a whore. As I have mentioned, it is not clear in the novel whether she is a prostitute; my point is that, despite being a regular companion to

Dean and Sal, she is invariably called a whore every time she decides to leave them: “‘where’s Marylou, man?’ ‘The whore ran off’” (165).

This reductionist and pejorative representation recurs in the novel. My following analysis should demonstrate how Sal’s romantic relation with Teresa, his Mexican-American girlfriend, is also disrupted by a vision which is especially revealing of the interracial and gender anxieties generated by Cold War conventions. After meeting Terry during a bus trip to LA, Sal is immediately attracted to her. He then describes their romantic relationship in terms of its being spontaneous: “Without coming to any particular agreement we began holding hands” – and fulfilling: “this was my girl and my kind of girlsoul” (80).

The romantic tone is nevertheless disrupted by an abrupt vision: “And here my mind went haywire, I don’t know why, I began getting the foolish paranoiac visions that Teresa . . . was a common little hustler who worked the buses for a guy’s bucks.” Sal begins to fantasize about Terry’s pimp observing them at the cafeteria: “We ate breakfast and a pimp kept watching us; I fancied Terry was making secret eyes at him.” The situation of strangeness and confusion grows until he finally asks Terry: “‘Do you know that guy?’” (80). The confusion eventually leads to an argument between them, and to Sal’s attempt to apologize:

O gruesome life, how I moaned and pleaded, and then I got mad and I realized I was pleading with a dumb little Mexican wench and I told her so; and before I knew it I picked up her red pumps and hurled them at the bathroom door and told her to get out. (81)

Sal’s alternation from fantasy to reality and vice-versa is best understood in the light of some of the most recurrent anxieties generated by the Cold War atmosphere: the fear of the cultural Other. His vision is constructed out of his difficulty in relating with

Terry's sex and ethnicity and therefore presents his insecurity with Terry's agency – after all, she is also moving, on the road – and liberal sexuality – she demonstrates she is also attracted to him – by relating her to an imaginary pimp without any explanation whatsoever: “My mind went haywire [. . .].” It is no wonder, then, that he deflects attention from his fear of relating with the cultural Other by reasserting the supposed inferiority of Terry's racial group in his society: “. . . I was pleading with a dumb little Mexican wench . . .” (81). Such a reaction, including a clearly misogynist characterization, presents the same pattern of self-assertion at the expense of the Other which is constructed in ways that mirror the gender and racial relations officialized by Cold War policies.

On the other hand, in *On the Road*, the passive role of women, silently waiting for men, is always praised, as becomes clear in Dean's following comment on his and Sal's common friend's wife: “Now you see, man, there's *real* woman for you. Never a harsh word, never a complaint, or modified; her old man can come in any hour of the night with anybody and have talks in the kitchen and drink the beer and leave any old time. This is a man, and that's his castle” (192, original emphases).

For Dean then, there is an essential condition that defines a “real woman” – “never a harsh word, never a complaint” –, and such a condition is strongly attached to the passive and stagnant behavior women became identified with in the early postwar period.

In another moment, Sal reflects on the lifestyle of their women companions. In this particular scene, Sal discovers, at Dean's wife's house, one of Galatea's pictures, and states the following interpretation:

To my amazement I saw a full-length oil-painting of Galatea Dunkel over the sofa. I suddenly realized that all these women were spending months of loneliness and womanliness together, chatting about the madness of men. (176)

The domesticity forced on female citizens during the following years of WWII is, at this point of the narrative, naturalized by Sal's attachment of a melancholic and passive "loneliness" to essentialist "womanliness". Such strongly dehistoricized "womanliness" becomes, alone, a justification for these female citizens' reduced scope of public actuation. Again, Kerouac's narrator's soft violence towards historically constructed minorities allows the narrative to depict male citizens as decontrollers, progressive – "the madness of men" as opposed to the controlling, stagnant and passive nature of women.

In *On the Road* then, women are the source of imprisonment, settlement, responsibilities, everything that "free" men are trying to get away from. Thus their praising of women who do not complain or charge them with any responsibilities: "Inez loves me; she's told me and promised me I can do anything I want and there'll be a minimum of trouble . . ." (236).

Therefore, it is clear that *On the Road* is not a cry for a new and more liberal approach to life issues but, most of the time, a cry for the maintenance and defense of patriarchal privileges instead.

2.4. Racist Discourse

As much as women, African-Americans were also prevented from fully exercising their rights as U.S. citizens. Onkst states that many African-Americans were touched by the war rhetoric which promised a better life of opportunities for black servicemen after WWII. After returning home from the war, these very servicemen were aware that segregation and discrimination would not finish overnight in a society that arranged a

separate Army and Navy for black servicemen while they, ironically, “fought for democracy overseas”. According to Onkst, many of these veterans were now ready to fight for their rights at home – “and many of them would do exactly that by playing an important role in the black freedom struggle of the postwar period” (518).

For Onkst, after returning home, African Americans also endured problems to make the GI Bill work for them. Many of the black servicemen recruited during the war ended up receiving special training which prepared them to assume skilled positions in the Army such as those of “draftsmen, auto mechanics, carpenters, radio operators, and welders” (519). But after returning home, black servicemen encountered difficulties to adapt their skills to profitable jobs in civilian society, mostly due to the severe racial discrimination exerted by white counselors at the Veterans Administration (VA) centers. For example, when trying to enter civilian society by requiring a skilled job, black veterans were, almost always, denied access. The following observations made by a Southern Regional Council agent, Harry Wright, clearly illustrate this discrimination:

In trying to find a job [the veteran would] visit the local U.S. Employment Service Office, if he'll accept some laborer's job they will readily place him – if he knows some of the old-timey trades they can get him placed, but if he's qualified in some of the new skills that Negroes haven't traditionally been doing – or has some kind of professional training, then they just can't find a place for him and he'll be offered a job as a porter in the local hotel or the like. (qtd. in Onkst 520)²⁰

Black veterans who did not accept these unskilled jobs also found problems in applying to unemployment benefits, since that required them to prove they had been actively seeking a job position. Onkst cites a case that happened in Hogansville, Georgia, where “local USES officials refused to allow several black veterans to collect

²⁰ According to Onkst, this observation was a “draft copy of article by Harry S. Wright, ‘Wanted, A Square Deal for Negroes,’” no date, SRC. Though it is not an academic source, it is a relevant testimony of the condition of black U.S. citizens in the period.

unemployment compensation after they had turned down positions as wood choppers” (521). By declining a job offer classified as suitable by a counselor, these veterans were cut off from the benefit.

Black veterans also faced racist attitudes when they sought to obtain “on-the-job” training. According to Onkst, in this kind of training, “employers would hire former servicemen, pay them wages, and teach them a particular trade” (523). However, few black veterans gained this kind of benefit due to white employers’ refusal to hire them – and also due to the unwillingness of black employers who feared later competition in the market.

The statistics of the time clearly show the low participation of black veterans in benefits such as on-the-job training: “in Atlanta, during March 1946, the American Council on Race Relations found black veterans participating in just six of the 246 on-the-job training programs” (524). The scarcity of this kind of opportunity led to a new kind of exploitation of black servicemen: some employers started to fake training practices and usually kept the veterans working at very low wages while offering them very few opportunities for actual learning.

Onkst states that access to higher education was even harder to reach due to the historical and social constraints that confined black people to levels of education that were inadequate in the context of rapid technological development and upward social mobility. The lack of school attendance did not allow them to try out college and university entrance programs. The low level of school education of these former veterans ended up restricting most of them to vocational schooling which, by that time, was too scarce to attend to the massive demand of all the veterans who showed interest.

Black veterans endured great difficulties while trying to achieve better opportunities of life and fully enjoy the benefits offered by the rich Consumer’s Republic which,

while proclaiming itself to be based on the principle of economic inclusion, actually forced African-American citizens to face the traditional racial norms that refused to envisage them as part of U.S. society.

In Kerouac's novel, when it comes to referring abstractly to the multicultural constitution of the U.S., Sal is able to recognize that his country is formed by a heterogeneous society. However, in the specific contexts such as those I have exemplified so far, heterogeneity serves to establish the narrator's centrality and to justify his dominance over others. For Sal, after all, America is a great group of highways, superhighways, roads that dominate the vast, wild and diverse regions of the country. In parallel with this image, Sal, a young white male, is the one who dominates, presents and explores the diversities of this multicultural space and due to his privileged condition, Sal is able to enter and leave every place in 'America'.

My point is that Sal's freedom is constructed as an illusory *difference from* rather than *confirmation of* the U.S. dominant culture. Indeed, in the beginning of the novel, Sal states that the only people for him are those who never "say a common place thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles. . ." (11) and that is the concept that he carries along his journey through the U.S. This statement assumes an ironic tone when we perceive Sal's recurrent reliance on rather than challenging of the dominant and hegemonic discourse of the period regarding subaltern peoples and conservative gendered assumptions.

As already commented, during his journey, Sal elides the constrictions defined by uneven economic conditions and gender roles and as a result, in *On the Road*, heterogeneity is used to establish stereotypes, naturalize the privilege of the narrator's condition and fix cultural Others into their "proper places". When it comes to racial heterogeneity within the U.S., Kerouac's narrator represents non-white groups in a

stereotyped way, proving once more the reproduction of the dominant normative discourse rather than establishing that of protest which Kerouac's narrative has been taken for granted as representing. For example, from the beginning of the novel, Sal states explicitly his conceptions on what it means to be a Negro. His reproduction of normative race conceptions is such that considerations such as the following, where he sees 'Negro attitudes' in a white person, do not disturb but reinforce racialized representations of the idyllic Other: "Although Gene was white there was something of the wise and tired old Negro in him" (29).

Gene, a minor character in the narrative – one of the several friends Sal made along the road –, is described as a "patient" man. Such a characterization is typical of imperialist discourse that recurrently produces the Other as subdued in order to produce the self as dominant. Gene's silence is then mystified: "looking out over the fields without saying anything for hundreds of miles. . .", as well as his speech: "His language was melodious and slow" (27). Such mystifying strategies of Kerouac's narrative dispel any potential resistance to the narrator's dominant portrayals of Others. The subsequent identification of his having "something of the wise and tired old Negro in him" is striking, therefore, for revealing the narrator's reliance on, rather than disturbance of, the dominant racializing ideology of the Cold War.

Sal's inability to leave his racist preconceptions aside is evident: so, every time he engages a cross-cultural or interracial relation he echoes the dominant discourse grounded in race and gender stereotypes. This inability is specially perceived when Sal decides to follow his girlfriend Terry to her hometown and become a cotton picker. Though he is living and experiencing the tough reality and the economic limitations of the subalternized, Sal adamantly leaves unquestioned the reason why that kind of hard job at low wages, "three dollars per hundred pounds of picked cotton" (91), is normally

taken by Afro and Mexican-Americans alone. Instead, he perceives this kind of activity as ideal and natural for non-white individuals: “[A Negro couple] picked cotton with the same God-blessed patience their grandfathers had practiced in ante-bellum Alabama” (92). Thus the racial-based economic inequalities historically defined by imperialist and white-male-centered discourses remain unquestioned by the supposedly anti-conformist Beat narrative. Worse than that, such uneven racial, social and economic relations are naturalized by Kerouac’s normative representations of the Other as stagnant, primitive, passive and so on.

By naturalizing inequality through race and gender, Sal is, once again, reproducing Cold War discourse, and by being aware of, yet casting aside any concern with, the lack of mobility derived from the economic exclusion forced on these U.S. citizens, Sal reinscribes conservatism under his own freedom of mobility. In this context, to read *On the Road* assuming that Sal voices countercultural protest only helps the novel to cover up its cultural monocentrism and patriarchal misogyny, echoing Sal on the verge of obnoxious cruelty:

‘See you in New York, Terry.’ She was supposed to drive to New York in a month with her brother. But we both knew she wouldn’t make it. I bowed my head and watched her. Well, lackdaddy, I was on the road again. (97)

CHAPTER 3

DISCOURSE OF SPONTANEITY

3.1. About *On the Road* – Content and Writing Style

According to George Dardess, the 175,000 words of the first version of *On the Road* were written in “twenty days” in April 1951 (2:289). That it was written in such a short period of time is often understood as a fact attesting to the unmediated transparency of the novel’s contents, i.e., to what has become known as the literary style developed by Kerouac: “Spontaneous Prose.” The result or the first version²¹ of this outburst of writing was a 120-foot roll of teletype that was finally published in 1957 by Malcolm Cowley from Viking Press.

In what concerns content, *On the Road* is structured around the narrative of Sal Paradise’s four travels across the U.S, his friendship with Dean Moriarty and their quest for adventures. The narrative is rendered in a style which is supposed to communicate experience with the minimum rhetoric possible, following a stream of consciousness where any interference of grammatical fears or inhibitions should be left aside. In *On the Road*, the narrative relies heavily on a colloquial tone and rapid and concise descriptions of events under the narrator’s stream of consciousness.

Since its debut, the novel has been widely commented, generating diverging critiques that, in some rare moments – as in a 1957 *New York Times*’ review – celebrate it for being “the most beautifully executed, the clearest and most important utterance yet made by the generation Kerouac himself named years ago as ‘beat’ and whose principle avatar he is” (qtd. in Hayward). Most of the times, however, they debunk its writer by

²¹ First version because, according to Dardess, *On the Road* was subsequently retyped, revised and expanded by Kerouac (289).

addressing his work as “infantile, perversely negative” (qtd. in McNally) or, as a “dizzy travelogue,” in the words of *Saturday Review* (qtd. in Charters). Indifferent to its negative critiques by relying, as I shall demonstrate in this chapter, on the discourse of spontaneity, *On the Road* epitomized a commercial and popular success which ultimately defined it as the “bible” of the Beat Generation.

Such a popular success turned *On the Road* and Kerouac into popular icons, a situation that, besides preventing the novel from receiving a more serious or academic critical approach, also displeased its author. For Kerouac, the co-option of the Beat Generation and his work by the media tainted and distorted its significance: “It’s politics, not art anymore” (qtd. in Martinetti).

Kerouac’s complaint reveals his subscription to the Cold War ethos presuming a total separation between politics and aesthetics. By suggesting that his aesthetic project was *turned into* politics, Kerouac was promoting the conception, also shared by other postwar artists, of “an elitist art divorced from any institutional power base” (Blasing 15). By doing so, the writer was able to disavow any political reading from his texts and, at the same time, assert his ‘spontaneous’ literary style’s untainted and non-persuasive nature.

As unconvincing as this rhetoric may be, much earlier literary criticism approached *On the Road* following Kerouac’s same mystifying bias. That is, the same proclaimed transparent and spontaneous poetics worked, in the critical realm, either to dismiss the novel for being a “transparent, not-quite-fictional representation of [Kerouac] and his friends” (Fiedler 491) or to proclaim it as a powerful fiction able to become a “rallying point for the elusive spirit of the rebellion” (Ossterreicher 5). In the same manner, Truman Capote’s assertion about *On the Road*’s writing style as being “typing, not writing” (qtd. in Nicosia 588) has been used either to criticize the novel for being a

naïve reproduction of the writer's personal experience or to celebrate it for its unmediated rather than representational nature.

The problem with such approaches, regardless of the different judgments they express, is that they fail to establish the necessary critical distance to avoid their subscription to the mystification of transparency that Kerouac's poetics of spontaneity has enjoyed alongside other countercultural texts which have been canonized through the depoliticized reception of their aestheticist traits. Nevertheless, since the late 80s, an increasing number of scholars, as already demonstrated in the introductory part of this study, have been identifying an important and complex field of analysis concerning subalternizing strategies underlying the literary works produced by the Beat Generation.

This broadening field of criticism sees the narrative of *On the Road* as a discursive complex in which the processes of constructing and representing Otherness are exhaustively yet blatantly smoothed out, and thus call for critical scrutiny. Due to its recurrent descriptions and references to cross-cultural and interracial encounters, this novel is a major locus for the analysis of how the process involving representations of Otherness are imbricated in a web of contradictions and anxieties commonly perceived in the U.S. postwar society and which, as I will demonstrate in the pages that follow, are directly linked to imperialist ideologies.

3.2. The Project of Spontaneity

In *The Culture of Spontaneity* (1998), Belgrad traces back the sources and the social-political significance of valorizing the spontaneous act that commonly grounded artistic creation during the postwar years in the U.S. For Belgrad, the culture of spontaneity can be understood as a reactive movement against the "ontology and epistemology of objectivity" of corporate liberal society. Against this high demand for objectivity, he

claims that the culture of spontaneity “posed intersubjectivity, in which ‘reality’ was understood to emerge from a conversational dynamic” (5).

For this project supposedly guaranteed by the spontaneous aesthetic, the dichotomies found in corporate society were symptomatic of the fragmentation of mind and body. Therefore, where in corporate society the intellect was perceived exclusively by a rationality that should avoid subjective experience, the culture of spontaneity, adopted by the avant-garde artists, defined the “‘rational’ as a viewpoint determined by the interaction of body, emotions, and intellect” (Belgrad 5).

Still according to Belgrad, in order to react against the strong controls defined by the corporate liberal ideology that ruled the society of the 40s and the 50s, the spontaneous aesthetic ended up establishing a critique of the fragmented intellectuality, oppressive technological development and hegemonic order over the individual’s will that took hold of modern Western society (5).

With the project and attempt to restore a new humanism, the artistic movement ended up adopting an “antimodern ‘primitivism’ or postmodern multiculturalism” (6) that, according to Belgrad, “has often been the component of romanticism in the arts” (6). These romantic features of the movement were strongly related to the extensive and eclectic assortment of cultural heritage – Surrealism, theoretical works of Carl Jung, and philosophical schools such as Zen Buddhism – that helped define the movement.

All these theoretical, artistic and philosophical references converged in informing the U.S. avant-garde in relation to anti-domineering and “anti-conquest” principles and beliefs. Nevertheless, as the project’s rhetoric is exposed, such cultural heritage evidences the project’s aesthetization of the hegemonic bias perpetrated by the imperialist discourse of the Cold War.

As an artistic school, Belgrad argues, Surrealism was the very first influence in the development of the avant-garde in the U.S.: the French artistic movement headed by André Breton praised the unconscious as a source of a superior reality – *sur realism* – and, as a method of artistic creation, it informed U.S. avant-garde about the importance of the technique of automatism which was based on “the effort to create spontaneously in order to allow the structures of the unconscious to manifest themselves as the subject of art” (35).

For Belgrad, the culture of spontaneity also defined its oppositional nature in relation to U.S. dominant culture by the adoption of subject-centered theoretical trends. According to him, Carl Jung heavily influenced the culture of spontaneity and among the avant-garde artists his psychological theory mainly justified the interest in primitive forms of artistic expression. Belgrad also states that within the project of spontaneity, Zen-Buddhism foregrounded the superiority of communication performed by physical actions over that by verbal means and, besides influencing writers to conform their writing techniques to the rhythms of the body, it also heavily influenced the development of gesture-painting techniques by avant-garde painters (167).

Considering the culture of spontaneity as examined by Belgrad and expanding on Blasing’s argument (on which I shall elaborate in this chapter) against taking spontaneity for granted, my point is that the recurrent references to an eclectic set of artistic, psychological and philosophical trends betray it as a project involving artistic-influenced techniques to make the mediated relation between form and content appear to be unmediated, transparent. That is, the culture of spontaneity, with all its artistic, theoretical and philosophical traits, consists of a strongly rhetorical project that, in the guise of a non-rhetoric aesthetic, elides its hegemonic bias.

Indifferent to such a condition, Belgrad highlights the multicultural and heterogeneous references presented in the culture of spontaneity as opposed to, rather than co-opted by, the hegemonic bias defined by the containment culture of the Cold War. He thus relates the movement to the emergence of the “struggle of ethnic Americans to achieve cultural authority” (10), a struggle that Belgrad thus produces as unhindered.

True, it is undeniable that among the artists that shared the ideological rhetorics of spontaneity, a great number were representative of ethnic, religious or social minorities.²² This is the case of most Beat writers: Kerouac, for example, was the son of a Roman Catholic rural family whose first language was French,²³ Ginsberg was Jewish-American; and Corso had Italian origins. Though acknowledging that in the case of African-Americans and their development of bebop jazz, the adoption of the spontaneous aesthetic is an overt resistance to the co-option of jazz by the big swing bands that entertained the white middle-class, Belgrad refuses to problematize the fact that, within the culture of spontaneity, the adoption of the spontaneous act stemmed from very divergent reasons. That is, while some minorities were *searching for* cultural authority, others were *reacting against* cultural appropriations. Though this study does not aim to analyze whether these references to, or inclusions of, so-called minority groups in the culture of spontaneity were caused by what Belgrad refers to as mutually-beneficial “cross-cultural dialogues” or by “cultural appropriations,” the differentiation is relevant. It demonstrates that Belgrad’s insistence on “cross-cultural dialogues” – in detriment of the “cultural appropriation” which, by the way, he reduces to a “clumsy

²² Commenting on the origins of avant-garde artists, Belgrad points out that Jackson Pollock was a farm boy from rural Wyoming, Theodoros Stamos was the son of Greek immigrants, Adolph Gottlieb and Lee Krasner were second generation Jewish Americans, and Toshiko Takaazu was the daughter of Japanese immigrants. (42)

²³ According to Belgrad, “Kerouac was raised speaking Quebecois French, and he learned English as his second language. [. . .] Kerouac attributed his success with spontaneous composition to the fact that he had heard the sounds of English language without knowing the meaning of words” (42).

Marxist metaphor” (45) – illustrates how the discourse of spontaneity has been updated by contemporary criticism which takes its project of ‘anti-conquest’ for granted on the basis of its being an aesthetic movement, apparently unrelated to the uneven political and social relations within U.S. postwar society.

As already commented in this chapter, such a refusal to envisage politics within aesthetics is part of the spontaneous rhetoric of transparency that claims that art is untainted by persuasion, that is, unmediated by rhetorics. Such a fallacy becomes clear once we perceive that, on the way to establishing a supposedly healthy cross-cultural dialogue and to defining a seemingly pluralistic, inclusive and revitalizing definition of culture, Kerouac, among other avant-garde artists, did not refuse to adopt the same imperialist and reductive terms – archaic, primitive and so on – to refer to cultural and racial difference.

Therefore, by echoing the dichotomies that were central to the containment culture of the Cold War, the project of spontaneity is best understood as a discourse covering up rather than challenging the exclusionary subtexts of Cold War politics. In other words, the rhetoric of transparency supported by the technology of spontaneity is reductionist once it dims questionings about mediation and denies the interconnections between the movement’s aesthetics and its politics.

3.3. Jung, Collective Unconscious, Otherness

Seeking to attain stronger and more relevant social influence,²⁴ the avant-garde artists found in Jung’s analytical psychology the necessary justifications and explanations for their overt interest in unconscious mind processes and multiculturalism within artistic creation.

²⁴ According to Belgrad, “an effort to create a socially relevant art requires at least an implicit theory of psychology; efforts to influence people’s minds must incorporate some idea of how people’s minds work” (56).

I believe it is extremely important to signal the political implications of the movement's interest in aligning unconscious mind processes with multiculturalism. That is, besides following the imperialist conception of the Other as primitive and underdeveloped, the assumption that these groups' artistic creations were derived exclusively from unconscious processes ultimately allowed an authority as well as a manipulation over Others' cultural production by the culture of spontaneity. Therefore, by increasing the social relevance of the unconscious, the project of spontaneity's appropriation of Jungian psychology helped establish new, but still controlling and uneven grounds of communication between heterogeneous societies.

According to Belgrad, Jung's theory, like Freud's, is structured around the importance of the contents imprisoned by the unconscious. These two theoretical frameworks diverge mainly as to their perspective on the origins of the contents of the unconscious. Different from Freud, who perceived the unconscious as the stocking place of private repressed experiences, Jung defined it as a reservoir of human memory, a suprapersonal complex of experiences common to the entire human kind, and which he therefore named collective unconscious. (57)

Still according to Belgrad, Jung's collective unconscious was the depository of the history of the human mind, and its main importance consisted of supplying individuals as well as societies with images that, in times of great distress, would emerge spontaneously or through artistic creation in order to "correct the course of the individual and the society" (58). Jung's conception interested the avant-garde artists once it afforded a curative aspect to be envisaged in the artistic process. His theory also generated interest because it perceived 'primitive societies' as more effective in the process of accessing and assimilating the imagery preserved in the collective unconscious. For Jung, then, primitive societies reflect a much saner behavior.

Though raising some divergences among the avant-garde artists, the term ‘primitiveness’ was eventually absorbed by the culture of spontaneity (Belgrad 45) so as to allow for the incorporation of Native-American, Afro-American, Latin-American and Easterner aesthetics into the movement. It is exactly in this incorporation that the movement originated and propagated a mythical and essentialist conception of the non-white cultures that constitute the heterogeneity of U.S. society. Mythical, because it based such incorporations on reductionist conceptions of Otherness that evaded their historicity and its social contents; essentialist because it considered culture to be determined by ethnicity.

For the Beat writers, this mythical conception of the cultural Other generated one of the most influential principles of the movement: the perception of marginalized groups of the U.S. “not as a failing but as an asset” (Belgrad 197). Marginalized groups, that is, the parts of U.S. society excluded from the economic development of the postwar period, started to be seen as the bearers of an authenticity that had become unreachable to modern, culturally corrupted, white man (*sic*).²⁵

In *On the Road*, the main character Sal relates the origins of his dissatisfactions to his white-man condition:

I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a ‘white man’ disillusioned. All my life I’d had white ambitions; that was why I’d abandoned a good woman like Terry in the San Joaquin Valley. (169)

Whatever it is that Sal means by white ambitions, they are portrayed as being inherent to white man’s constant need to move, that is, to white man’s alleged dynamic and progressive nature. The depicting of such ambitions as a source of sadness and

²⁵ I universalize “man” to emphasize the fact that, in *On the Road*, women were otherized along with ethnic groups.

disillusionment works both to cover up white man's oppressive nature as well as to imply his mobility. Clearly then, Sal's dissatisfaction towards white ambitions works in the narrative to construct the safe freedom of Kerouac's progressive male characters. In the same manner, Sal's assertion of Terry *being left by him* rather than *being unable to leave* naturalizes his mobility as much as elides the excluding conditions that constructs Terry's marginality and lack of mobility. Therefore, by constructing and maintaining the Other as stagnant and free of disillusionment, Kerouac's narrator is also able to unproblematize the social and economic marginality historically imposed on non-white groups and women, and to construct his safe freedom as well.

It is no wonder, then, that while strolling in the "raggedy neighbourhoods" of "Denver coloured section" (170), Sal, ignoring the social and economic marginality of such a reality, expresses his desire to "change worlds with the ecstatic Negroes of America" (170). At this point, however, the construction of the Other as being stagnant is disturbed by subtextual contradictions. If Negroes are "ecstatic" (outside stasis) rather than in stasis, then they are also moving! In order to produce the centrality of the speaker's identity, it becomes necessary to evade the contemporaneity of the Others by constructing their stagnancy in contrast to the mobility of the modern self. The word "ecstatic" thus shows a blind spot or faultline opening the narrator's surface text to a subtextual reading of *On the Road*. Indeed, if Negroes are so ecstatic that Sal feels apart from them, then "sad" merges with "static" and "stagnant" – thus, the narrator's anxiety to construct the white character he represents (Sal) as being "on the road" and on the move, by contrast.

This analysis exemplifies the fact that the innocent and safe freedom proclaimed by Kerouac's narrator is in fact built upon a constructed stagnancy of non-white groups.

It is clear, then, that within Kerouac's narrative, the exclusionary practices of the Cold War are aestheticized by a romantic contemplation voiced by a narrator who, while defining and proclaiming an ahistorical and atemporal Otherness, dismisses his own sovereign, and therefore oppressive, condition through recurrent melancholic depictions of his own sadness and displacement.

Such references to dissatisfaction and sadness empower Kerouac to produce his narrator's voice as being dissonant, apart from the dominant voices already corrupted by and committed to the logic of an oppressive, controlling system. Therefore, Sal's dissatisfaction with part of his regular friends' reasonings — portrayed as being in a "negative, nightmare position" of "giving their tired bookish or political or psychoanalytical reasons" for everything (13) —, as well as his sympathy for non-white groups' alleged stagnancy (and actual marginality), work in the narrative to support Sal's still "innocent road-eyes" (102).

On the Road's surface narrative of innocence and anti-conquest — based on a recurrent construction and normatization of the Other's marginality as well as of white male agency — is, in my reading, evidence of the narrative's aligning with imperialist discourses of dominance. In other words, my point is that what underlies the romantic approach of *On the Road's* narrator toward non-white groups is the same logic that, in the discourses of dominance and imperialism, uses Otherness as a spectacle in order to construct the sovereign identity of the speaking subject.

Despite the evidence of such a dynamic within *On the Road*, that same romantic approach to its representations of marginalized groups can also be perceived in the work of some of Kerouac's critics to this day. Campbell (2001), for example, states that the Beat's identification with marginal classes could be understood as an attempt to find alterity, that "something rebel and nameless" that their generation so eagerly sought. He

goes on to say that the Beats were able to find it in the “aspects of black life that had hitherto been concealed from whites” (453). I want to deromanticize Campbell’s contention: in my view, by making use of stereotype representations, the Beat writers were indeed celebrating and endorsing the same white male privileges that were central to the dominant discourse of the Cold War which I have contextualized in the previous chapter. In this context, then, by referring to the “madness of jazz” (Malcolm 96), for example, Kerouac’s novel endorses the figure of the Other as primitive and irrational while asserting white man’s sovereignty in appropriating the Other.

In this context, it is possible to infer that what underlies the innocent and disinterested quest so eagerly sustained by Kerouac’s narrative is the narrative of expansion, updated here in the form of a youthful road narrative. Therefore, along the road whether in the huge national territory – “crossing and recrossing the country every year, south in the winter and north in the summer and only because he had no place he could stay in without getting tired of it” (30) – or defying the established borders, as in “the end of Texas, the end of America” (257), Sal and his friends are reproducing a renewed version of the white male sovereign role of exploring and domesticating the wilderness of the land, typically represented without its people in colonial discourse.

In *On the Road*, the mystification of the road elides the conquest of the territory: “‘it’s the world’. We can go right on to South America if the road goes” (260). Portrayed as virtually endless and disowned, the road is then the elected, almost sacred, sanctioned instrument that allows Sal and his friends to evade their own vicious and predatory interests, thus to unproblematize and enjoy their privilege of being sovereign subjects.

The mystification of the road promotes a self-desimplication that, once more, allows Kerouac to construct his main characters’ safe freedom and innocence. As it becomes

clearer throughout the reading of the novel, the surface narrative of innocence and anti-control reflects the aesthetization of imperialist and controlling policies established by the project of spontaneity.

This dynamic between the surface humanitarian narrative and the subtexts of dominance is nevertheless fragile and, as already demonstrated, in *On the Road*, such a pattern of representation can be easily disrupted, as illustrated by the analysis of Deans' explanation of what it meant to have "the whole Mexico" before them:

All the years and troubles and kicks – and now *this!* So that we can safely think of nothing else and just go on ahead with our faces stuck out like this, you see, and *understand* the world as, really and genuinely speaking, other Americans haven't done before us — they were here, weren't they? The Mexican war. (260, original emphases)

In this passage, the narrative of innocence is attempted by presenting the imperialist actions of military interventions and territorial expansion as being taken by, now otherized, Americans: "other Americans. . . before us — they were here, weren't they? The Mexican War".

The subtexts of dominance, however, emerge through Dean's construction of his power of agency and superiority based on a knowledge that naturalizes his understanding while disregarding or subalternizing the Others'. Once more, then, *On the Road* cannot avoid engaging the narrative of innocence that supports subalternizing strategies.

By the analysis of this textual moment, it becomes clear that Dean alienates himself from both imperialist militarism and the subaltern subjects. That such innocent and safe freedom is constructed upon subalternizing strategies is evidenced by the narrative

itself: “. . .so that we can safely think of nothing else. . .” If it is not so, what other reason might Dean have for feeling so dangerous?

As becomes clearer throughout, *On the Road* is a complex narrative where the imperialist, controlling logic underlies the novel’s humanitarian and multicultural surface text. In this light, the question: “Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?” (114), that was so exhaustively echoed by numberless followers of countercultural movements, and that in *On the Road* was made by Carlos Marx, one of Sal’s friends, may certainly lead to several philosophical and political issues, but it certainly re-inscribes America in a more contemporary version of the national narrative of expansion.

The mystification of the road contributes not only to the characterization of a non-conformist and innocent subject, but also to the construction of the free self by fixing the Others into their “proper” places, that is, into categories of unfree Otherness. Therefore, while the white male character’s agency is overtly celebrated: “We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one noble function of the time, *move*” (127, original emphases), the circulation of those marked characters representing heterogeneity and diversity is highly restrained. Because of this containment of diversity, the narrative is keen in presenting Sal going to an opera “all racked up sharp in a suit, with a beautiful well-dressed blonde” (51) or “clank to the little Harlem” to enjoy a jazz session, where a “brutal Negro with a big neck” hits the drums while a “six-foot skinny Negro woman” rolls “her bones at the man’s hornbell” (186). In *On the Road*, the blonde girl matches the opera, the Negro woman matches a lascivious dance and, as exemplified previously, Terry matches the cotton field. Thus, within Kerouac’s narrative, references to

heterogeneity do take place but only through the aesthetized categories of subaltern/sovereign relations.

Contrary to what Campbell states, then, it is not in the primitive figure of the Other that Kerouac establishes the rebelliousness which canonized his novel, but rather in those very subaltern/sovereign relations that, in the discourses of dominance, construct white man's cultural appropriation of the Other. White man's agency, in *On the Road*, is thus always dependent on its contrast with – and on the aesthetization of – the alleged primitiveness, stagnancy and dependency of non-white groups.

Sharing the logic sustained by the project of spontaneity, the heterogeneity celebrated in the novel is part of a rhetoric which frames Otherness in reductive terms, “proper” places or idyllic depictions in order to construct the free self of the narrative voice. Illustrative of such a logic is the passage that narrates Dean, Sal and Stan's trip to Mexico. After arriving in Mexico, the men come across a group of Indian girls who are selling pieces of rock crystal. During the time they spend with the girls, the narrator makes references to “the soulful intensity” of those “great brown, innocent eyes” that “stared unflinching into “our nervous blue eyes” (280). Besides the systematic insistence on revealing the innocence of Mexican-Indians – “We saw in them the tender and forgiving gaze of Jesus” (280) – the narrator is keen on highlighting racial differences between the two groups – such as their brown/blue eyes – and on attaching those differences to the cultural contents they are purported to express – such as unflinching/nervous eyes. I consider the narrator's recurrent references to racial features, whether of skin and eye color or body shape, indicative of his subscription to the racist theories that inform imperialist discourses. As to the particular passage above, which puts forth a complex mingling of religious and racial features, its construction of Otherness relies on an arbitrary mystification that naturalizes the “unflinching eyes” of

Mexican Indians as opposed to the self-conscious, culturally corrupted, “nervous eyes” of the white men.

Through the analysis of this textual moment, it becomes clear that Kerouac’s narrative cannot support the maintenance of the explicit innocence of the cultural Other and the implicit innocence of the white subject at the same time. This particular passage brings together, face to face, both the idealized and the contrastive patterns which *On the Road* relies on. The clash of the idealized Other’s and the white men’s innocence would eventually converge to define such groups as equals, destroying then the contrastive pattern on which the narrative relies to construct the progressive free self.

For this very reason, Kerouac prefers to put forth the agency of the main characters. Thus the “nervous blue eyes” work in the context to soften the white men’s not so innocent I’s/eyes and, most importantly, to distinguish the young males from the romanticized representations of the Others as stagnant, subdued and dependable.

Holton, however, states that “Kerouac’s ethnic others rarely emerge from a sort of pastoral (or urban pastoral) simplicity” due to the “limitations of Kerouac’s naïve vision” (270). He concludes, then, following Deleuze and Guattari, that “cultural revolutionaries like Kerouac (*sic*) who choose the road of cultural flight are rarely able to ‘complete the process’” (269). I want to take issue with Holton’s argument, because in my view what underlies Kerouac’s inability to break up with such straight conceptions and actually engage a narrative not so dependable on contrastive patterns is his aligning with imperialist conceptions that traditionally centralize the agency and civilization of white man – the sovereign subject – through the subalternization of the culture’s Other. Therefore, what Holton calls “naïve vision,” in my reading becomes *hegemonic vision*.

Like the project of spontaneity, within Kerouac's narrative, the hegemonic vision is aestheticized rather than challenged and therefore is underlying any reference to minorities. Traveling in Mexico, for example, in complete wonder and touched by the mythical figure of the Indian, Kerouac's narrator is keen to argue that the nation must be even wilder off the road "because the Pan-American highway partially civilizes this nation on this road" (280). Sal's expansionist opinion is also directly stated when analyzing the "frantic and almost silly" talk of the Indian girls who were selling crystal rocks along the road: "In their silence they were themselves. They've only *recently* learned to sell these crystals, since the highway was built about ten years back – up until that time this entire nation must have been *silent!*" (281). Kerouac's narrator voices here one of the most oppressive lines of the novel, that is, by the slip from silence to speech, Sal reproduces a conception that mistakes the Other's language for silence. Sal's conception is highly dehumanizing once it perceives the human ability to talk solely on the basis of his own language and his sovereign condition.

In sum, in both these moments, the narrator, by rendering the Other as de-historicized and as a de-humanized spectacle, is considerably endorsing the civilizing, progressive condition of white man without ever considering the relations of subalternity/sovereignty such alleged agency is established on.

The same pattern of relation is perceived when Sal decides to spend some time living and working as a cotton-field picker among the Negroes and Mexican-Americans in the U.S. The narrative highlights recurrent idealizations such as when the narrator states that: "Birds sang an accompaniment. I thought I had found my life's work" (93). Alongside pastoral depictions of farmer work, such as: "it was beautiful kneeling and hiding in that earth. If I felt like resting I did, with my face on the pillow of brown moist earth" (93), Sal also enacts an ethnic cross-dressing – "sighing like an old Negro cotton-

picker” (93) – in order to describe his feeling after a day of work. While seeking innocence throughout such a cross-dressing, Kerouac’s narrator is actually constructing his authority to displace the Other’s episteme, eliding social conflicts.

The unproblematized and aestheticized reproduction of the socio-economic marginality imposed on non-white groups allows Sal’s later consideration “They thought I was a Mexican, of course, and in a way I am” (94) to be voiced proudly. Nevertheless, by such an assertion, Kerouac’s narrator is able to establish both a secure differentiation from the culture’s Other — so as not to compromise his own alleged progressiveness —, as well as a willing identification with that very group based on the grounds of a commonly shared spontaneity and innocence.

In *On the Road*, the white male sovereign condition is also defined and reasserted by gender-based contrasts. And therefore, the domesticity enforced on female citizens within Cold War society as opposed to the public realm defined for men is also reproduced throughout the narrative. Women’s submission and domesticity are then incorporated and recurrently praised: “Dig her? Dig her, man? That’s Inez. See, that’s all she does, she pokes her head in the door and smiles” (235), while their refusal to submit their lives to orbit around men’s is perceived with moralistic recriminations, as in the case of Marylou, or diminished and discredited as childish behavior in the case of Dean’s assertion on his wife’s nervous breakdown over his constant infidelities: “She’s getting worse and worse man, she cries and makes tantrums . . .” (172). Despite such controlling and oppressive characterization, such comments are incorporated in the narrative without ever causing any qualms in the men’s discourse of innocence and non-oppressive freedom.

It becomes clear, then, that Kerouac’s narrative is always haunted by discourses of dominance towards minorities because the very agency and innocent freedom of its

main characters, as I have argued, relies on the aesthetization of reductionist representations of Others within imperialist discourses. Kerouac's novel, and the culture of spontaneity as a whole, therefore collaborated to normatize the very dichotomies that were central to the U.S. official discourse of the Cold War.

Furthermore, my point is that although Kerouac has been taken for granted even by such critics as Deleuze and Guattari as being a "cultural revolutionary," he can only remain so if these subtextual conflicts within his narrator's supposedly rebellious voice in *On the Road* continue to be obliterated by contemporary criticism. In this sense, Kerouac's image as a "cultural revolutionary" can only be preserved through readings that ignore the text's potential to unmask the narrator's conservative discourse.

3.4. Spontaneous Prose as Craft

In his article entitled "Peasant Dreams: Reading *On the Road*," Richardson refers to the 50's, the decade when *On the Road* was written and also published, as the "haunted, hopeful, doomed decade" (220).²⁶ This is mostly true because of Cold War policies which based economic and upward class mobility mainly on the establishment of an increasingly hegemonic society rather than a more inclusive one. Thus, the U.S. society of the 50's saw reactions from those people whose wills or beliefs, for political or ideological reasons, were not represented or assisted by the federal policies aimed at consolidating the ideology of consensus. The result of such acts of resistance was the increase in legalized violence and oppression.²⁷

As I have suggested, the anxieties and oppression derived from Cold War politics were directly responsible for the development of the reactive project of spontaneity in order to construct the mask of anti-conquest. It is necessary to understand, nevertheless,

²⁶ According to Richardson, *On the Road* "imaginatively spans the first decades of the American National Security State and of the Civil Rights struggle" (220).

²⁷ According to Richardson, "between 1950 and 1953 defense spending quadrupled" in the U.S. and "by the end of 1950," U.S. soldiers were fighting the Chinese in Korea and, in 1953, "Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were executed" under the accusation of Un-American activities (220).

that the same massive repression and consequent reduction of the scope of citizens' social influence contributed to shape such a reaction in the form of a romantic and utopian project that, aiming at evading that hegemonic logic, ultimately promoted it.

Derived from such a hegemonic social control, therefore, is the postwar artists' interest in experimenting with radical techniques. It is easy to infer that the valorization of form over content is symptomatic of the absorption of Cold War containment logic by these artists' aesthetics. That is, Cold War containment logic, with its severe censorship of content, clearly contributed to shift artists' attention towards spontaneous form. In this light, it is possible to say that the great concern involving the development of a writing style that so anxiously moved the Beat writers was itself a symptom of Cold War policies. Kerouac's poetics of spontaneous prose therefore can be perceived as a technique both *stimulated* and *limited* by the political, social and economic pressures of increasing Cold War anxieties.

While analyzing the rhetoric of postwar poetics, Mutlu Konuk Blasing comments that the postwar artists' interest in experimenting with radical techniques and in breaking up with traditional forms became eventually linked to "oppositional politics" (2). Still according to Blasing, such aligning of "technical strategies with political values" was moreover responsible for establishing the conventional perception of technique as the bearer of "specific sociopolitical, ethical and metaphysical values" (2).

True to such a convention, the Beats' literary method – a conscious refusal of the mind-body fragmentation defined by corporate liberal society and the adoption of an unconscious-driven 'spontaneous prose' – brought with it the general tendency of attaching oppositional values to radical techniques. For the Beats in general, and Kerouac in particular, the unconscious-driven technique rather than staging a message was itself a message.

It was in 1954 that Kerouac outlined the principles of this writing style in “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose”.²⁸ In his essay, it is possible to perceive the conflation of some of the psychological and philosophical influences that informed the project of spontaneity – Gestalt and Reichian Therapy and Zen-Buddhism – being used to construct the transparency of the writer’s poetics and its unrhetorical traits.

In several tenets of his poetics, Kerouac insists on the importance of writing “without consciousness in semi-trance” and of following “free deviation (association) of mind”. For Kerouac, such an economy of writing would avoid “pause to think of proper word” and therefore avoid craftiness – “Craft is craft” (*Essentials of Spontaneous Prose*).

By a pervasive attack on craftiness – rhetorical language –, Kerouac’s proposed spontaneous technique was rendered as a transparent vehicle able to verbalize the writer’s inner mind without any rhetorical interference. According to Blasing, “Modern and late-modern²⁹ experimental writers” had recurrently perceived writing techniques as the “very opposite of rhetorical and representational writing” and because of that have rendered persuasive and clearly rhetorical moments of their narrative as “absolute truths revealed by the ‘adequacy’” (7) of their techniques.

In his essay, Kerouac also asserts his technique’s spontaneous operation by conditioning its process to the rhythm of the body: “with writing-or-typing cramps, in accordance (as from center to periphery) with laws of orgasm, Reich’s beclouding of ‘consciousness’” (1954). For Blasing, the aligning of technique with the operation of natural processes worked to authorize the ideology of the technical purification “of the contamination of rhetoric and historical corruption” (8). In Kerouac’s essay, the aligning of his ‘organic’ technique with jazz spontaneous and conversational dynamic –

²⁸ See Annex B.

²⁹ Blasing considers “late-moderns” those writers who evaded “the rhetoric of their form and set out to reclaim the avant-garde energies of late modernism” (3). She considers Charles Olson as well as the Beat writers Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder to be representatives of such a period. All of them are included in the spontaneity movement, as defined by Belgrad.

“the vigorous space dash separating rhetorical breathing as jazz musicians drawing breath between outblown phrases” (1954) – also enabled the writer to justify his progressive approach to cultural and racial diversity.

By the way it was structured, spontaneous prose is a complex assortment of tendencies that justified the idea that method was essential in the process of delivering artistic creation. However, by disclosing its rhetoric, its purity should become demystified: Kerouac’s spontaneous prose is less a naive technique and more a rhetorical instrument aiming at freeing aesthetics from ethics.

In *On the Road*, Kerouac’s suspicion about the artificiality and persuasive nature of what the Beat poet Ginsberg called “officialese” talking (qtd. in Belgrad 198) is voiced by Dean as follows: “Man, wow, there’s so many things to write! How to even *begin* to get it all down and without modified restraints and all hang-up on like literary inhibitions and grammatical fears . . .” (10). Like the content of *On the Road*’s structure, Kerouac’s estrangement with the grammar conventions and preordained configurations of language are carefully registered in order to present the narrative as a piece of spontaneous, not crafted work.

While analyzing the orality within the Beat poetics, Michael Hayward traces a parallel between some items cited by Walter J. Ong in *Orality and Literacy* as characteristic of “orally based thought and expression” (Appendix A) — additive rather than subordinative and aggregative rather than analytic clauses, redundant or copious and close to human lifeworld expressions — and Beat writing. Hayward cites, then, the final paragraph of Kerouac’s narrative as a comparable example concerning the Beat writer’s use of orally-based expressions, such as additive clauses and repetition:

So in America when the sun goes down *and* I sit on the old broken-down river pier watching the long, long skies over New Jersey *and* sense all that raw. . . *and* all

that road going, all the people dreaming in the immensity of it, *and* in Iowa I know by now the children must be crying in the land where they let children cry, *and* tonight the stars'll be out *and* don't you know that God is Pooh Bear? . . .

I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of old Dean Moriarty, the father we never found, *I think of Dean Moriarty*. (291, added emphases)

The aggregation of elements of orality within *On the Road's* structure works to produce the transparency and unrhetorical traits of the novel. This aligning of unconventional writing with transparency is then in perfect aligning with Kerouac's and other postwar artists' mystification of form. My point is that such a mystification allows Kerouac's narrative to be seen as not crafted and therefore as unrhetorical work.

Nevertheless, despite being revised, retyped and expanded — that is, crafted — ,the narrative flaunts evidences of its spontaneous, not-crafted nature. Thus its non-standardized punctuation and syntax — “The city was one big construction job; the people transient, wild, ambitious, busy, gay; washlines, trailers; bustling downtown streets with banners; altogether very Californian” (157) —; and its oral-like repetitions — “Now, Dean approached him, he approached his God; he thought Slim was God; he shuffled and bowed in front of him and asked him to join us” (167) — and additions: “Across the street Negro families. . . talking and looking up at the starry night through the trees and just relaxing and sometimes watching the game” (170). In this light, it is possible to infer that the orally-based expressions in *On the Road* are evidences of Kerouac's mediated, persuasive and rhetorical work rather than spontaneous outburst of writing.

In his “Belief & Technique for Modern Prose”,³⁰ Kerouac listed 30 directions for his technique. One of them makes reference to “The unspeakable visions of the individual.”

³⁰ See Annex C

According to Hayward, this statement illustrates the importance which Kerouac and other Beat writers placed upon both orality and individual vision: writing as the ongoing attempt to communicate the visions and the ‘voice’ of the writer” (2.0.0).

Such visions and images were perceived as parts of the writer’s voice and because not mediated by language, were also considered to be truth, untainted, not persuaded expressions of the divine, artistic mind. For Hayward, the underlying assumption of the “unspeakable visions” is that the development of a spontaneous, unconscious prose — free of the preordained and impersonal forces of the language — would allow the images to be uttered (2.0.0).

According to Blasing, the modernists³¹ tended to perceive the image as “universal, existing in perfection, in freedom from space and time” (6), and therefore to address it as the presentation of ‘truth’ – real because conceived “without the mediation of rhetoric” (6). For Blasing, such logic suppresses the rhetoric of figuration by presenting the image “as spontaneous and immediate perception” (7). Similarly to this suppression of rhetoric, in Kerouac’s method, image and visions are related to superior, ‘spontaneous’ moments of expression.

True to such a logic, in *On the Road*, images, visions and apparitions are presented as expressions of truth: “You had a vision, boy, a *vision*. Only damn fools pay no attention to visions” (145, original emphases). The superiority of visual communication is explained by Bull Lee, after Sal commenting on a “temporary trance” concerning his late father, he was sent to after reading one of the horses’ names in a horse race:

Mankind will someday realize that we are actually in contact with the dead and
 With the other world, whatever it is; right now we could predict, if only
 exerted enough mental will, what is going to happen within the next hundred

³¹ Blasing cites Pound’s imagist poetics as an example of mystification of image.

years and be able to take steps to avoid all kinds of catastrophes. (146)

In *On the Road*, then, visions are related to a form of communication still to come, a form not fully comprehended now, but which will be in the future “if the scientists get the ball. The bastards right now are only interested in seeing if they can blow up the world” (146).

Visions and images are also presented as sources of strong experiences connecting body and mind as perceived in Sal’s comments after having a visionary and delirious state caused by starvation. After having visions of his being in “another life and in another body,” Sal explains that “for just a moment [he] had reached the point of ecstasy that [he] always wanted to reach” (164).

Visions are also related to unconscious processes as becomes clear in the moment Sal is high in marijuana in Mexico: “I gulped, I saw streams of gold pouring through the sky and right across the tattered roof of the poor old car, right across my eyeballs and indeed right inside them; . . . For a long time I lost consciousness in my lower mind of what we were doing and only came around sometime later . . .” (268).

Within *On the Road*, therefore, there is a recurrent mystification of images and visions whether by relating them to superior, new forms of communication to fit the new life to come after the “other Americans . . . before us”; sources of holistic experiences integrating mind and body, therefore avoiding the fragmentation of objective mind processes; or as unconscious – free of authorial bias – forms of communication.

My point is that the mystification of such images and visions within the narrative alongside the careful maintenance of orally based expressions converge to construct *On the Road* as an unmediated, pure and innocent narrative. This alleged transparency will continue to overshadow *On the Road*’s complex and conflicting narrative as long as

Kerouac's spontaneous prose and the project of spontaneity as a whole continue to be mistaken as given, that is, as long as they continue to be approached through a depoliticized and mystifying bias.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

4.1 Exoticism as a Literary Heritage: The Construction of U.S. Cultural Identity

I have demonstrated, so far, the merging points between the dominant discourse of the Cold War and its reactive form – the culture of spontaneity. To read Kerouac's *On the Road* as a text defined by the conflation and mingling of these two discourses points to the effective political use of a constructed Otherness as a repressive discourse not only in the official federal policies but also in the artistic realm. By being able to supplement and to justify political norms as well as to define diverse social activities (artistic, for example), this constructed Otherness can thus be understood as a discourse; as such, it is closely involved in the process of maintenance of the existing power (Eagleton 289).

At this point of my study I shall use Said's³² considerations on the hegemonic conceptions of the 'Oriental' within Western culture. For Said, the construct of Orientalism³³ is a "corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it". Still according to Said, such consistency surrounding the Oriental subject and culture must be seen and understood as a discourse so enormous is the "systematic discipline" (69) by which "European culture was able to manage – and even

³² A similar argumentation on the imaginative and political uses of Otherness has been done previously than Said's by the Mexican historian Edmundo O'Gorman in *La Invención de La América*.

³³ According to Said, the "most readily accepted designation for Orientalism is an academic one . . . Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient – and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist – . . . is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism. (68) I borrow the term, to refer to a different context, that of discourses of the /Otherness of the West itself because of the logic of constitutive polarity which it implies in the construction of the imperial "I".

produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (70).

I shall use Said’s argumentation on Orientalism in order to articulate my conclusion as to how the discourse of Exoticism informs the recurrent use of the image of Others in *On the Road*.

I have argued for the relevance of reading *On the Road* in the context of the white male-centered discourse perpetrated by Cold War policies and their dependence on the construction of an exotic Otherness. In this sense, the present chapter concludes that the novel’s proclaimed revolutionary content is intrinsically attached to what Toni Morrison argues is the tradition of U.S. canonical literary production: white-male-centered imperialism (1992).

While analyzing the use of black subjects within canonical U.S. literature, Morrison asserts that its “celebrated major themes” – autonomy, newness, difference, authority, and absolute power – cannot be perceived separately from the “four-hundred-year-old presence of first Africans and then African-Americans in the United States”. For Morrison, the fact that canonical U.S. literature has become “the preserve of white male views, genius, and power” is much in debt with the “imaginative uses” of a constructed “non-white, Africanistic presence” in the U.S.³⁴

What is strikingly interesting in Morrison’s analysis is that she perceives the central importance of a constructed, exotic Other in the process of defining “the nature and even the source of literary ‘whiteness.’” Her analysis calls for demystifying U.S. literary production, for it ultimately asserts the central role of a constructed Other within the major themes of U.S. literature.

³⁴ All citations from Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark* refer to pages 3-29.

According to Morrison, “cultural identities are formed and informed by a nation’s literature.” She goes on to say that, in the particular case of U.S. history, the very need to construct a new kind of white man identity in contrast with the one from the Old Continent – Europe – became closely attached to the development and establishment of a national literature. That is, since the very beginning of U.S. national history, literature has contributed with the register of a supposedly unproblematic national identity which was provided through the contrast with the European subject by means of the existing racial diversity on the American continent – especially considering the presence of African slaves.

The ‘American’ identity³⁵ became, therefore, since the very beginning, dependent on the racial difference that formed U.S. society. This difference, still according to Morrison, was able to provide “a huge trove of signs, symbols, and agencies for organizing, separating, and consolidating identity along valuable lines of interest.”

In her reading of *Huckleberry Finn*, for example, Morrison discloses the “interdependence of slavery and freedom” within the novel by asserting the meaning that Jim’s slave condition brings to Huck and Tom’s conceptions of freedom and identity. For Morrison, the visibility of Jim as the Other allows the perceptions of white superiority and black submission to and appreciation for the white masters. Morrison asserts the importance of the novel precisely because it forces frontal debates and “stimulates and describes the parasitical nature of white freedom.”

While Morrison’s analysis politicizes the racial relations normatized within the U.S. canonical literary scene, Richardson’s comments point to the more elaborated exoticism of the racial Other propagated by U.S. literature: “Primitivism, colors, the earth, authenticity and sexual vigor, the constellation is familiar in American writing” (224).

³⁵ I refer to Angela McRobbie’s concept: “identity is not just a matter of ‘who/what one is’, but also who/what one is not’, ‘who/what one could be’ and ‘who/what one would like to be’ (qtd. in Stembrouck 17)

Richardson cites Jean Toomer's *Cane* as an example of a novel using the racial Other as an exotic figure and quotes a passage from Toomer's novel where a black character is portrayed in the following manner: "A soil-soaked fragrance comes from her. Through the cement floor her strong roots sink down. They spread under the asphalt streets... Her strong roots sink down and spread under the river and shoot in blood-lines that waver south. Her roots shoot down" (qtd. in Richardson 224). Richardson's comment focuses on the similarity of Toomer's and Kerouac's view of Others: for him, both writers exoticize the Other by proposing a "kind of psychosexual pastoral, a return to the earth, to the soil, to sexual vitality, and to color" (225).

From Morrison's analysis to Richardson's comparison, we can see the consistent use of the cultural Other in a supporting role whether to construct an innocent version of the 'American' subject's freedom, or to reflect a complex of romantic or repressed desires. In both examples, though, the culture's Other emerges less as a fixed construct and more as a receptacle for the self's projections.

4.2. Spontaneity as Control

In *Orientalism*, Said explains how the Orient became a European invention, "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (67). According to Said, this European process of inventing and presenting the Orient ended up structuring a discourse that, besides rendering one of the "most recurring images of the Other" in European culture, also contributed to the definition of the image, idea and personality the European subject held for itself (68).

According to Said, the Orient cannot be considered solely as a free deviation of creative and imaginative mind processes but also as a part of the European political, economic and cultural practices. For Said, the concept of the Orient within Western society is expressed, reinforced and propagated through a discourse that is structured by

“supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles” (68). Therefore, through a diverse form of political speeches, social considerations, economic studies, academic researches and literary narratives, the Orient is always considered, presented and represented in terms of the dichotomy – Orient/Occident – in which it is the second, minor term, a backdrop of contrast for the West.

My conclusion is that the Beat’s most famous novel *On the Road*, propagates the discourse of spontaneity as a form of what Said calls Orientalism – a discourse structured on political, economic and social conventions establishing the imaginative Other as exotic.

I have demonstrated that Kerouac’s novel relies on a binary conception identifying the national subject as opposed to the objectified Other. This mode of perception was previously illustrated by Morrison in her analysis of the formation of a national identity through literary texts, for example; it was also exposed by Cohen’s and Onkst’s investigations of the gendered and racializing federal policies aiming at the development of a consumer’s society during the postwar; and it was also disclosed by Saldanha-Portillo’s analysis of the neo-imperialist discourse promoted by the U.S during the Cold War.

As I have demonstrated, key textual moments of *On the Road* produce a hegemonic conception of the U.S. nation that tends to identify *us* as different from *them*. In the same manner that this very basic conception drew the line, in the early U.S., between the national subject and the Old Continent one for example, it also established an internal social stratification that ultimately defined some ‘Americans’ as more ‘American’ than others. This stratification rendered to U.S. society an ironic nature, for

it normatized a privileging/excluding condition within the hearth of a society ideologically defined as defending first and foremost the right to liberty and equality.

The reproduction of this dichotomy of privilege/exclusion can be perceived, for example, both in the normatization of privileged social, political and economic conditions of the white male subject presented in the federal policies and in the imperialist politics defined by the discourse of the Cold War, and by the aesthetization of the excluded condition of the cultural Other in the discourse of spontaneity.

Another aspect of this hegemonic conception defining a dominant subject and a cultural Other can be noticed when observing the highly flexible use of Otherness by both discourses. As demonstrated in the previous chapters of this study, within Cold War discourses, the fully developed white male subject was overtly opposed to the passive, primitive and under-developed Other. A negative approach to such constructed features justified both U.S. interference in post-colonial territories and the maintenance of the political, economic and social privileges of the white male subject within U.S. society. On the other hand, in the discourse of spontaneity, the same imagined Otherness reflected a desired condition – primitivism, return to Earth, authenticity – as opposed to the dysfunctional and neurotic self resulted from the economic, political and social development of the dominant subject. In both discourses, nevertheless, the concept of Otherness was used to evidence the progressive and fully developed status of the white male U.S. citizen.

In other words, while the discourse of the Cold War defines the dominant subject in terms of a negative approach towards the constructed Other, the project of spontaneity defines the dominant subject in terms of an exaltation of the excluded Other. Such a dynamic, integrating proclaimed opposite discourses, discloses the existence first, of a practical and then, of a more internalized process of defining, constructing and

maintaining the cultural Other within U.S. society. That is, of course, political practices have strongly contributed to the process of defining the subjugated groups – Africans as slaves, women as restricted to the domestic sphere and the native population as primitive – but it was also through cultural practices – such as literature and artistic movements – that much of U.S. perception of Other as passive and inferior became hegemonic.

Therefore, the project of spontaneity not only was informed by the hegemonic conceptions that perceived minorities as inferior, passive and underdeveloped but also informed a highly elaborated construction of Otherness, a construction that ultimately contributed to reproduce the Other as exotic.

Though the Other in *On the Road* is not typically an Easterner, but rather a black, a Mexican, or a woman, I am, at this particular moment of my study homogenizing these different minority groups under the label “Oriental” in order to demonstrate that the construction of these groups as exotic within the project of spontaneity and Kerouac’s most famous novel happens under the same polarity that, in Said’s *Orientalism*, defined the “sovereign Western consciousness” as opposed to the exotic “Oriental.” As Said puts it:

. . . the imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments and projections. (74)

The perception of this “sovereign consciousness” is especially significant at this point for it allows us to perceive the imaginative uses of these marginalized groups in

Kerouac's narrative, for example, as part of a complex dynamic involving political, cultural, economic and imperialist power. Therefore it would be dangerously naïve not to perceive the romantic approach of the project of spontaneity towards the cultural Other of U.S. society, portrayed as anti-modern, as closely related to its imperialist practices. Kerouac's romantic and idyllic depictions of the marginalized groups of Cold War society demonstrate the uneven "relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (Said 72). What becomes clear, then, is that it is not by chance that the exotic subjects that emerge in *On the Road* belong exactly to the same groups to which political and social representation have been constantly denied. As I have demonstrated, the process of romantic exoticism delivered by Kerouac's bucolic returns to primitiveness when referring to African-Americans, Native-Americans and Mexican-Americans as well as the narrator's passionate valorization of women's passivity and submission are closely related to the hegemonic perceptions of the cultural Other within U.S. society.

A subtextual critique of the construction of Otherness within the Beat generation's most famous novel is spurred by a saturating discourse of exoticism underlying the project of spontaneity that perceived the Other as one who, in Allen Ginsberg's words, "seemed to share an ethos that did not focus on achievement" (qtd. in Belgrad 197). These presuppositions that, for the Beat generation, in general, perceived the Other as one who does not "focus on achievement," and in *On the Road*, in particular, as one who "knows nothing of disappointment and white sorrows" (171) or in whose eyes are all the human qualities that "are soft and subdued" (262), are therefore as dehumanizing and depoliticizing as the imperialist and patriarchal discourses that constructed Others as "lower races" and "primitive and stagnant" (qtd. in Saldanha-Portillo 21).

My conclusion, therefore, is that the representations of marginalized groups in the most famous Beat novel reinforces rather than challenges their subjugation under the hegemonizing interests of Cold War economic and cultural politics. Thus confirming my first hypothesis, my analysis has demonstrated that the discourse of spontaneity and exoticism in *On the Road* ultimately defined an aesthetization of the imperialist and patriarchal political practices defined by Cold War discourse.

4.3. The Mystification of Aesthetics

As important as recognizing the aesthetization of such political practices, is to perceive the effects of aestheticization: by refusing to be attached to the political logic of the Cold War, the project of spontaneity dimmed its own “organized political circumstances” (Said 76) just as much as Kerouac’s refusal to see what Richardson called the “horrible importunity” (228) of ‘America’ opened the way for *On the Road* to endorse the dehumanizing discourses imposed on minorities.

The aesthetization of such controlling, excluding and hegemonic politics explains consistently, though not completely, the considerably easy co-option of the Beat novel by the hegemonic U.S. society of the 50’s. According to Gerald Graff, the economic system is able to co-opt any movement that does not offer a consistent opposition or refusal to its ruling logic (94). But, this fact alone does not fully explain the considerably stable revolutionary appeal that the Beat generation and *On the Road* still enjoy – this issue, concerning the reception of the novel, is not within the scope of this study; I have concluded, nevertheless, that it is a highly relevant matter for further research.

Throughout this study it became clear that, besides producing the aesthetization of the imperialist logic adopted by the U.S. during the postwar period, the project of spontaneity underlying *On the Road* have their sources strongly fed the ideology by

which artistic movements originated in restraining times have privileged access to ‘truth’. In what concerns the project of spontaneity, such a privileged access to truth was supported by the use of radical techniques, presented and taken for granted as unconscious-driven, unrhetorical methods of delivering artistic creation. That is, by presenting method as a guarantee for the true, unrhetorical condition of artistic creation, postwar artists engaged themselves in a “rhetoric of technique” (Blasing 2) that led to an increasing mystification and depoliticized perception of their art.

Besides mystifying their own techniques, postwar artists also perceived the breaking up with traditional aesthetics as evidence of their rebelliousness and inconformity while conventional forms became aligned with traditional or conformist positions. As Blasing makes clear in her analysis of the rhetorics presented in U.S. postwar poetics, such an alignment is up to this day conventionally accepted by public and critics as well.

In *On the Road*, Kerouac’s structuring of the narrative on a colloquial tone and his inclusion of orally based expressions, as well as his mystification of visions and imagery, all contributes to create an illusion of unrhetorical work. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the alignment of unconventional forms with the assumption of transparency is a convention which has been taken for granted by both critics and public. Similarly, *On the Road*’s presentation of images and visions as superior forms of communication has been used to uphold a conventional belief which, as Blasing argues, was shared by diverse postwar artists at least since Pound’s imagist poetics.

Therefore, confirming my second hypothesis, the mystification of Kerouac’s spontaneous poetics along with the conventional alignment of radical techniques with “oppositional politics” (Blasing 2) helped perpetuate the revolutionary appeal *On the Road* still casts on the public as well as critics³⁶ after almost 50 years of its release. That

³⁶ See “Review of Literature” in the introductory chapter of this study.

is, *On the Road*'s oral-based language contributes to promote the Beat novel as a transparent literary text and its unconventional writing contributes for it to be seen as a radical, rebellious literary production.

However, Kerouac's spontaneous narrative does take a lot of craft! Throughout the novel, the reader comes across a series of careful combinations such as poet-like language used to suggest Sal's and his friends' spontaneity: "Holly flowers floating in the air, were all these flowers in the dawn of Jazz America" (192); street talk to assure the "street smart" type of Dean Moriarty: "'so long's I can get that lil ole gal with that lil sumpin down there tween her legs, boy'" (14) as well as old-fashioned language to voice the intellectual Carlo Max: "I mean, man, whither goest thou? Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?" (114).

Similarly to this subtle manipulation of language, the recurrent visions and apparitions in *On the Road* rather than being unmediated are clearly constructed and tainted by the same imperialist centralities reproduced alongside the narrative. Thus, the visions related to the white male characters in *On the Road* naturalize what is actually their constructed, arbitrary agency. Particularly interesting for its moving, speedy, seemingly unmediated vision is Sal's reference on his friend Dean's arrival in Denver:

Suddenly I had a vision of Dean, a burning shuddering frightful Angel . . . I saw his wings; I saw his old jalopy chariot with a thousand of sparkling flames shooting out from it; I saw the path it burned over the road; it even made its own road and went over the corn, through cities, destroying bridges, drying rivers . . .

(244)

In this reading of *On the Road*, then, I have attempted not only to expose the recurrent interferences of the Cold War imperialist project and its anxieties within the Beat novel, but also to argue against the depoliticization of Kerouac's aesthetics that

perpetuates a critical history that has refused for too long to acknowledge that “technical experience can no longer be justified as enabling a privileged access to truth” (Blasing 10).

This study does not aim to diminish the important role played by the project of spontaneity in general, or of the Beat novel in particular, within the U.S. culture. On the contrary, by demonstrating that the complex ambiguities within the Beat generation’s canonical texts can be read as evidences of their intersection with U.S. containment and imperialist logic, this study, besides calling for a more attentive and comprehensive analysis of this generation’s literary production, opens ways for subsequent studies concerning the interrelations between art and politics.

These interrelations become far more complex and interesting once we perceive Beat generation and *On the Road* as important references for counterculture movements that subsequently developed in the U.S. and other parts of the world. That is, the Beat novel was influential for several movements (hippie, punk, anarchic-punk, hard-core) that carry within their ideologies a clear refusal of the established order. This question thus bids further research: what have been the legacies and consequences of the minoritizing discourses as well as the mystification of aesthetics concerning the artistic trends that have revised and re-enacted counterculture to this day?

WORKS CITED

- Belgrad, Daniel. *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Blasing, Mutlu K. *Politics and Form in Postmodern Poetry O'Hara, Bishop, Ashbery and Merrill*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Campbell, James. "Kerouac's Blues." *The Antioch Review* 59 (2001): 451-9.
- Charters, Ann. *American Novelists since World War II*. Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1978. Vol. II of *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. 16 vols. 255-61.
- Cohen, Lizabeth. "Reconversion: the Emergence of the Consumer's Republic." *A Consumer's Republic*. New York: Vintage Books, 2003. 112 - 65.
- Dardess, George. *The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar America*. Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1983. Vol. 16 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. 16 vols. 278-303.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Teoria da Literatura: Uma Introdução*. Trans. Waltesir Dutra. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1997.
- Elteren, Mel van. "The Subculture of the Beats: A Sociological Revisit." *Journal of American Culture* 22 (1999):71-99.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1963.
- Fiedler, Leslie. *The Collected Works of Leslie Fiedler*. Vol I. New York: Stein, 1971.
- Graff, Gerald. "American Criticism Left and Right." Comp. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen. *Ideology and Classic American Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. 91-121.
- Harris, Oliver. "Cold War Correspondents: Ginsberg, Kerouac, Cassady, and the Political Economy of the Beat Letters." *Twentieth Century Literature* 46 (2000): 171- 92.

- Hayward, Michael. "Unspeakable Visions: The Beat Generation and the Bohemian Dialectic." 25 July 2003 <<http://www.harboyr.sfu.ca/~hayward/UnspeakableVisions/Page/html>>.
- Holmes, J. C. "This is the Beat Generation" A 26-year-old defines his times. *New York Times Magazine*, 16 November 1952, 20 June 2003 <<http://www.litkicks.com>>.
- Holton, Robert. "Kerouac Among the Fellahin: *On the Road* to Postmodern." *Modern Fiction Studies* 41(1995): 255-83.
- Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*. Penguin Books. Great Britain, 1976.
- . "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose." 6 Aug. 2004. <<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~Afilreis/88/kerouac-sponatenous.html>>.
- . "Belief and Technique for Modern Prose." 6 Aug. 2004. <<http://www.upenn.edu/~Afilreis/88/Kerouac-technique.html>>.
- Malcolm, Douglas. "Jazz America: Jazz and African American Culture in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*." *Contemporary Literature* 40 (1999):85-110.
- Martinetti, Ron. "American Legends/American Writers." September 20005 <www.americanlegends.com/authors/Kerouac.html>
- McNally, Dennis. *Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, the Beat Generation, and America*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Vintage, 2000.
- Neuhaus, Jessamyn. "The Way to a Man's Heart: Gender Roles, Domestic Ideology, and Cookbooks in the 1950s." *Journal of Social History*. 32 (1999): 529-53.
- Nicosia, Gerald. *Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac*. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1983.

- Ossterreicher, Arthur. Rev. of *On the Road*, by Jack Kerouac. *Village Voice* 18 Sep. 1957:5.
- Onkst, David H. “ ‘First a Negro... Incidentally a Veteran’: Black World War Two Veterans and the GI Bill of Rights in the Deep South, 1944-1948.” *Journal of Social History* 31 (1998): 517-43.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Richardson, Mark. “Peasant Dreams: Reading *On the Road*.” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 43.2 (2001) 218-42.
- Ricobom, Gisele. “A Organização dos Estados Americanos e os Estados Unidos da América na Guerra Fria: A Promoção da Democracia.” Unpublished Dissertation, UFSC, 2004.
- Riquelme, John Paul, ed. *Dracula*. Case Studies in Literary Criticism. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2002.
- Roman, Camille. *Elizabeth Bishop’s World War II – Cold War View*. NY: Palgrave, 2001.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- . *The Edward Said Reader*. Ed. Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.
- Saldanha-Portillo, Maria Josefina. “Development and Revolution: Narratives of Liberation and Regimes of Subjectivity in the Postwar Period.” *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development*. Durham Duke University Press, 2003, 17-59.
- Scott, Krista. *Stumptuous*. 16 October 2004. <<http://www.stumptuous.com/comps/>

debeauvoir.html>.

Smith, Mitchell J. "Beat , Beatnik, or Diet Beat: The Choice of a New Generation". 19 Sep 2004<<http://www.proxy.arts.uci.edu/~nideffer/Tvc/section2/08.Tvc.v9.sect2.Smith.html>>.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988. 271-313.

Stembrouck, Stef. *What is Discourse Analysis?* 13 August 2003 <<http://bank.rug.ac.be/da/da.htm>>.

Theado, Matt. "Beat Generation Literary Criticism." *Contemporary Literature* 45 (2004):747- 61.

Willentz, Elias. *The Beat Scene*. New York: Corinth Books, 1960.

Wisseman, Nicholas. "Falsely Accused: Cold War Liberalism Reassessed." *The Historian* 66 (2004): 320-34.

ANNEX A

What in the world interests a woman?



When she's married to The Man in Two Positions to Buy

—practically everything!



As a *businessman*, The Man in Two Positions to Buy decides or influences the buying for his company of goods and services of many kinds from many different sources.

The women in America's 1,700,000 TIME-reading homes are alert and intelligent—interested in practically everything. Like the men in their lives, they read each issue of TIME with avid interest—and read it cover-to-cover.

Because they are married to men who usually hold positions of responsibility in business or the professions, these 1,700,000 women have at their disposal incomes which make them best customers for almost any quality product being marketed in America today.



As a *family man*, he and his wife and their friends are consistent best customers for all types of better products and services. Their interests are broader, and their means way above the national average.

ART BOOKS BUSINESS CINEMA
EDUCATION FOREIGN NEWS HEMISPHERE
INTERNATIONAL LETTERS MEDICINE MUSIC
MILESTONES MISCELLANY NATIONAL AFFAIRS
NEWS IN PICTURES PEOPLE PERSONALITY
PRESS RADIO AND TV RELIGION
SCIENCE SPORT THEATER WAR IN ASIA

TIME America's Largest Audience of Best Customers
Interested in Practically Everything...

Traditional gender roles were endorsed throughout campaigns aiming at increasing consumption behavior within U.S. society. In the present advertisement published in a 1953 issue of *Time Life Magazine*, women are portrayed as better target audience once they had at their disposal incomes provided by their working husbands.



KITCHEN CONVENIENCE Choice of the regular mount or the special wall type shown above. Both types are available in a choice of attractive colors. You'll love the way they brighten up the kitchen.

"I couldn't get along without my kitchen telephone"

You'll see, too, once you know the convenience of a telephone right beside you in the kitchen. Saves steps and time. Saves you!

No need to leave the table or the kids or the roast or whatever you're doing to make a call. No need to rush to another room to answer the telephone. You just reach out your hand and there it is!

A kitchen telephone is so convenient when you need that "telephone break" from your household chores. Other favorite locations are the bedroom, den, recreation room and work shop.

Easy to get. Wonderful to have. Just call the Business Office of your local Bell Telephone Company.



Be fun to phone... **Bell Telephone System**



Postwar technology affected life in many ways during the 50s in the U.S. but it was followed by the maintenance of conservative gender roles. In this 1958 advertisement, women domesticity is normalized.

ANNEX B
ESSENTIALS OF SPONTANEOUS PROSE
Jack Kerouac

SET-UP The object is set before the mind, either in reality, as in sketching (before a landscape or teacup or old face) or is set in the memory wherein it becomes the sketching from memory of a definite image-object.

PROCEDURE Time being of the essence in the purity of speech, sketching language is undisturbed flow from the mind of personal secret idea-words, blowing (as per jazz musician) on subject of image.

METHOD 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." (William Carlos Williams)

SCOPING Not "selectivity" of expression but following free deviation (association) of mind into limitless blow-on-subject seas of thought, swimming in sea of English with no discipline other than rhythms of rhetorical exhalation and expostulated statement, like a fist coming down on a table with each complete utterance, bang! (the space dash)- Blow as deep as you want-write as deeply, fish as far down as you want, satisfy yourself first, then reader cannot fail to receive telepathic shock and meaning-excitement by same laws operating in his own human mind.

LAG IN PROCEDURE No pause to think of proper word but the infantile pileup of scatological buildup words till satisfaction is gained, which will turn out to be a great appending rhythm to a thought and be in accordance with Great Law of timing.

TIMING Nothing is muddy that runs in time and to laws of time-Shakespearian stress of dramatic need to speak now in own unalterable way or forever hold tongue-no revisions (except obvious rational mistakes, such as names or calculated insertions in act of not writing but inserting).

CENTER OF INTEREST Begin not from preconceived idea of what to say about image but from jewel center of interest in subject of image at moment of writing, and write outwards swimming in sea of language to peripheral release and exhaustion-Do not afterthink except for poetic or P. S. reasons. Never afterthink to "improve" or defray impressions, as, the best writing is always the most painful personal wrung-out tossed from cradle warm protective mind-tap from yourself the song of yourself, blow!-now!-your way is your only way-"good"-or "bad"-always honest ("ludi- crous"), spontaneous, "confessionals" interesting, because not "crafted." Craft is craft.

STRUCTURE OF WORK Modern bizarre structures (science fiction, etc.) arise from language being dead, "different" themes give illusion of "new" life. Follow roughly outlines in outfanning movement over subject, as river rock, so mindflow over jewel-center need (run your mind over it, once) arriving at pivot, where what was dim-formed "beginning" becomes sharp-necessitating "ending" and language shortens in race to wire

of time-race of work, following laws of Deep Form, to conclusion, last words, last trickle-Night is The End.

MENTAL STATE If possible write "without consciousness" in semi-trance (as Yeats' later "trance writing") allowing subconscious to admit in own uninhibited interesting necessary and so "modern" language what conscious art would censor, and write excitedly, swiftly, with writing-or-typing-cramps, in accordance (as from center to periphery) with laws of orgasm, Reich's "beclouding of consciousness." Come from within, out-to relaxed and said.

ANNEX C

BELIEF & TECHNIQUE FOR MODERN PROSE

Jack Kerouac

1. Scribbled secret notebooks, and wild typewritten pages, for yr own joy
2. Submissive to everything, open, listening
3. Try never get drunk outside yr own house
4. Be in love with yr life
5. Something that you feel will find its own form
6. Be crazy dumbsaint of the mind
7. Blow as deep as you want to blow
8. Write what you want bottomless from bottom of the mind
9. The unspeakable visions of the individual
10. No time for poetry but exactly what is
11. Visionary tics shivering in the chest
12. In tranced fixation dreaming upon object before you
13. Remove literary, grammatical and syntactical inhibition
14. Like Proust be an old teahead of time

15. Telling the true story of the world in interior monolog
16. The jewel center of interest is the eye within the eye
17. Write in recollection and amazement for yourself
18. Work from pithy middle eye out, swimming in language sea
19. Accept loss forever
20. Believe in the holy contour of life
21. Struggle to sketch the flow that already exists intact in mind
22. Dont think of words when you stop but to see picture better
23. Keep track of every day the date emblazoned in yr morning
24. No fear or shame in the dignity of yr experience, language & knowledge
25. Write for the world to read and see yr exact pictures of it
26. Bookmovie is the movie in words, the visual American form
27. In praise of Character in the Bleak inhuman Loneliness
28. Composing wild, undisciplined, pure, coming in from under, crazier the better
29. You're a Genius all the time
30. Writer-Director of Earthly movies Sponsored & Angeled in Heaven