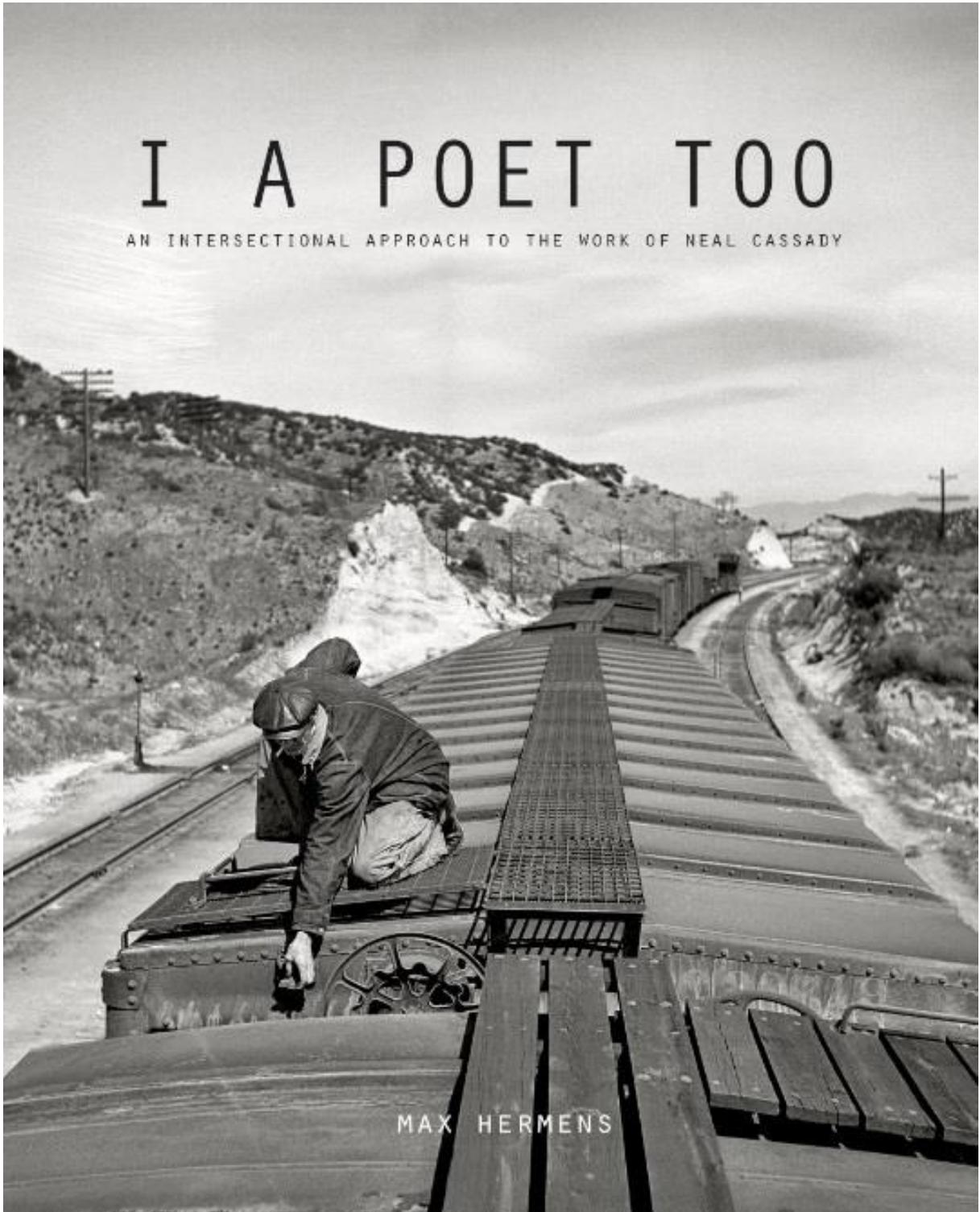


# I A POET TOO

AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO THE WORK OF NEAL CASSADY



MAX HERMENS

**“I a poet too”:**  
**An Intersectional Approach to the Work of Neal Cassady**

“Look, my boy, see how I write on several confused levels at once, *so* do I think, *so* do I live, *so* what, *so* let me act out my part at the same time I’m straightening it out.”

Max Hermens (4046242)

Radboud University Nijmegen

17-11-2016

Supervisor: Dr Mathilde Roza

Second Reader: Prof Dr Frank Mehring

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Chapter I: Thinking Along the Same Lines: Intersectional Theory and the Cassady Figure	10
Marginalization in Beat Writing: An Emblematic Example	10
“My feminism will be intersectional or it will be bullshit”:	
Towards a Theoretical Framework	13
Intersectionality, Identity, and the “Other”	16
The Critical Reception of the Cassady Figure	21
“No Profane History”: Envisioning Dean Moriarty	23
Critiques of <i>On the Road</i> and the Dean Moriarty Figure	27
Chapter II: Words Are Not For Me: Class, Language, Writing, and the Body	30
How Matter Comes to Matter: Pragmatic Struggles Determine Poetics	30
“Neal Lived, Jack Wrote”: Language and its Discontents	32
Developing the Oral Prose Style	36
Authorship and Class Fluctuations	38
Chapter III: Bodily Poetics: Class, Gender, Capitalism, and the Body	42
A poetics of Speed, Mobility, and Self-Control	42
Consumer Capitalism and Exclusion	45
Gender and Confinement	48
Commodification and Social Exclusion	52
Chapter IV: Writing Home: The Vocabulary of Home, Family, and (Homo)sexuality	55
Conceptions of Home	55
Intimacy and the Lack	57
“By their fruits ye shall know them”	59

Conclusion	64
Assemblage versus Intersectionality, Assemblage and Intersectionality	66
Suggestions for Future Research	67
Final Remarks	68
Bibliography	70

## Acknowledgements

First off, I would like to thank Mathilde Roza for her assistance with writing this thesis. She always gave a lot of feedback and – something which I find even more important – many compliments and positivity. I must also thank Sanne Kanters, who got me on the track of intersectionality theory, and she certainly helped downplay the many fallacies that surround this particular literary subject. Lastly, an unusual thanks to the faculty of Philosophy, Theology, and Religious-Studies, for without their 12<sup>th</sup>-floor workspace overlooking the green trees south of the university, I would certainly not have found the ease of mind to write all this.

## Abstract

This thesis examines the work of Neal Cassady from an intersectional perspective. It first addresses several issues with regards to the critical reception that already exists of Cassady's work, most notably the prevalence of fictionalizations by other authors and the absence of research directed solely at Neal Cassady's own work. This thesis then sets out to examine Cassady's work by looking at the various components that have shaped his author identity, such as gender, class, and sexuality – thus establishing a firm ground on which to investigate the historical circumstances that have shaped his work. It concludes by demonstrating that Cassady's lower class background has had tremendous effects both on his writing life and on his conceptions of gender and sexuality, and that these latter two, in turn, have influenced his experience of class. As a result of this research, common criticisms directed at fictionalizations of the Cassady figure can be reframed in order to better fit the historical circumstances that shaped Cassady's life, which leads to a more articulate understanding of the workings of gender, class, and sexuality in Beat literature.

## Introduction

It will come as no surprise that the real Neal Cassady was quite different from the mythical figure that the Beat writers made of him. Born in Salt Lake City in 1926, Neal's mother left his alcoholic father when Neal was only six years old. Neal was forced to live with his father in Denver's skid row, sleeping in cheap hotels and taking occasional hobo trips across the country. He switched schools a lot, got into trouble with the law for joyriding, and spent several terms in jail. He was introduced to literature, such as the works of Dostoyevsky, through the prison library. After staying in youth reform schools and labor camps, Neal traveled to various cities and worked different jobs. During the mid-1940s he met characters such as Al Hinkle, Hal Chase, and eventually Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. He had an affair with Ginsberg, and they wrote dozens of (love) letters to each other over a long decade. He married a girl, LuAnne Henderson, but annulled their marriage a year later in order to marry his lifelong partner, Carolyn Cassady. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s they had three children. He also had an illegitimate child – Curtis Neal – with Diana Hansen. Neal started working at the railroad in 1948. The early and mid-1950s were a relatively quiet period in his life, he spent them either in San Francisco or at his home in Los Gatos (California) with Carolyn, during which he wrote most of his (now published) work. He continued working at the railroad, a job that helped him to financially support Carolyn, their three children, and Diana. During this period, he wrote several short stories and worked on his autobiography. In 1958 Neal was arrested for possession and “suspected” sale of marijuana, and sentenced to two years in San Quentin prison – although an official trial was never held. After his release Cassady did various odd jobs, but his incarceration left marks on his relationship with Carolyn and their children, and they eventually divorced in 1963. After the divorce, Cassady had a series of intense and often drug/alcohol-fuelled relationships with various women. Because of his reputation as *On the Road's* “Dean Moriarty,” Neal was asked to join Ken Kesey's *Merry Pranksters*, and he traveled across the US several times, doing all types of drugs. While visiting a wedding in Mexico with some of his friends in 1968, Neal wandered off at night, and was found in a coma alongside a railroad track the next day. He was carried to a hospital and died several

hours later. Rumors of his death are abundant, many of them claiming he died of overexposure, although an official autopsy was never held (Moore xix-xxii).<sup>1</sup>

The fact that Neal was different from the many Beat fictionalizations that surround his name is revealed in the numerous historical documents that surfaced after his death. Below I have listed two examples of this. In the first, Linda McDowell writes about Neal Cassady's response to the publication of *On the Road*. The second is taken from the introduction to a series of Cassady's letters in *The Missouri Review*:

The portrait of a carefree, dare-devil Moriarty in *On the Road* was an inaccurate reflection of Cassady's experience. [...] According to Carolyn's autobiography, Neal said he enjoyed Jack's descriptions of what they had done together and got a kick out of reminiscing by reading it, but the glorification of his antics in print also made him uneasy. He wasn't proud of this side of his nature; he tried very hard to overcome it. (417)

In many ways, the man Neal Cassady didn't entirely fit the casual myths about him. Despite his baroque sex life, Neal ended up loving and being loved by one woman, Carolyn Robinson Cassady. Their three children, for whatever reasons, grew into admirable adults, contrary to the stereotype of the 'wounded' children of celebrities. This philosopher of the carefree life hated being idle. Not having a job made him antsy. ("The letters of Neal Cassady" 94)

Neal's life slowly started falling apart in 1958 because he was sentenced to two years in San Quentin prison. Neal lost his job at the railroads and he could not see Carolyn and his children during his incarceration. During this period Kerouac told Carolyn that he could not "picture anything grayer than the thought of Neal in one part of the world, alone, and you in another, alone, lacking your intimate conversation between each other" (Charters, *Selected Letters* 288).

After joining Ken Kesey's *Merry Pranksters* bus, and already at the age of 38, Neal again shot across the US in a drug-fuelled frenzy. Carolyn Cassady writes:

They treated him like a trained bear. Neal said he took any drug, any pill, anyone handed him. He didn't care. He was doing his damndest to get killed. [...] I didn't realise the two pillars of his support were the

---

<sup>1</sup> Some authors have even fictionalized Neal Cassady's death, e.g. Ken Kesey's "The Day After Superman Died". Although the very particular term "overexposure" comes back in various biographical anecdotes, sources are always very unclear as to why Cassady would have died from it, as it is a term commonly associated with heat, not drugs.

railroad job and being head of a family. He realised he would never become respectable, as he wanted, and he wanted to die. (“Excerpts”)

Instead of a man relentlessly hurrying after his desires and soaring across the US in search of the next metaphorical “hit,” this depiction of Cassady reveals his personal issues with trying to live a respectable life as a hardworking, almost stereotypical “American man”. Instead of being represented as the antithesis to married life and its various rules and hegemonic ideals, Cassady is portrayed as a man who idealizes and relies on these very structures for financial support and emotional stability. The “Adonis of Denver” – as Ginsberg and Kerouac called him – actually did most of his writing when living with Carolyn and working steadily at the railroad.

Upon reading these excerpts I was quite astounded to find that Cassady had spent most of his life with one woman and in one place, which only goes to show that because of the elaborate fictionalizing and mystification, it has become difficult to envision the historical person apart from his supposedly frantic and excessive lifestyle. This example sheds new light on our conception of Neal Cassady as inherently different from Dean Moriarty. Although I will not go as far as claiming that Cassady was not (at least partly) responsible for many of Moriarty’s “antics,” it is at least true that his identity existed on several different levels. One of these levels might have served as an inspiration to certain Beat fictionalizations, but this does not exclude other identities from having been embodied by the same historical person, nor should it prompt us to exclusively dedicate our attention to the prevalent portrayals of his life.

When the Beats are accused of sexism or hedonism, Cassady is often the butt of the joke (e.g. Stimpson 386). However, of all the popular Beat writers, Cassady did not deny the existence of his children (as Kerouac did), did not go from relationship to relationship without a regard for others (surprisingly, former lovers speak of him really fondly), and he certainly did not murder his wife (as Burroughs did). Cassady actually lived with and supported Carolyn and their children for over a decade – only to be arrested and convicted of the possession of marijuana. Just before his incarceration Kerouac wrote to Neal about *On the Road*: “I sure do hope no one recognizes you too much in that opus” (Charters, *Selected Letters* 24). However, there are arguments that the police officers who arrested him “were fully aware that Cassady was the hero of *On the Road*. It is possible that his notoriety at the time contributed to their decision to pursue the charges” (“The letters of Neal Cassady” 94).

It is from these preceding examples that I must conclude that Neal Cassady's personal life must have looked quite different from popular fictionalized representations. His life is marked by issues concerning class, gender, and (homo)sexuality that are not necessarily addressed in such figures as Dean Moriarty. As Gregory Stephenson has remarked: "The Cassady figure, as represented in the works of fiction, the poems and plays in which he appears, is protean, disparate" (170).

My goal in this thesis is to centralize Neal Cassady as an author worthy of our attention. Not as a coherent individual, but rather as a container of events, texts, and words which I will approach as an intersection of merging components that point to recurring themes and issues. This approach examines gender, class, and (homo)sexuality in Cassady's writings, and how these influence each other to an extent that we cannot properly address one of them without also addressing the others. The reason I believe this approach is necessary and useful has as much to do with the many fictionalizations that made his name (in)famous, as with the literary criticism about these fictionalizations. I will argue that both strands of representation make little effort to approach the historical circumstances that shaped Cassady's own writings. The many fictionalizations of the Neal Cassady figure often deviate strongly – both in content and in their structural approach – from the personal life and work of Neal Cassady himself, whereas in academic criticism his own life and personal writings have largely gone unnoticed. Central to my analysis is the question: How do the intersections of class, gender, and sexuality inform the personal writings of Neal Cassady? I will examine the many texts and letters by Neal Cassady, and the perspectives on gender, sexuality, and class that emanate from these. Aside from his own (often autobiographical) writings, I will examine correspondences with Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Carolyn Cassady. I will examine to what extent his lower class background has influenced his conceptions of gender, sexuality, and marriage – and whether these have, for example, influenced his opinion on (homo)sexuality. Furthermore, I am interested to learn how Cassady's lower class background and lack of education have shaped his poetics, and how he reflects on this. This thesis' title, "I a poet too," refers to a remark Cassady wrote to Ginsberg in a letter in which he laments his shortcomings as a writer (Gifford 21). The quote on the second page, in turn, refers to Cassady's own awareness of his identity being shaped alongside different parameters (Gifford 25). Each of this thesis' subjects is closely related to the many different criticisms Beat literature – most notably Kerouac's *On the Road* – has received, and with this

examination I thus want to establish whether these criticisms can or cannot be extended to the historical person of Neal Cassady, or whether they should be reiterated or reframed in order to match the historical circumstances in which he existed and in which his work came into being. Central to my approach is not to come to a definitive truth about the supposedly “real” Neal Cassady, but to find a correct approach to the historical circumstances that shaped his work.

## Chapter I

# Thinking Along the Same Lines

### *Intersectional Theory and the Cassidy figure*

This thesis has a somewhat irregular set-up. Because finding a correct approach to Cassidy's own work proved arduous, the steps I had to undertake in order to clear out this investigative path for myself became part of my theoretical and methodological approach. The thoughts and discoveries made in this process are essential to my reading of Cassidy to an extent that they form this thesis' first chapter – a theoretical chapter that examines Beat literature, the role of the Cassidy figure in it, and the criticisms that have been directed at these fictionalizations, in order to set up a proper theoretical infrastructure for examining Cassidy's own work.

### *Marginalization in Beat Writing: An Emblematic Example*

Before explaining this thesis' theoretical approach, I must first elaborate on the difficulties in approaching the Beats as historical figures. I will do this by summarizing and analyzing a recurring critical discussion: that of the portrayal of women in *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac and *Off the Road* by Carolyn Cassady. The reason I will elaborately discuss these two works is twofold. On the one hand Linda McDowell's analysis of *Off the Road* indicates that reading different texts alongside each other helps us to better understand the workings of class, gender, and sexuality in relation to some of the disparate circumstances, characters, and events that shaped Beat literature. On the other hand the example of Carolyn's memoir indicates the importance of acknowledging the different components that shape identity, such as gender, sexuality, race, and class.

A lot of academic criticism has been directed at Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Part of this scholarship focuses on his portrayal of women, African Americans and migrants, or in short: how Kerouac's work represents the Other. To a great extent all of these texts agree that although Kerouac's novel tried to subvert certain hegemonic ideological structures, it similarly reinforced particular gender and race dialectics, and marginalized the voices of women, African-Americans, Hispanics, and migrants (Cresswell, "Mobility as resistance"; Cresswell, "Writing, reading"; McNeil; Richardson; Seelye; Smyth; Stimpson). In "Mobility as Resistance: A Geographical

Reading of Kerouac's 'On the Road,' Tim Cresswell examines the function of mobility in resisting hegemonic ideals. Cresswell concludes that despite strong notions of cultural resistance, *On the Road* still manages to uphold and reinforce gender binaries:

On the one hand the frantic directionless mobility of the central figures in *On the Road* represents a form of resistance to the 'establishment'. [...] Simultaneously, however, the mobility theme fits into the central pioneer image of mobile Americans. In addition, the theme of men on the road reinforces the tired gendered dualism of public (male) and private (female). (249)

Cresswell notes that the theme of mobility empowers the novel's male protagonists, while at the same time it silences the voices of its female characters. In a response to Cresswell's analysis, "Off the Road: Alternative Views of Rebellion, Resistance and 'The Beats'," Linda McDowell analyzes the writings of Carolyn Cassady in order to locate these silenced female voices, and subsequently give a voice back to them. In contrast to Cresswell, McDowell argues that in order to uncover silenced voices, *On the Road* should not be addressed as a closed text, but should be allowed to enter a dialogue with other texts:

However, by focusing solely on *On the Road* as his source, Cresswell ignores a number of themes that challenge this simple dualism [between male and female]. A more nuanced reading of the novel and consideration of [Carolyn] Cassady's book, as well as greater familiarity with the critical assessments of the beat generation and their work, suggests a set of more complex interconnections between the public and the private, between the road and the home, and between men and women. (414)

McDowell reads *On the Road* as an autobiography, a written account of events that precede the text, and she locates possibilities of ("female") acts of resistance by examining different perspectives on these historical events and characters. From a formalist perspective, Cresswell's analysis is quite accurate: when looked at as a singular, closed document the language, style, and narrative structure of *On the Road* centralizes the white male experience and marginalizes many different other voices. McDowell steps outside of the novel in order to locate different acts of resistance in the historical characters and events that precede it. She notes that Carolyn Cassady, contrary to what Cresswell argues, did not necessarily experience her life with Kerouac and Cassady as one of being marginalized to private space. Instead, McDowell examines sections of Carolyn's memoir in which she clearly demonstrates that – in relation to the society at large – she

actually experienced more freedoms with Kerouac and Cassady than she would have had with “normal” men.

McDowell’s reply to Cresswell was printed in *Transaction of the Institute of British Geographers*. Tim Cresswell was subsequently asked to reply to McDowell’s analysis of Carolyn’s memoir in the same magazine. Some of his words are worth quoting in full:

Another way of looking at it is as what Pierre Bourdieu calls the ‘choice of the necessary’. This formulation of ‘sour grapes theory’ posits that people on the receiving end of systematically asymmetrical power relations come to believe that they are actively preferring and choosing the situations that are forced upon them. [...] A woman who is not given the option of taking to the road, who is consistently used by men and who stays within the realm of the home can come to believe that her choices constitute a lifestyle of her own choosing. [...] The partners and wives of the beat men were hardly refusing to take to the road. The life that many beat women led seemed to be one of making the best of a bad world. (423)

Cresswell’s homogenizing statements on the Beat women hardly take account of the different processes that constituted their identities, such as class, sexuality, and race – and in that sense his analysis actually seems quite intent on upholding that “tired gendered dualism” he opposed to earlier. Furthermore, by distrusting the female voice present in this debate – by reading Carolyn Cassady as an unconscious ventriloquist for patriarchy – Cresswell’s words tragically echo Gayatri Spivak’s classic analysis of the silenced subaltern: “The ventriloquism of the speaking subaltern is the left intellectual’s stock-in-trade” (28). Although Cresswell does make the valid point that resistance comes in many forms, and that it is extremely difficult to acknowledge a certain act, process, or piece of writing *as* resistance, he mistrusts marginalized voices from the outset of his analysis (“Writing, reading” 422). When the agency with which this voice speaks and acts is acutely doubted, a double, echoing silencing occurs.

Cresswell’s analysis of Kerouac’s novel is methodologically sound, yet it does not permit the examination of the lives of the marginalized characters in *On the Road*. By stepping outside of the constrictive analytical approaches of formalism and closed readings, McDowell is able to write about oppression and resistance from the point of view of one of those marginalized characters, uncovering the motivations behind her actions and demonstrating that – despite her marginal status – she was not completely without agency. In a Wittgensteinian fashion both critics’ analyses are “logical” in the sense that their conclusions emanate from their respective approaches (“*Die Sätze der Logik sind Tautologien*”). Yet in this thesis I am more interested in McDowell’s approach,

which marks and traverses the thin line between (auto)biography and fiction, addresses many different documents and marginal historical moments, and draws some unlikely conclusions.

***“My feminism will be intersectional or it will be bullshit”:***

### ***Towards a Theoretical Framework***

An *intersectional approach* to a case study takes account of the many different factors that shape a person’s identity, such as gender, sexuality, class, and race. Intersectionality theory proposes that each element of a person’s identity is inherently and inextricably tied to the other elements, and that an analysis of any historical case subject must take account of these factors and their interlinkage – not necessarily to the point that all intersecting axes of identity are examined, but rather to the point at which the author takes responsibility for the components that s/he does or does not analyze. Intersectional theory has slowly developed throughout the 1980s and onward as a response to second wave feminism, and it argues that “woman” is not a homogeneous category in which all different female experiences can be contained (Puar, “I would rather” 51-2). Its most prominent spokespersons were women of color, who argued that their identity was shaped both by their race as well as by their gender, and that this experience differed so much from that of white middle class women’s experiences that a homogeneous approach to feminist issues was not sustainable. They argued that this homogeneous approach centralized the white middle class female experience at the cost of other aspects of identity, such as race and class.

The term *intersectionality theory* was first coined by law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, in an article in which she discusses several court cases where women of color were being misrepresented because the system of law did not effectively recognize the different factors that shaped their identities. In short, the court of law read them either as women, in which case issues of race discrimination were not addressed, or as African Americans, in which case gender discrimination was overlooked or neglected. Crenshaw argues for an approach to historical subjects that acknowledges various aspects of a person’s identity, ranging from race and gender to factors such as age, ability, religion, and sexuality.

It is wrong to assume that the intersectional approach should only be consulted when women of color are involved. Crenshaw clearly argues that all identities are intersectional, and perhaps, as I will suggest, especially those identities that are not thought of as such – which is often

the case with the normative white male – ought to be approached from this perspective. In this thesis I will therefore approach Neal Cassady from an intersectional perspective, arguing that class, gender, and sexuality all play constitutive roles in the formation of his personal writings, and that none of these aspects can be addressed – as many critics have done in the past (e.g. Woolf; Stimpson; Stephenson; Bush; McNeil) – without also examining their counterparts.

An instance which demonstrates that classism, for example, plays an integral role in the formation of gender and sexuality can be found in the beginning of Carolyn Cassady's memoir. This example illustrates that an interpretation of gender patterns that does not also address class issues is bound to overlook the complex socio-political power structures that define sexual relationships. At the start of her memoir Carolyn repeatedly notes how she dislikes the notion of marrying the man her parents want her to marry for the sake of conforming to the ideals of married life that her family upholds – a life which will be spent living in a suburb, socializing with men who constantly “rehash their wartime traumas,” and in which her existence is reduced to providing for her children and her husband's career (29). Meeting the vagrant Neal Cassady provides Carolyn with an opportunity to escape some of these middle class expectations. Life with Neal allows her to engage with different people, to speak of different subjects with both men and women as an intellectual equal, to use alcohol and marijuana without experiencing guilt or shame, to focus on her own artistic career, and to develop her own hobbies and personal interests. She also frequently notes the bitterness of her parents and family when she declares her love for a man outside of their class. Further along in the memoir the hegemonic ideas on marriage even become a trope in Neal and Carolyn's sense of humor, as they laugh away its bizarre standards and unfeasible expectations (e.g. 64-5). When looked at from the perspective of Carolyn, her relationship with Neal can be read as an active form of resistance against her upper middle class family's patterns of gender conformity. Although Neal Cassady does not exactly fit the stereotypical image of a lower class laborer, Carolyn's memoir does explicitly discuss their class differences, and how these differences in what was expected of a man and a woman attracted both parties toward each other. It is important to note that this example does not necessarily diminish Neal Cassady's infamous status, but rather clarifies the complex situation Carolyn Cassady was in as a woman living in the 1940s and 1950s. It illustrates that despite her marginal status, she was not without agency, and able to shape her life according to her own desires.

Carolyn also writes about Neal's reasons for pursuing this particular relationship: "Then Neal met me, an upper middle class well-educated girl not too hard on the eyes. Here was his chance to invade a higher level on the social scale, and he went for it" ("Excerpts"). According to Carolyn, Neal's sexual desires were, at least in part, motivated by class differences, and in this instance, the term "invade" can refer both to a particular class as well as to its members' bodies. The desire to ascend in class through sexuality stands in stark contrast to how Kerouac envisions Dean Moriarty's sexuality in *On the Road*: "To him sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life, although he had to sweat and curse to make a living and so on" (4). Dean Moriarty's sexuality is not socio-political but physical, a-historical, *a priori*, primal even: first sexuality, then politics. By approaching Carolyn and Neal Cassady from the perspectives of class and gender simultaneously, their complex historical situations can be ascertained more elaborately, without removing agency from either of them.

This illustration, however, does not necessarily oppose Cresswell's remark that Carolyn Cassady's autobiography is filled with scenes in which men take up dominant, assertive roles and women have to deal with and respond to their actions in a passive, reflective manner ("Writing, reading" 422-4). It is certainly true that Neal takes up a dominant, assertive role so stereotypically identifiable with the white male, and that Carolyn is often subsumed to his "antics". However, reading both characters from the perspective of classism sheds new light on Neal's assertiveness. After just meeting Neal, Carolyn notes that, although she was baffled by his appearance, she was simultaneously not too charmed by his somewhat crude manners. Carolyn makes one thing very clear in her memoir: if it wasn't for Neal's assertiveness, she would have never considered him a potential partner, simply because she was mistrustful of his class background. Although one could justly argue that these scenes depict an assertive man trying to get the attention of a passive woman, and therefore repeat a "tired gendered dualism," one could similarly argue that they portray a lower class man trying to get a sense of respect from an upper middle class woman – a sense of respect Carolyn explicitly notes she did not have upon meeting. For the sake of argument, I will contend that Neal's assertiveness and Carolyn's indifference have as much to do with class differences as with stereotypical gender roles.

The last example I want to mention has to do with the metaphor of silence. Towards the end of her memoir, when Carolyn is frustrated with Neal's unreliability, she decides to approach him differently, and we are presented with what looks like an all-too-stereotypical scene:

I said nothing and continued making the bed. Neal, taken aback by my unusual silence, continued speaking in his own defense, just as though I had responded with the familiar objections. In a moment I began to feel the change in me, the relief at not reacting negatively. I was in control. I could tell I now had the advantage, and I kept on keeping still. (293)

In this instance silence is being applied by Carolyn as a means of resistance. If Neal's struggle with Carolyn involved getting her to want to speak with him in the first place, then her silence can also be regarded as an assertive action. Although she is performing the stereotypically feminine role of making the bed, one could argue that there is agency in her silence, and that this silence effectively speaks louder than words. This example demonstrates that the common trope of silence versus visibility is problematized when addressed from both a gender and a class perspective.

### *Intersectionality, Identity, and the Other*

Jasbir K. Puar elaborates quite eloquently on the workings of the intersectional approach and how it became embedded in feminist frameworks, as well as on the structural complications it poses for feminist researchers:

Pedagogically, since the emergence and consolidation of intersectionality from the 1980s on, it has been deployed more forcefully as a feminist intervention to disrupt whiteness and less so as a critical race intervention to disrupt masculinist frames. Thus, precisely in the act of performing this intervention, what is also produced is an ironic reification of sexual difference as a/the foundational one that needs to be disrupted. Sexual and gender difference is understood as the constant from which there are variants, just as women of color are constructed in dominant feminist generational narratives as the newest arrivals among the subjects of feminism. This pedagogical deployment has had the effect of re-securing the centrality of the subject positioning of white women. [...] But what the method of intersectionality is most predominantly used to qualify is the specific difference of "women of color," a category that has now become, I would argue, simultaneously emptied of specific meaning in its ubiquitous application and yet overdetermined in its deployment. In this usage, intersectionality always produces an Other, and that Other is always a Woman of Color[.] ("I would rather" 51-2)

The intersectional approach, both in its contents and because of its place in a feminist genealogy of interventions, can be argued to build the effectiveness of its interventions on the production of

an Other “who must invariably be shown to be resistant, subversive, or articulating a grievance” (Puar, “I would rather” 52). The intersectional approach undermines centralized gender and race definitions by ontologically producing its antipodal opposites, which often are women of color, thus *both producing an Other while simultaneously undermining such a divisive categorization*. The effectiveness of the intersectional approach in disrupting normative gender and race patterns thus rests on the production of an Other in relation to these particular norms, and using the ontological existence of this Other to critically intrude upon that norm – both producing an Other/norm dichotomy while at the same time trying to subvert it. Hence, Puar’s assessment is not a critique of intersectionality theory, but a thorough analysis of its workings: it is difficult to determine whether producing an Other while eroding her/his differences effectively disrupts centralized gender and race categories.

The fact that intersectionality theory produces an Other whose “otherness” is used to critically interact with a certain norm is certainly the case with my approach in this thesis. In large parts this thesis builds on the argument that Cassady’s lower class background and homosexuality made him into an Other for the normative, albeit heterogeneous, white middle and upper classes, while at the same time he is being regarded *as* normative because of his “white maleness”. This thesis analyzes Cassady as a subject on an intersection of different identity components – and those components deviating from a certain norm (lower class background, homosexuality) will be used to produce Cassady as an Other in order to critically intrude upon this norm, thus simultaneously establishing the norm and disrupting it. It is, therefore, true that this process of “othering” produces a subject “who must invariably be shown to be resistant, subversive, or articulating a grievance”. I will also use this process of othering to reframe popular accusations of sexism often levelled at the white and male Beat authors, criticisms which will be reframed because Cassady’s identity is complicated to a point at which these criticisms have to be reiterated to suit his personal circumstances. When critics accuse Cassady of sexism, for example, they implicitly imbue him with the agency to act as a sexist, whereas intersectionality theory complicates individual agency by fixing the analytic subject to a grid of intersecting factors. That is to say a subject accused of sexism can reside on a location on a grid in which sexist attitudes determine her/his identity – a conclusion which does not lessen these accusations, but embeds them in a wider network of connections that complicate individual subject agency.

As mentioned above, the intersectional approach is closely affiliated with women of color – both through its structural approach and because of its place in a feminist genealogy of interventions. Several complications arise from using this approach to analyze the work of Neal Cassady, a white and male author and thus part and parcel of the normative standard this approach intends to disrupt. Puar legitimately notes that “the insistent consolidation of intersectionality as a dominant heuristic [used to describe African American women’s lives] may well be driven by anxieties about maintaining the ‘integrity’ of a discrete black feminist genealogy,” adding that this consolidation “might actually obfuscate how intersectionality is thought of,” namely: as an approach applicable to *all* identities (“I would rather” 52). Despite being embedded in a black feminist genealogy, on a philosophical level intersectionality theory suggests that *all* historical case subjects consist of several intersecting components, regardless of race or gender. I fully realize that using intersectionality theory to produce a white and male subject almost presents itself as a betrayal, as a form of appropriating the work of women of color into normative culture to re-centralize the white and male subject – not to mention that appropriating the Other in order to gain new insights into the self is something that the Beats have been explicitly criticized for (e.g. Prothero; Richardson). Adding to that the fact that I myself am a white and male student, and this research could be misread as a genealogy in which white men are the last “arrivals among the subjects of feminism” (Puar, “I would Rather” 51), thus being at a risk of rendering the effectiveness of its interventions obsolete. This approach would appropriate black feminists’ work in order to elaborate on white and male authors, a form of “coming full circle” in a bad way. The last thing I want to achieve with this examination of Cassady’s work is to repeat the age-old fallacy that whenever a woman speaks of gender issues, men overwhelm her arguments with a loud and pathetic outburst: “But we have problems too!” I fully acknowledge that much of Beat literature marginalizes the voices of women and ethnic minorities, and that Neal Cassady’s behaviour was – at times – extremely sexist. Yet marginalization and sexism occur in complex networks of power relations encompassing various arrangements of different parameters, and in this thesis it is my intent to uncover and elaborate on the historical circumstances that shaped such power relations, case in point being Neal Cassady’s work and writing life.

There are even several positive side effects in approaching a white and male author intersectionally. First of all, it should be mentioned that terms such as “white” and “male” are each subject to their own politics of location, and cannot be transferred across generations and

nationalities effortlessly. Any surface similarities between Cassady and myself cannot be used to undercut the integrity of this research, as the definitions of the concepts used to highlight these similarities (e.g. “white,” “male”) are always bound to a specific historical time and place.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, Puar regrettably notes that the intersectional approach is rarely used to study and analyze white subjects, adding to this the notion that the “othering of Women of Color through an approach that meant to alleviate such othering is exacerbated by the fact that intersectionality has become cathected to the field of women’s studies as the paradigmatic frame through which women’s lives are understood and theorized” (“I would rather” 52, 64). This thesis can thus serve to extend this framework of analysis beyond its usual domain – that of women (of color)’s lives – and establish its effectiveness in approaching a myriad of identities, while of course giving proper acknowledgement to its African American and feminist genealogy.

It should be noted that the intersectional approach has another contradictory characteristic: as argued above, it produces a grid of interlinking components on which it places the analytic subject. In this process the intersectional approach installs the subject on a fixed grid, whereas the case material used in this thesis is both physically as well as compositionally disparate: it is retrieved from a long and diverse range of books, articles, and letters that were written during different periods during and after Cassady’s life, in different genres, writing styles and proportions, and directed at many different readers. To produce a fixed grid on which to place a singular analytic subject stands in stark contrast to the disparate case material at hand. Puar writes: “What the tension between the two purportedly opposing forces signals, at this junction of scholarly criticism, might be thought of as a dialogue between theories that deploy the subject as a primary analytic frame, and those that highlight the forces that make subject formation tenuous, if not impossible or even undesirable” (“I would rather” 49). If the intersectional approach temporarily produces both the analytic subject and the grid it is placed on, then this approach contradicts the notion that an identity is always in a continual process of “becoming”. Instead, the intersectional approach produces this identity in relation to certain central components which are locked on a grid, whereas both the analytic subject, as well as these components, are not fixed, but subject to the specific case that is being analyzed. Or to put it in Cassady’s own words: “Like

---

<sup>2</sup> Although one could argue that my “whiteness” and “maleness” is similar to Cassady’s, it has different connotations in relation to each moment in our biographies, our nationalities, the historical periods, and to the temporal definitions of the other components constituting our identities – although I must certainly take account of the similarities in our biographies, which can help explain my interest in the case material.

everything else that is not longer becoming but become, it has put a mechanism in the place of an organism” (Gifford 87). Therefore, age and physical ability could be regarded as verbs to the extent that they are always in development. Even race is a social construction and therefore not fixed, despite its supposedly unchangeable idea of “color”. For example, there are obvious legislative differences in the meaning of the term “black” before and after the Civil Rights Movement.

Puar recommends that as a response to this “intersectionality as an intellectual rubric and a tool for political intervention must be supplemented – if not complicated and reconceptualized – by a notion of assemblage [...] intersectionality, as that which retroactively forms the grid and positions on it, and assemblage, as that which is prior to, beyond, or past the grid” (“I would rather” 50). In order to properly approach Cassady as a historical character, each instance I address has to reproduce both the grid and the subject placed on it in relation to the developing historical circumstances of his life and the developing definitions of the components that produce the grid. Therefore, the central components alongside which I will analyze his work – gender, class, and sexuality – should not serve as essential traits of the historical Cassady, but as events, interactions between entities, and moments in which they are produced within the specific case analysis at hand.

Puar writes: “[I]ntersectional identities are the byproducts of attempts to still and quell the perpetual motion of assemblages, to capture and reduce them, to harness their threatening mobility” (*Terrorist Assemblages* 213). An example of this impediment can be found in Cresswell’s analysis of the Beat women: unable to reconcile his interpretation of Beat literature as sexist with McDowell’s argument that Beat writing also demonstrates moments of great complexity that broaden and complicate categories such as male, female, gender, sexuality, and confinement – unable to harness the “threatening mobility” of Beat identities, Cresswell argues that the “life that many beat women led seemed to be one of making the best of a bad world” (“Writing, reading” 423). This conclusion undermines McDowell’s emphasis on the disparate and continually shifting identities that shaped these lives and the countless intersectional moments of analysis they could invoke. As a result it should be clear that it is not my aim to produce a singular image of the author Neal Cassady, but to examine several situations, texts, characters, and events in his life and use the intersectional approach to demonstrate the complexity of class, gender, and sexuality in the formation of his (author) identity – in part also in order to reveal the difficulty with producing

criticisms directed solely at the workings of only one of the irrevocably interlinked components that shape his work. The above example of Carolyn Cassady's autobiography also demonstrates the complexity in analyzing an author's biography without addressing the historical circumstances of the characters he had intimate dealings with. Therefore, this thesis must periodically refer to the writings of other Beat authors in order to better analyze the mutual influence they had on each other – hopefully to a point at which it becomes difficult to read these figures as autonomous individuals, and at which we can understand them better because of their embeddedness in a larger historical community of characters. I believe that this approach will complicate the case matter at hand to an extent that it forces us to withhold judgements of an individual author's character and work, and instead compels us to acknowledge the disparate processes, events, and characters that continually shape his work and identity. However, before delving into Neal Cassady's own writings, I must first examine three key issues: (1) the critical reception of Cassady's work, (2) the fictionalizations of the Cassady figure in Beat literature, and (3) the criticisms that have been written about these fictionalizations.

### *The Critical Reception of the Cassady figure*

It is important to examine the critical reception of Neal Cassady and the many fictionalizations that were created of him in order to establish the difficulties in approaching him as a historical figure. As far as I know, no literary criticism has been directed solely at Cassady's personal work. Much more often he is named in analyses of Kerouac's novels, or his work is addressed in comparison to other Beat writing (e.g. Seelye; Dardess; Woolf; McNeil; Douglas; Richardson; Mortenson; Carden). Several articles do centralize the Cassady figure and his role in Beat literature, but they abstain from closely analyzing Cassady's own work (Stephenson; Bush). When critics accuse *On the Road* of sexism, of marginalizing certain ethnicities, or of romanticizing lower class struggles, the fictional Dean Moriarty is often central to their arguments (McNeil; Stimpson; Richardson). Any accusations thrown at the white and male author Kerouac are often simultaneously thrown at the mythical Moriarty, whereas no critique of Kerouac should automatically extend to Cassady, who despite also being a white male, came from a completely different class background. I would not go so far as to say that critics are extensively scrutinizing the historical Neal Cassady on these matters (although some are, e.g. Stimpson 386), but instead

I would like to draw attention to the fact that Neal Cassady's personal viewpoints on subjects such as sexuality, gender, and class have hardly been examined at all – nor, for that matter, have his personal writings. Despite the fact that “Neal Cassady” is an overexposed linguistic symbol in critical writing – whether referring to the fictional or the historical person, or to some entity in between – very little research has been dedicated solely to Cassady's work. The fictionalizations of the Cassady figure are often used to strengthen critics' arguments about other Beat writing without addressing the deviating historical circumstances in which Cassady grew up. It is therefore not wrong to state that the *fictional* figure of “Neal Cassady” has been examined much more elaborately within literary criticism than the personal writings of the author whose name is consistently being reiterated.

So why is the historical Cassady so remarkably absent in literary criticism? First of all, this seems to be caused by Cassady's overexposure in Beat literature, whether in the shape of Neal Cassady, Dean Moriarty, Cody Pomeray, the Adonis of Denver, or simply as Ginsberg's N.C. It is difficult to speak of “Neal Cassady” when the linguistic symbol refers to numerous disparate entities. Mark Richardson remarks that “Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Cassady himself were always inventing and reinventing ‘Neal Cassady,’ [...] Neal is simply too fine a creation for this world; his genius can never be adequately embodied” (219). These inventions and reinventions of the Cassady figure make it quite difficult to address the historical circumstances that shaped Neal Cassady as an author, as these circumstances were shaped by Beat literature itself. It is no secret that Kerouac and Ginsberg were Cassady's chief mentors, and that they were instrumental in encouraging Cassady to write. It is also no overstatement to say that without Beat writing there would be no “Neal Cassady,” and to speak of Neal Cassady, therefore, is to speak of Beat writing. Clive Bush elaborates on this by arguing that the historical characters who inspired much Beat writing “served the authors they befriended, not always willingly” (130). Bush adds that “there are at least two possible approaches to Cassady: as envisioned by others, and envisioned by himself in the vision of his own more crafted work” (145).

Secondly, the lack of interest in Cassady's writings makes perfect sense from a literary critic's point of view: Cassady wrote very little – a third of an autobiography, a few unfinished stories, and many personal letters – and his oeuvre has been of little interest to readers to date, whereas Kerouac's novels are currently still being reprinted and discussed extensively (examples of recent critical inquiries: Cresswell; Douglas; Campbell; Mortenson; Richardson; Carden).

Adding to that, literary critics tend to agree that Cassady's work is much less developed than that of other Beat writers, not to mention in relation to a larger American canon. The dilemma emanating from this lack of interest in the historical writings of Neal Cassady is that the life he actually lived and personal work he wrote is shoved aside by a myriad of fictionalizations.

### *"No Profane History": Envisioning Dean Moriarty*

After having assessed that any examination of the historical Neal Cassady inevitably relates to his fictionalizations (Richardson 219; Bush 145), I am briefly directing my attention to Dean Moriarty, in order to establish some sort of a consensus on one of the formative pillars of the Cassady myth. I have specifically chosen to analyze *On the Road*, not only because many criticisms have been written on this novel – which can in turn be directed towards Cassady's writings – but also because it instantly turned the real Cassady into a cult hero, and it remains to this day his most popular envisioning ("The letters of Neal Cassady" 93-4; Stephenson 156).

Cassady's figuration as "Dean Moriarty" in *On the Road* highlights certain aspects of his personality and biography while similarly silencing others – an obvious statement: every (auto)biographical narrative focuses on certain characteristics of its protagonists while diminishing others. Yet my concern here is that which the novel neglects, as these silences point to recurring thematic emissions. In the final scene of *On the Road*, for example, Dean visits Sal "ragged in a motheaten overcoat he brought specially for the freezing temperatures of the East" (309). Neal Cassady did actually visit New York in January 1951, albeit to see Diana Hansen and their son, Curtis Neal (Moore xxi). Kerouac's novel does not mention this, and instead argues that Dean's visit is meant to strengthen their friendship.

Another example: Close to the end of the novel, Sal and Dean visit Mexico City, where Sal is struck with dysentery. In the middle of Sal's delirium, Dean suddenly leaves in order to head back to the US. Sal remarks: "When I got better I realized what a rat he was, but then I had to understand the impossible complexity of his life, how he had to leave me there, sick, to get on with his wives and woes" (303). Carolyn Cassady sheds a different light on this situation: "Neal did not want to leave him, but he had been called back to the railroad, and if he didn't go immediately, he would lose that lifetime job. He moaned for weeks after for having had to leave Jack ill. I am surprised Kerouac didn't realize the cause of Neal's leaving" ("Excerpts"). In

developing a completely irresponsible Moriarty figure, Kerouac takes no account, at least in the novel, of the moments in his life in which Cassidy clearly showed great responsibility. The railroad job – this has already been mentioned – meant a lot to Cassidy, as it enabled him to sustain his marriage with Carolyn and raise their children in relative prosperity. Reading the novel like Carolyn does, as a subjective transcription of historical events, it surprises me greatly that Kerouac shows so little empathy for Cassidy’s departure, calling him a “rat”. All a reader can fathom from the novel is that he leaves in order “to get on with his wives and woes” – a clear betrayal of the Beats’ defiance of “responsibility”. It is difficult to determine whether Cassidy’s railroad job was left out on account of novelistic purposes or whether this underacknowledgement really was due to Kerouac’s delirium. In order not to succumb to mere speculation, these examples at least demonstrate that the Moriarty figure is never “caught” upholding any sense of responsibility, although the historical Neal Cassidy certainly did, at times, do just that.

An elaborate analysis of the fictionalizations of Neal Cassidy in writings other than his own has been made by Gregory Stephenson, who concludes that the “Cassidy figure is an embodiment of transcendental primitivism – the American response to the cultural-spiritual crisis of Western civilization to which such movements as dadaism, surrealism, and existentialism have been the European response” (170). Dean is envisioned as a transcendental presence from an anti-intellectual point of view. It is interesting to note that in his analysis Stephenson dismisses all personal writings of Cassidy as “inapposite to [his] purpose” (154), thus establishing the void in literary criticism for this research. Stephenson continues:

[Moriarty] communicates an awareness of existence as possibility, as promise, and as wonder that denies the self-limiting cautions and conventions by which most people live their lives. [...] For Sal, Dean represents a psychological and spiritual reorientation, a new pattern of conduct, and a new system of values, including spontaneity, sensuality, energy, intuition, and instinct. In contrast to Sal’s eastern urban-intellectual friends who are ‘in the negative, nightmare position of putting down society and giving their tired bookish or political or psychoanalytical reasons,’ Dean, ‘a sideburned hero of the snowy West,’ affirms and celebrates life. (155-6)

American post-WWII literature was dominated by the New Criticism movement, which favoured the realistic novel, and such tropes as irony, paradox, ambiguity, personalism, privatism, and a retreat into the self before the overwhelming and perplexing pressures of history (Bush 128; “The letters of Neal Cassidy” 94-5). Morris Dickstein described this style as “a literature of limited

risks, smooth surfaces, and small poetic intensities” (27). In contrast to the privatism and personalism of the New Criticism movement, *On the Road* does not stay indoors, nor in the private sphere, but focuses much more on taking the body outside, into a sensory experience of the world, marking a shift from inside to outside. In a direct response to this style the Moriarty figure appears as a phenomenon used to drive certain anti-intellectual motives: “The transcendence of personal consciousness and time [...] and the attainment of a synchronization with the infinite” (Stephenson 155-7). He is more of a physical force than an intellectual character, and his speech is often highly oral and free from difficult metaphors and deep philosophical analyses. Moriarty is often described as interestingly absent from time, or in control of it, and his presence as a character is rarely related to a historical time or particular historical events. Eric R. Mortenson remarks: “Dean uses time to serve his own ends. [...] Time may still be subsumed by space, but it is a space that Dean is free to configure according to his own wishes. Time does not employ Dean; he employs time” (54). Dean’s background is rarely used to explain his characteristics and more often than not he is simply “there”. Little attention is given to his past or future, making him resemble a literary Trickster (Stephenson 157). The anti-intellectual approach of Kerouac emphasizes individualism and portrays Moriarty as existing outside of socio-political circumstances. If Joseph Conrad’s Mr. Kurtz consisted solely of a voice, then in popular envisionings Cassady is primarily portrayed as a body, one of actions and desires, a presence outside of causal and chronological history.

Truman Capote once famously called Kerouac’s style “not writing but typing” (Lyons 5). This aptly demonstrates Kerouac’s aversion to rationalism, or to the ideology behind rationalization as a method used to analyze the world around us. Instead his work focuses on documenting those rhythms, images, and words that normal events and oral language produces, providing us with a pre-rational, spontaneous experience of speech. Richard W. Hall calls it “recording; a transcription of words whose original habitat was the world of speech” (386). Other critics also argue that Kerouac’s style aims at transcribing pre-rational or anti-intellectual speech, establishing speech as a phenomenon without logic or coherence, yet as a force with real effects (Coolidge 43-9). Dean Moriarty is constructed in this style of anti-intellectual and a-political writing, emphasizing speech and oral language.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Let one last thing be clear: *On the Road* was not written in three weeks. Kerouac worked on it continuously for about seven years, editing and revising the manuscript throughout, although his “three weeks” statement obviously helped spark an interest in the novel (Brinkley xxv-xxvii).

Kerouac was inspired by French novelist Jean Genet, of whom Sartre once famously wrote that he “has no profane history. He has only a sacred history” (Sartre 5). Contrary to the work of many 1940s and 1950s writers, Kerouac does not elaborate much on the influences of class difference, socio-political status, and ethnic and cultural heritage when shaping the Moriarty figure. He places Moriarty outside of socio-political circumstances and outside of significant historical narratives. Although Dean Moriarty is given a background in the novel, envisionings of his personality do not reduce him to it, do not psychoanalyze his personality, nor relate it to larger socio-political circumstances. Instead, Moriarty is represented as a unique individual outside of, or surpassing, such influences – a Nietzschean *übermensch* without a profane history and outside of temporal causality. His behaviour resembles Nietzsche’s famous lines from *Genealogy of Morals*: “To be oneself is to deny the obligations which both past and future lay upon one, except for those obligations that one chooses for oneself and honors simply because one finds them ‘good’” (White 355). Bush writes that “Huncke and Cassady could provide living instances of ‘rebels without a cause,’ a phrase reeking with *a massive evasion of political and social definition*” (130, emphasis added). In a similar vein one could argue that this depiction of Moriarty reiterates the famous American myth of the “self-made man,” who achieves success due to his inventiveness, ingenuity, and hard work, rather than because of his family’s privileges (Swansburg).

Although Neal Cassady came from a broken home and was hardly able to follow any proper education, he did eventually fight his way into a middle class income, and he married the upper middle class and well-educated Carolyn Cassady. He even published a few of his stories in magazines, and a significant part of his autobiography posthumously. On the one hand, Cassady did escape the disadvantages of a life amongst the lower classes of Denver and was thus a prime example of the transcendental figure Kerouac envisioned in Dean Moriarty. On the other hand, this envisioning of Moriarty does not read him as a subject who relates to socio-political circumstances and class distinctions, nor as a person who relates to real sexual, financial, and class struggles. This point of view does not explain Moriarty’s personality as the result of difficult intercrossing lines which shape an identity, but views it as a finished and a-temporal “whole”.

### *Critiques of On the Road and the Dean Moriarty figure*

The anti-intellectual, transcendental, and a-political portrayal of several characters in *On the Road* has, in turn, produced many of its criticisms. The first of these critiques were directed against the novel's sexism, followed by more careful critiques on subjects such as romanticism and racism. In "The Beat Generation and the Trials of Homosexual Liberation," Catharine R. Stimpson formulates a strong critique on the work of Kerouac and his portrayal of gender and sexuality:

[The Beats] wanted women to be agents of Aphrodite, to shell out in bed, to wave happily from the froth of orgies. They called these women 'Chicks,' a quaint label that time has rendered embarrassing. If a Chick had class, if she had a professor father, her grooving and swinging were all the more appealing because she was violating a moral decorum that bourgeois society had trained ladies to defend. If a Chick were black, Chicana, Native American, or Mexican, her grooving and swinging were all the more mythic because she was displaying a 'primitive' force that those in flight from bourgeois society so wishfully craved. (378-9)

Stimpson argues that despite Kerouac's anti-intellectualism and aversion to rationality, he covertly upholds hegemonic gender and race dualities. For Sal the opposite of a "Chick" is a "Mother"-figure, and in his portrayals Kerouac often overlooks this very Freudian dichotomy. Thus, each woman in *On the Road* is tossed aside either as a "chick" or cannot be properly loved as a "mother," leaving Sal "unable to reconcile carnality and tenderness" (Stimpson 379). The novel reduces women either to maternal, passive love, or to active and idealized copulative vessels (Stimpson 380). Helen McNeil beautifully locates the double moral standards in *On the Road* when Sal ultimately labels Marylou a "whore" because she sleeps with other men, while at the same time these men sleep with other women (189).

The novel's rationale dictates that all the responsibility Dean Moriarty discourages is individual and therefore masculine, and anyone endorsing social responsibility therefore automatically becomes feminine (McNeil 185-8). Kerouac's aversion to psychoanalysis creates a Moriarty that does not struggle with a superego trying to restrain its libido, and in turn any notion of self-control or responsibility is regarded "as just another form of control and subsequently discarded" (McNeil 191). As a result, Dean is represented as the antithesis to social responsibility, and his anti-intellectual and irrational personality in *On the Road* serves to provide Sal Paradise with new and fresh outlooks on life, aiding him in his escape from social responsibilities and an over-intellectualizing upper middle class background.

Many critics have noted that the Beats took their inspiration for resistance against cultural hegemonic structures from what Kerouac calls the “fellaheen”. Stephen Prothero writes:

[T]he beats looked for spiritual insight not to religious elites but to the racially marginal and the socially inferior, ‘fellaheen’ groups that shared with them an aversion to social structures and established religion. Hipsters and hoboes, criminals and junkies, jazzmen and African-Americans initiated the beats into their alternative worlds, and the beats reciprocated by transforming them into the heroes of their novels and poems. (212)

Although this particular summary focuses on the positive aspects of such appropriations, many critics also scrutinize the Beats for (ab)using marginal subjects in order to enable personal acts of resistance against patriarchy and hegemony (Prothero 214-5; Bush 130; Richardson). Writing of the role peasants and poor laborers played in Kerouac’s work, Mark Richardson concludes: “White Americans reduce Mexican-American and Black farm workers to poverty only to flatter them with suggestions that their lives are idyllic and charmed, free of White worry, White responsibility, White inhibitions – in a word, with suggestions that they are ‘natural’” (225). Neal Cassady was living under specific socio-political and economic conditions, and one can wonder to what extent authors like Kerouac and Ginsberg used Cassady’s distinct lower class background as a vessel through which they could effect their liberation from hegemony and resistance to intellectualism.

Another common critique of the novel is its use of the homosexual as a symbol of self-affirming sexuality, as “a rebel who seizes freedom and proclaims the legitimacy of individual desire” (Stimpson 375). Stimpson argues that Kerouac often uses marginalized social statuses, ethnicities, genders, and sexualities in order to subvert hegemonic ideals. She notes that although this subverts normative (heterosexual, white, middle class) notions of sexuality and gender, it similarly (ab)uses a marginal Other in order to facilitate a certain middle class liberation. Homosexuality is used as a phenomenon to free the white and middle class male from intellectosensory oppression, and homosexual intercourse is cued by men acting out their inner masculine desires – Dean’s body functioning as the exemplary driving force of this sensual liberation in *On the Road*. Because of the poetics of liberation that the novel upholds the homosexual is not allowed to embody feminine (that is: social) characteristics, as these would only serve to imprison him. Instead of representing homosexuality as a taboo that feminizes men, the novel instead argues that

Dean is *über*-masculine because he freely *allows* his desires to extend into the realm of homosexuality. Yet even Stimpson makes the crucial mistake of reading the portrayals of Dean onto the historical Cassady, arguing that Kerouac's "hero and muse was the linguistically facile and sexually unquenchable Cassady, the man with no inhibitions and a few scruples that he both violated and redeemed" (386).

This chapter has looked at mechanisms of marginalization in several examples of Beat literature. In order to properly examine Cassady's work, it seems pertinent that it be addressed from several perspectives at once, taking account of (at least) several of the central components that shaped his writings. A few critical articles have been written about the Cassady figure, and academic criticism has often incorporated the Cassady figure in examinations of Beat literature. However, little attention has been directed solely at Cassady's own work in the proper context of his biography. Moreover, the fictionalizations of the Cassady figure, such as Dean Moriarty, have come to dominate our appraisal of Neal Cassady. The Cassady figure manifests itself in various ways, yet he is almost always represented as a primitive, bodily force, free from guilt and responsibility, and used to represent a liberation from intellecto-sensory oppression. These figurations, in turn, have spawned many of the critiques of Beat literature. In the following chapters I will analyze Cassady's work on the subjects of class, gender, and sexuality, arguing that such criticisms as Stimpson's have to be reframed in order to better fit the particular circumstances that shaped Cassady's writing life.

## Chapter II

### Words Are Not For Me

#### *Class, Language, Writing, and the Body*

Assessing the countless letters Neal Cassady wrote over two decades – to Kerouac, Ginsberg, Carolyn Cassady, and many others – it quickly becomes clear how he continuously struggled with the process of writing. Many letters either begin with endless apologies for not having written earlier, or with a mention of the difficulties it had taken him to write at all. This infamous lover of mobility and speed was not easily confined to the writing table, and this becomes piercingly clear when examining some of the letters he wrote (supposedly plastered) in some dingy bar. By looking at Cassady's letters on the subjects of writing and literature, it also becomes clear that he struggled heavily, throughout the years, with attempts at conceptualizing his autobiographical fiction. These letters do not only demonstrate the pragmatic difficulties Cassady faced as a writer, they also symbolize several larger issues he struggled with as an autodidact whose only teachers were other writers like Kerouac and Ginsberg – men of higher classes and inaccessible formal education. Aside from the many short excerpts here and there, Cassady wrote two letters explicitly about the act of writing, one to Kerouac and one to Ginsberg (Moore 69, 289). These letters speak of a personal poetics, one that is intimately sceptical of the power of words to convey reality, one that constantly doubts his own ability to learn to write, and one that severely distrusts all attempts at doing so. These letters give us an unexpected insight into the thoughts of an author who wrote very little and was skeptical of words themselves, but who nevertheless wanted to try his hand at them. These struggles, despite being fragmented across many letters, can help explain the development of his personal oral style of prose writing.

#### *How Matter Comes to Matter: Pragmatic Struggles Determine Poetics*

Before I address Cassady's letters on his personal poetics, and how they relate to his class background and perception of language and writing, I must first address and centralize what must seem like a trivial issue: the pragmatic difficulties he faced as a writer – that is to say the material,

temporal, and spatial difficulties he came across in his writing efforts. I could endlessly speculate about what drives or motivates authors to write, but it is certainly no secret that most acclaimed literary authors either had access to financial support or were in the possession of a certain liberty in which to write – most of them had *money and a room of their own*, if you will.

Many of Cassady's letters, especially in contrast to Ginsberg's and Kerouac's letters, deal with very pragmatic financial issues. He is often out of money and forced to work long hours, or he is in some sort of trouble with the police, a landlord, or some shady figures. In the first letters to Ginsberg, Cassady is obsessed with a pair of pants he left at Ginsberg's place in New York. Apparently they were his "only pair of trousers that are any good," and he repeatedly asks Ginsberg to send them over (Moore 12-3, 19-20). In one of his first letters to Kerouac he complains about his troubles with the law, with finding a job and a decent place to live and, as per usual, about women. He also remarks that he has not eaten that day (Moore 27-30). He consistently mentions that he has been unable to write because of the strenuousness of all of these practical necessities. Cassady's descriptions of his working life, his struggles with money, housing, and the law, stand in stark contrast to the subjects of Ginsberg's and Kerouac's letters. In my readings of Kerouac's letters, I have rarely found mention of monetary issues – such as housing, income, and employment – nor have I found much mention of material goods. Ginsberg's letters are also more concerned with elaborate descriptions of particular social circumstances, emotions, poetics, poetry, and writing. Cassady repeatedly mentions how much money he still owes, how much income he makes on what job, and how much money he will be able to save up to visit his fellow Beat authors. These constant financial struggles reveal an interesting contrast to Kerouac, whose mother "supported Jack financially during his travels, and he often returned to the comforts of home after his trips" ("The letters of Neal Cassady" 116). Neal neither had a mother to support him, nor a home to return to. Neal and Carolyn's elaborate plans to live in a house together with the other Beat authors in order to support each other in a communal manner were also met with little approval (see ch. IV). Furthermore, there is evidence that Jack and Neal often squabbled over Neal's economizing, with Jack urging him to spend his money more generously, and Neal arguing he simply could not ("The letters of Neal Cassady" 120).

Before Neal landed the railroad job he had practiced an uncountable number of other jobs, including all types of farm work, work as a potato-picker, a dishwasher, and a valet. The work he did for the railroad also took up a significant part of his time. In a letter to Ginsberg he writes that

“the RR program makes writing difficult because I’m seldom in SF more than 8 hrs. at a time. [...] Being not home long enough to work [my notes] into a typewritten reality, I simply quit writing until such a time as I can catch up” (Moore 289). Carolyn Cassady, for example, writes that Neal could take great pride in showing that “he was capable of working at anything and could manage to procure an income at any time until his writing proved profitable” (*Off the Road* 17). However, his railroad job often required Neal to leave his home and family for periods of up to three months (“The letters of Neal Cassady” 121). The argument I am arriving at is obvious: Cassady was not embedded in a life that served his authorship on a pragmatic level – whether by personal choice or not. These practical issues might look like trivialities, but they seem to have had a major impact on his (in)ability to write.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, there is no indication that Neal ever received any money for his writings, nor much encouragement, other than Kerouac’s and Ginsberg’s, from publishers, literary agents, or other notable intellectuals (“The letters of Neal Cassady” 93). Fed up with disappointment Cassady wrote: “I hate words, they are too much” (Gifford 36). Taking into account all of these pragmatic struggles it is somewhat surprising that Cassady was able to write at all, especially since he thought good writing meant that “even my most indifferent and trivial hours must become an expression of this impulse and a testimony to it” (Moore 69).<sup>5</sup>

### ***“Neal lived, Jack wrote”<sup>6</sup>: Language and its Discontents***

The development of Cassady’s writing style is traceable throughout his many letters, although always in faint and fragmented ways. He started by writing in an intellectual style he associated with educated, literary writers, a style which gradually turned into a more personal, naturally flowing form of oral prose that is said to have inspired Kerouac and Ginsberg. In these early letters it is clear that Cassady was in awe of the language that well-educated upper middle and higher class authors like Burroughs, Kerouac, and Ginsberg employed. In these letters one can clearly see Cassady struggling to find the right tone in addressing his friends so as to impress them with

---

<sup>4</sup> It is also quite difficult to find another uneducated lower class author who wrote a great body of work while supporting two families and working long hours, often months at a time, away from home.

<sup>5</sup> The body of his “work” consists of nearly 200 pages of (autobiographical) fiction and more than 400 pages of letters, some of which are really worth reading from both a historical as well as a literary perspective.

<sup>6</sup> Excerpt from: García-Robles 16. The full paragraph reads (and certainly adds to the myth): “Neal was everything Jack wanted to be but couldn’t: his unattainable alter ego. Neal was amoral, Jack Catholic. Neal was unscrupulous, Jack guilt-ridden. Neal had forgotten about his mother, Jack had never been weaned. Neal was thickskinned, Jack hypersensitive. Neal lived, Jack wrote.”

his ability to pick up on and understand a “literary” or “intellectual” language. Kerouac was not wrong when he wrote of Dean Moriarty that he “was conning me and I knew it (for room and board and ‘how-to-write,’ etc.)” (7). Yet this process of being influenced by others is notably twofold: the more encouragement Cassady received from Kerouac and Ginsberg, the more he started to develop a personal style, which was, in turn, picked up by Kerouac and Ginsberg as inspirational material for their own work, especially for *On the Road*.

The central issue Cassady faces in his early poetic progress seems to be the dissonance between what he sees as reality and the literary language that is used to describe it. In the first poetic letter to Kerouac, he writes:

It is not possible to grasp and express things at all as completely as most people, particularly critics, would have us believe. Most events are inexpressible, they happen in a region of the soul into which no word can penetrate [...] I have always held that when one writes one should forget all rules, literary styles, and other such pretensions as large words, lordly clauses and other phrases as such, i.e., rolling words around in the mouth as one would wine and proper or not putting them down because they sound good. Rather, I think, one should write, as nearly as possible, as if he were the first person on earth and was humbly and sincerely putting on paper that which he saw and experienced, loved and lost; what his passing thoughts were and his sorrows and desires; and these things should be said with careful avoidance of common phrases, trite usage of hackneyed words and the like. (Moore 69-70)

This fragment clearly demonstrates that Cassady’s distrust of the extent to which words can be used to express complex thoughts and feelings is closely tied to a particular understanding of language as an “elitist” discursive framework. Proper writing, according to Cassady’s poetics, is apposite to “particular critics,” “rules,” “literary styles,” “pretensions as large words, lordly clauses,” “rolling words around in the mouth as one would wine,” “common phrases,” and a “trite usage of hackneyed words”. Each of these phrases implicitly references a certain usage of language that Cassady dislikes; a language that transcends the personal, advocates the ability of words to express more than the sum of their parts, and professes to carry with it some claim to a truth beyond that of the individual employing it. Cassady’s distrust of language emanates from his suspicion of the upper middle and higher classes he feels excluded from. These classes do not only possess an intellectual language Cassady does not have access to and feels distanced from, they also generate and uphold the discursive practices of this language through education, administrative authority, and socio-political influence. That is to say this intellectual language – one not so

different from the intellectualism Sal Paradise despises – is a language external to Cassady’s experiences growing up among the lower classes of Denver. The absence of this language in Cassady’s personal history, therefore, makes it impossible for it to presume to “speak for” his personal experiences. This suspicion even manifests itself in his own (early) letters, in which Cassady constantly punishes himself when using such a language. Hence, he could write of his own “terribly stilted style, shallow sounding and intellectual as it is,” and his “trite, awful sounding second-hand observations, analyses and other apparently surface-spoken artificialities” (“The letters of Neal Cassady” 105). In Cassady’s poetics, intellectualism produces a language that distances itself from personal events, thoughts, and feelings to an extent that it becomes artificial or inauthentic. Lamenting his inefficiency with this “intellectual” vocabulary in a letter to Kerouac, Cassady writes that “perhaps words are not for me” (“The letters of Neal Cassady” 101).

This sense of distancing also becomes apparent when one compares Cassady’s more elaborate fiction with his mistrust of intellectualism. In *The First Third* Cassady embraces a very physical philosophy of life, one in which physical mobility is assumed to be a central pillar in acts of resistance against a capitalist consumer society that alienates its laborers. It is Cassady’s preference for mobility, which prevents the body from being fixed into place, that manifests itself as a central issue with regard to language. In his poetic letter to Ginsberg he writes about his struggles with words:

After the first statement is out, and often before, I get hopelessly involved in words to contain the increasing number of ideas [...] if I accidentally hit the wrong letter to start a word I would, rather than erase, think up a word to suit the letter and as another and then another mistake came up I had soon altered completely both the meaning of what I said and the things which I was saying [...] once a word has come to me, no matter how obviously poor, I am loath to leave it out of that sentence. Seeing it won’t fit I set out to manufacture another sentence for it [...] In the interval it takes to make the sentence structure a few more hit me and they force the sentence into a ridiculous bulge which I must prune pronto. To load each sentence with all it can carry takes time and the longer I linger the more abstract possibilities flit across my mind. (Moore 289-91)

In Cassady’s extensive analyses of his personal writing process, language presents itself as a duality; it is both endlessly mobile, an ever-expanding process of signification as the words “flit across my mind,” while the act of putting down these words on paper presents itself as a demobilization of all of their possibilities, as a form of finalizing “the things which I was saying”. In this process

signification presents itself as an encounter, an accident even. Cassady suggests that he has little control over the words as they come and go, each word immediately referring to another, and then another, and their origins and connections with each other are multicausal, multidirectional, and therefore never fixed.

Aside from the socio-political issues Cassady faces with a particular “intellectual” language he feels excluded from, the above paragraph also shows that his mistrust of language manifests itself on a very metaphysical level, namely as a mistrust of the ability of language itself to express any form of “reality”. In a letter to Kerouac he jokingly remarks that to “expect words to give one insight into life is like expecting a hog to know astronomy,” and he continues: “I’ve explained nothing you did not know, and said nothing that I meant to say, but – by God – I tried my damndest, I said my say and I know you know. That’s enough for me and all that I can expect” (“The letters of Neal Cassady” 105). In his letters Cassady repeatedly remarks that he can say one thing and completely mean something else, because words are either too limiting in conveying a highly personal experience or feeling, or because they are simply too grand in their many different meanings to be narrowed down to a personal definition. Yet he is simultaneously absolutely certain that because of their intense friendships Kerouac and Ginsberg know exactly what he is talking about. In these letters the process of language again presents itself as a doubled event; Cassady desires from language the ability to express highly individual experiences and emotions, while at the same time the effectiveness of its communication depends on a common ground between speaker and recipient in which words possess similar meanings and connotations. This duality can help explain Cassady’s preference for a literary language that is “groping toward the personal” (Moore 69). His desire to write in an autobiographical language over a distantly intellectual one is a form of aligning himself closer to this predicament: by presenting the autobiographical “Neal Cassady” as the orator of the majority of his work, he seems to convey onto a reader that the meaning of the language he uses lies in this language being irreversibly interlinked with the autobiographical orator. Hence, Cassady could write to Kerouac – who understood the personal connotations of the language he used – that “I know you know”.

### *Developing the Oral Prose Style*

I am inclined to assume that Cassidy's preference for an inherently personal language, a language which uses the speaker's autobiographical presence in order to direct a text's many possible meanings, led him to develop his "oral prose style". Of this style Kerouac has remarked: "Cassidy also began his early youthful writing with attempts at slow, painstaking, and all-that-crap craft business, but got sick of it like I did, seeing it wasn't getting out his guts and heart the way it felt coming out" (Berrigan). One of the most prominent examples of this oral style is the Joan Anderson Letter, a piece of prose writing highly oral, rhythmic, irrational, anti-intellectual and without a clear narrative structure.<sup>7</sup> It reads like a long monologue in which the orator lets himself go and utters sentence after sentence; some of these related to the story he is trying to tell, others about his personal views on a number of things; words are used in reference to their meanings just as much as in reference to a particular oral meter or rhythm; sentences evolve into each other; the plot is difficult to follow yet the narrator does refer to the structure of the letter constantly; many personal details are left unexplained; and the letter's meaning – if there is one – is always *internal*, tied to the language of the individual orator. This monologue-like form hints at the contingency of the letter's meaning; like in a conversation, words could just as well have been replaced, left out, or added, and the language in the letter only means something in relation to the inevitable presence of an autobiographical narrator, possessing no external truths, nor referring to a commonly shared reality. This absence of a shared reality also explains the physicality of the oral prose style: by staying close to the natural rhythms of oral speech, of dialect, of personal thoughts and how they evolve during the telling of a story, Cassidy seems to imbue the letter with the physical presence of the speaking orator, who by doing so becomes inherently tied to the connotations of the language in the letter, thus creating a language which derives a significant part of its meaning in reference to its writer.

The Joan Anderson Letter uses a type of oral prose language in which the physical presence of the autobiographical orator is introduced through the monologue, its natural rhythms, local dialect, stream-of-consciousness, unapologetical use of slur, and unexplained references. This genre of narrative can be read as a "performative" use of language, that is to say it uses a language

---

<sup>7</sup> The "real" Joan Anderson Letter was apparently lost for decades, but has recently resurfaced and was put up for auction, only to end up in between numerous parties claiming copyright and ownership. Up until now it remains unpublished. I used the shorter, 5100-word version printed in: Moore 244-55.

that is inherently tied to a performing body outside of itself. Of performativity in a posthumanist framework, Karen Barad writes:

A performative understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent preexisting things. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real. Hence, in ironic contrast to the monism that takes language to be the stuff of reality, performativity is actually a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve. (802)

The presence of the autobiographical body in Cassady's oral prose style is both a testimony to the power of language as well as a contestation of it. On the one hand, Cassady uses an endlessly large amount of stylistic figures to convey a very personal, subjective language, which can be read as a thorough exploration of how powerful language can be in transmitting private thoughts and feelings. Yet on the other hand, Cassady's unapologetic use of dialect, slur, and unexplained remarks can be said to refer to a disbelief in the possibilities of such a transfer through language. One could even argue that Cassady's distrust of language itself is a form of resistance against its "power in determining our ontologies". Although it is quite difficult to determine exactly what position Cassady takes up in this debate, it is at least clear that his use of language is performative in the sense that it almost always refers, both stylistically as well as in its contents, to the presence of the autobiographer's body, a body that is external to language and yet becomes interlinked with the language it produces, and therefore with its conceivable meanings.

Sceptical of the ability of language to properly convey a private "reality," Cassady increasingly tries to convince Kerouac to write in a more natural, oral language, one that does not take account of an endless amount of different readers, but instead revels in the presence of its own words. He writes: "By God! Just write Jack, write! Forget everything else. Hear me? [...] You know you'll never never put any single thing in words as they come from the voice in your head, just try like hell and don't regret each failure so much." ("The letters of Neal Cassady" 99, 110) Judging from his letters the oral prose style seems to have given Cassady much enjoyment, as it was a style he felt more at home in than in "intellectual" language.

### *Authorship and Class Fluctuations*

In order to better understand Cassady's location within a socio-political class system, it is worthwhile to delve deeper into the notion of "class" in relation to Cassady and his Beat peers. As discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis, concepts such as class and gender are not ontologically fixed; they are tied to historical circumstances, geographical locations, and often to individual contexts; they are events, performatives, contingencies. They are performed again and again with or without alterations, consciously or unconsciously, and in this repetition they (seem to) solidify, yet they can never signify a singular, all-encompassing definition. That Neal Cassady came from a lower class background and his peers from an upper middle to higher class background is a useful but also generalizing statement. First of all, however, it is worth mentioning that despite their dislike of socio-political discourse, it should be clear that each of these authors liked the other on an individual, personal level, and rarely specifically because he shared, or did not share, a particular class background. At the same time, I have already demonstrated that class distinctions certainly did play a part in what aspects of each other's life stories these authors embraced, using as an example Kerouac's interest in Cassady's background in order to facilitate Sal's liberation in *On the Road*. It is therefore important to come to a better understanding of what the concept of class means throughout Cassady's writing career, how it develops, and how it relates to the class backgrounds of Kerouac and Ginsberg.

It is no secret that Cassady was, at least in part, interested in Kerouac and Ginsberg because they represented to him well-educated, upper middle and higher class, somewhat established literary writers. Yet despite certainly enjoying the benefits of their more fortunate background, figures like Kerouac and Ginsberg simultaneously regarded themselves, and were being regarded, as metaphorical outcasts (Paton 118). That is to say they enjoyed the benefits of their class backgrounds while simultaneously distancing themselves from its other characteristics, such as intellectualism, elitism, conservatism, and classism. It therefore makes little sense to think of class structures as a line, from top to bottom, on which to place these authors. Felix Guattari writes:

Take the notion of class, or the class struggle. It implies that there are perfectly delimited sociological objects: bourgeoisie, proletariat, aristocracy. . . . But these entities become hazy in the many interzones, the intersections of the petite bourgeoisie, the aristocratic bourgeoisie, the aristocracy of the proletariat, the lumpenproletariat, the nonguaranteed elite. . . . The result: an indeterminacy that prevents the social field from being mapped out in a clear and distinct way, and which undermines militant practice. (26)

Kerouac's, Ginsberg's, and Cassady's class positions seem to be doubled in the sense that they simultaneously belong and not belong to the social classes they are often placed in. Cassady came from a lower class background yet managed to marry the upper middle class Carolyn Cassady, move to a relatively prosperous neighborhood and obtain a decent, though physically arduous job, write and publish stories, as well as develop intimate friendships and collaborate with several literary authors. Yet Cassady's unexpected two-year incarceration in 1958 hints at a socio-political repression more commonly associated with the lower classes. In that sense the continuing fear of being incarcerated, which is highly present in his autobiography, is proven right, as despite his job, relative prosperity, literary connections, and steady marriage, Cassady was thrown in jail without a proper trial. It is worthwhile to remember that William S. Burroughs spent a lot less time in jail for killing his wife (thirteen days) than Cassady did for passing around a joint (Morgan 101; Moore xxii). Simultaneously, figures such as Kerouac and Ginsberg came from relatively well-to-do families and certainly enjoyed financial and educational benefits, yet at the same time they distanced themselves from many of its social conventions and took efforts to embrace, both in their personal lives and in their work, the lower classes and marginalized ethnicities. Regardless of the effectiveness of their efforts, the question surfacing here is whether a subject belongs to the socio-political class he is commonly placed in, or to the class he feels a part of? And if the subject does not feel part of a social class, then how can class distinctions help to elaborate on his work?

Guattari continues:

Now the notion of arrangement can be useful here, because it shows that social entities are not made up of bipolar oppositions. Complex arrangements place parameters like race, sex, age, nationality, etc., into relief. Interactive crossings imply other kinds of logic than that of two-by-two class oppositions. Importing this notion of arrangement to the social field isn't just a gratuitous theoretical subtlety. But it might help to configure the situation, to come up with cartographies capable of identifying and eluding certain simplistic conceptions concerning class struggle. (26)

Taking other aspects of Cassady's identity into account, such as his gender, sexuality, and race, it becomes clear that despite his class background, his identity is not a "bipolar opposite" to that of either Kerouac or Ginsberg. Instead, all of these authors embody complex arrangements in which different parameters influence the composition of their identities in various intensities. The

similarities between Guattari's terminology and that of intersectionality theory again demonstrates the difficulties in writing the cartography of a historical individual's identity.

What becomes strikingly clear as we see Cassady's oral style develop is that an author such as Kerouac revelled in its local slur and dialect. It represented the direct vocabulary of an Other that Kerouac was excluded from yet fascinated by (Prothero; Richardson). Throughout his work, Kerouac "would continue to depict the suffering of the fellaheen" (Prothero 215), and he certainly regarded Cassady as an authentic, direct link with these Others. In his letters, Kerouac would often compare Cassady to other Beat figures he met during his travels, and at one point he even compares Cassady to Moroccan laborers in Tangiers (Charters, *Selected Letters* 22). Thus, from Kerouac's perspective, Cassady emerges as an author that represents an Otherness central to Kerouac's vision of liberation and resistance. In a letter dating from 1951, Kerouac even goes as far as discouraging Cassady from writing: "Don't have to write back – let me write our letters" (Charters, *The Portable Jack Kerouac* 607).

Cassady, on the other hand, clearly regarded Kerouac and Ginsberg as upper(-middle) class, well-educated men, and certainly looked up to them as such, despite *their* apparent distance from these classes. As argued above, in his early letters Cassady tries to impress Kerouac and Ginsberg by strenuously trying to write in an intellectual style, only to abandon this format of writing during the 1950s, going on to advise Kerouac to develop a more spontaneous style as well. What this indicates is that these specific Beat authors upheld difficult positions in relation to class. Ginsberg and Kerouac distanced themselves from certain upper class privileges and embraced marginal statuses as inspirational material, and Cassady represented such a status, at least, for Kerouac. On the other hand Cassady clearly looked up to Kerouac and Ginsberg for their class backgrounds, and tried to impress them by intellectualizing. As a result, these Beat writers, throughout the 1940s and 1950s, led a doubled class existence, residing both within and outside of their classes to the extent that they problematize, in Guattari's words, any notion of bipolar oppositions within a class hierarchy.

This chapter has analyzed the manner in which class has had an influence on Cassady's conception of his authorship, both in how he writes of his authorship and in how it is reflected in his work's contents. The pragmatic struggles that he faced as an aspiring writer dominate his personal letters to a point at which it is clear that they certainly obstructed his writing career, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Cassady struggled with language throughout his writing

life, despite receiving encouragement from his unconventional tutors, Ginsberg and Kerouac. This resulted in a distrust of language, especially an intellectual language that claims to represent a truth beyond itself. In response to this feeling of discontent, Cassady starts to develop his personal oral prose style, which uses natural speaking rhythms and local dialect, and it also clearly foregrounds the physical presence of the autobiographical author in order to signify the words' embedded meanings. Cassady's upward class shifts are mirrored by Ginsberg and Kerouac's preference for drawing on the lower classes and others of marginal statuses for inspiration. Despite these slight shifts, however, Cassady's lower class background has had an unavoidable influence on the larger body of his (autobiographical) fiction – something which the next chapter will demonstrate at length.

## Chapter III

# Bodily Poetics

### *Class, Gender, Capitalism, and the Body*

Having established that Cassady's class background influenced his oral style and made him prefer the physical presence of an autobiographical orator, I will now look at *The First Third & Other Writings*, as well as at two different critical readings of this work, to address the intersection of gender and class in his poetics. I will first look at a section of an article by Clive Bush in which he addresses issues of class, authorship, labor conditions, and self-control in relation to *The First Third*. Secondly, I will look at Mary Paniccia Carden's analysis of the workings of gender in *The First Third*. Lastly, I will combine these critics' arguments, and extend them in order to see how each factor intersects and influences the other. By doing so I hope to come to a better understanding of how the different components that shape an identity are interwoven with each other to a point that one cannot be properly addressed without also taking account of the others.

### *A Poetics of Speed, Mobility, and Self-Control*

The first sentences of Neal Cassady's unfinished autobiography already signify a world in which class and gender intersect, as *The First Third* starts off by commenting that Neal grows up among "hundreds of isolated creatures who haunted the streets of lower downtown Denver [...] dreary men who had committed themselves, each for his own good reason, to the task of finishing their days as pennyless drunkards" (1). Cassady grows up in a masculine lower class world, surrounded by hobos, alcoholics and drifters. He also mentions the contrast between this vagrant life and the life with his family, one filled with violent stepbrothers who abuse him and his alcoholic father. The hobo's existence is a life "so singularly uncommon and giving me so matchless an edification in observing the scum right from the start" (3). Clive Bush calls Neal's consequent liberty "a freedom of that experience of the internalised emotional and physical violence of the American family under economic pressure, and rightwing imperatives to consider the family a holy site of bio-sociality" (149). As a response to a restrictive, violent household on the one hand, and a

passive, socially motionless father on the other, the protagonist of *The First Third* develops a poetics of living geared towards bodily self-control, mobility, and speed. It is this lifestyle that saves him from household abuse, the dangers of the Denver slums, authoritarian expectations, unrebelling slavery, guilt, and his father's fatalism.

This mobility is represented in several scenes in which the young Neal strolls through the many different streets and neighbourhoods of Denver – reminiscent of a lower-class version of Baudelaire's *Flâneur*. Cassidy's protagonist finds liberty in the elongated physical movement through the various streets of an industrial Denver, passing under bridges, alongside factory walls, jumping over cracks in the pavement:

In the next five years all the city was to become my playground – what with the ever-increasing passion for 'junking' and freedom to indulge – so that even the many miles of Cherry Creek (from its upper reaches well past Denver's south-eastern limits of dairy farms, chicken ranches, riding academies and cowboy style night clubs) was to give up to my fancy the most absorbing treasures of its nadir's gold, i.e. junk caches under a dozen bridges with sellable empty wine & beer bottles or old inner tubes for slingshots, and overhanging limbs on which to climb above the creek's 15 foot cement sides, or hobo nests that were not too cluttered with fetuses (tight up under the bridge-floor) where I could huddle alone for a quiet hour. (33)

These scenes depict a strong sense of self-control and mobility being juxtaposed with authoritative symbols of restriction and confinement. About this sense of bodily control Bush writes:

Mastery over self-initiated movement is developed in the long run to the schoolhouse: dribbling the tennis balls, avoiding pavement cracks, creating a zig-zag route to save time, skirting banks whose 'enormous bronze doors of scrolled bas-relief (featuring charioteered archers, mostly) were never opened.' [...] The still places are the factories and school which crush the spirit. (151)

Although a French literary influence is clearly discernible, this protagonist is unlike Baudelaire's *Flâneur* in several ways. Unlike the adult white male strolling leisurely through the streets of Paris during his interminable free time, this version of the wandering *bohémien* possesses a severe sense of angst for a slum environment inhospitable to its young commuter. The environment generates a strong sense of impending constraint, hence the various ominous industrial structures signifying the laborer's incarceration and the stroll's metaphorical end; a looming, authoritative, fenced off

school building. Bush writes that the “voluntary activity [of play] is set within the shadow of its opposite: the unfulfilling labour America offers the young and poor” (151-2).

What emerges from these scenes is a strong sense of inevitable confinement within powerless positions, whether in authoritarian systems of education, in lower class labor practices, in the social stasis of vagrants, or in a domestic sphere riddled with violence and humiliation. Many of these images “point to a sense of potential entrapment which the boy’s run circumvents by skill and speed. [...] A kind of Gothic potential of escape from the prison by exceptional feats of daring” (Bush 151-2). Within this narrative rationale, trapped between several different authoritarian institutions that all seek to confine his body, physical speed and mobility provide the protagonist with the promise of liberty – even though this promise will inevitably fail, hence the perpetual sense of “lurking danger” (Bush 152).

In *The First Third* speed and stasis develop as central antipodal themes which come to define the protagonist’s identity, as he “reframes the relationship of travel to masculinity and makes travel commensurate with male freedom and conquest. Feeling the ‘constant challenge to conquer a new tree or building,’ he devotes himself to his travels around the city” (Carden 82). Whereas the laborers and winos of the Denver slums are beaten into slowness, their bodies used as instruments for others, Neal Jr. resists through movement, sheer speed and self-control. The protagonist flourishes during these cat-like movements through an industrial Denver. These moments shape the boundaries of Neal Jr.’s identity; they delineate his possibilities, his restrictions, even his desires and dreams. Cassidy does not only describe a twentieth-century city, but he describes a child’s identity through its interaction with it; junk caches point to exploration, overhanging limbs point to climbing exercises, and his preference for sleeping in abandoned hobo nests reveals him being unwanted elsewhere. That Denver would reveal the “treasures of its nadir’s gold” after thorough exploration – old tubes, empty bottles – suggests what value system Neal Jr. embraces in order to achieve self-esteem: one in which mobility is a reward in and of itself, generating self-respect internally. All movement is celebrated, even movement towards and away from others, as long as it escapes stagnation and the sense of confinement that comes with it. As a result of this, Neal Jr.’s identity becomes manifest in the representation of a moving body – not in an incorporeal intellect.

### *Consumer Capitalism and Exclusion*

Neal Jr.'s preference for mobility is tied to a capitalist class system in which power can be bought through the consumption of certain commodities, a system of social prestige which empowers those who can afford to buy such commodities and discharges those who cannot. Through the eyes of the protagonist, this system manifests not only in commodities, such as cars, but also in education and high-skilled labor. This system uses the lower class laborer's body as a means to an external end, in factories, mills, forges and other industrial workshops. Cassady's accounts of the desensitization that factory labor has affected in his vagrant peers are highly reminiscent of Marx's theories on capitalist alienation. From the onset of his autobiography Cassady conveys a strong sense of being excluded, in many different ways, from participating in this consumer system (the closed bank doors being just an example). Unable to access male buying power through the consumption of certain goods, Cassady is forced to find different ways to gain social prestige as a man. This is an instance which could help explain the protagonist's interest in motor vehicle theft and joyriding, and Cassady's boasting of having joyridden over 500 cars before turning 21 (*The First Third* 105-6). If the lower class laborer is excluded from attaining consumer goods and social prestige through buying power, then by stealing these from others and (ab)using them he can not only act the societal part, but in his frantic *overuse* of these commodities he can also undermine that same system which valorizes these individual consumer products so strongly. If *all* cars can be stolen and driven to exhaustion equally, then none of them are special, and any prestige attained by possessing a single one of them is eroded. Mary Paniccia Carden remarks: "Rather than working to establish male power through buying power, Cassady glories in his unlimited and unsanctioned consumption of the ultimate icons of a capitalist economy based in male dominance—cars and women" (83). I will address the latter "icon" Carden mentions later in this chapter. For now, it serves to remark that Neal Jr.'s poetics of movement and mobility is also present in his juvenile acts of delinquency, which are, in turn, rooted in a capitalist consumer system from which he feels excluded. By disproportionately taking possession of and overusing those products heralded as status-enhancing, Cassady's poetics of speed and movement creates a possibility to infiltrate a consumer culture which tries to tie the consumer's identity to privately owned commodities.

The hyperbole of this poetics culminates in "Joe Hanns," Cassady's story about a subliminally fast racecar driver:

Who else [had] such peripheral vision, and faculty for instantly acting on thought?, with perception proved nearly twice as fast as was anybody's, by scientific tests undertaken (because of the fantastically fast intuitive "feel" shown in the Miglia Mille incident) that revealed Joe Hanns could see as stills, motion pictures going 1/50th of a second. (*The First Third* 114)

Joe Hanns is a futurist hero simply speeding all of normal American life by, as his sheer movement and bodily self-control provide a promise of escape from a commodified identity – an escape from a laborer being alienated from his body and the products he creates, and an escape from subsequently being forced into spending hard-earned wages on the commodities he is alienated from. Although this description of mobility as an act of resistance seems very similar to Kerouac's portrayal of Moriarty, the difference lies in its embeddedness in a discourse of class struggles which clarifies the underlying intentions of such behavior, and not just what it can possibly mean for the middle class Sal Paradise. What we can learn from these examples is that bodily self-control and mobility do not only promise relief from confinement to a young Cassady in the Denver slums, but that this same poetics can be extended to enable an adolescent Cassady to attain a sense of prestige within a society that has excluded him from such consumer power.

The ideal of mobility that Neal Jr. upholds is juxtaposed with his father's social stagnation. In a social structure in which the lower classes are put under great economic pressure, Neal Sr. has internalized and individualized lower class financial struggles and is subsequently ridden with guilt and self-hatred for his failure as a father, a family man, a lover, and a laborer. Central to this portrayal is that Neal Sr. turns all blame for his social position on himself, and as a result of this he languishes away as a wino in the Denver slums. Neal Jr., on the other hand, is presented as a mirror-image of Neal Sr.'s internalized class struggles. Neal Jr. externalizes any sense of guilt over his position, he simply knows no guilt, and thus removes any possibility of motionlessly wallowing in self-hatred over the social situation he is unwillingly placed in. By denying the individual's responsibility for class circumstances, Cassady resists a capitalist class system aimed at either making us into solidary consumers or depressing us as supposedly failed individuals. Following this logic, any internalization of guilt by a lower class subject occurs in compliance with a system that has produced unequal class structures *a priori*. The externalization of guilt and responsibility is used here as a method to escape a social class system which seeks to celebrate society for its successes and condemn an individual for his failures. On the lack of responsibility in *On the Road*, Helen McNeil writes: "Once 'responsible' self-control has been externalized it is revealed as mere

control, and negative. [...] Beatitude is the absence of guilt over sex, over treatment of women, over property” (191). Contrary to McNeil’s reading, Cassady’s lack of a guilt-ridden conscience does not necessarily point to a lack of conscience, but rather to a conscious effort to externalize guilt in order not to succumb to individual self-hatred for the social exclusion he unwillingly experiences. That is to say the absence of guilt occurs due to socio-political circumstances, and not because of hedonistic or opportunistic tendencies.

Contrary to Freudian psychoanalysis, in which the unconscious is “the preserve of wild drives that have to be tamed by the ego,” Lacanian psychoanalysis argues that the unconscious is “the site where a traumatic truth speaks out” (Žižek 3). Slavoj Žižek explains:

Not ‘The ego should conquer the id’, the site of the unconscious drives, but ‘I should dare to approach the site of my truth.’ What awaits me ‘there’ is not a deep Truth that I have to identify with, but an unbearable truth that I have to learn to live with (3).

The notion of a superego – whether constructed through social decorum, bourgeois ideology, or moralism – that must learn to constrain its drives is remarkably absent in Cassady’s descriptions of his youth, a setting of crippling poverty, alcoholism, violence, (sexual) humiliation, social exclusion, and incarceration. In *The First Third* Cassady represents the situation he grows up in as an “unbearable truth” of human decency, a truth not reached *through* psychoanalytical effort – not by deconstructing the “mask” of the social superego – but instead by placing himself in a socio-political sphere in which morality is, because of crippling poverty, surprisingly absent.<sup>8</sup> The lower class laborer’s existence is made into a location from which a traumatic truth about human decency speaks out. It is from this traumatic “place” that the young Neal sets out to discover the world, and is subsequently confronted with social expectations and bourgeois ideology. From Neal Jr.’s perspective social decorum thus comes across as an inauthentically fabricated falsehood used to “mask” a more severe moral degeneracy – a metaphorical mask that can, at any time, be taken off in order to reveal an unbearable truth about human existence.

---

<sup>8</sup> It is in these scenes that we can find French literary influences on Cassady’s writing, most notably Genet’s *The Thief’s Journal* and Céline’s *Death on the Installment Plan*. Genet, for example, compares the beauty of roses to the bodies of prisoners, writing that “beauty is the projection of ugliness and by developing certain monstrosities we obtain the purest ornaments”. He also lamented the closing of French penal colonies, claiming it was only there we could see society in its purest form, its drives unmasked, its urges unrepressed, exposed for all to see.

### *Gender and Confinement*

Neal's early life is marked by an "oscillation between the humiliation inflicted on him in the domain of mother/society and the abjectness of his father's outsider position" (Carden 81). In his writing Cassady comes to align femininity with the social and masculinity with a resistant individualism:

Mother figures remove their support, or are neurotically bound to houses. They are selfish and devouring, or facilitate emasculating class hierarchies. Cassady's account of his father's wandering serves to establish a complex of restrictive associations linking women, mothers, families, and society. (Carden 81)

Authoritarian institutions are associated with femininity and women. Women come to stand for two things: stasis and the social. They represent family life, bourgeois ideology, confinement and social inertia, all of which are at odds with the protagonist's preference for mobility and speed. That does not mean Neal Cassady is inherently averse to any notion of family life – his correspondence with Kerouac often has them eulogize the family home – but it rather means that Neal Jr. perceives the family household as a social locale which inherently restricts liberty.

At the same time Neal Jr.'s impression of family life is marked with the failure of his father to provide for a family. Neal Sr.'s failure to support Neal Jr. and Maude, a middle class widow, leads them into being thrown out of the family household by Neal's stepbrothers. As a result, any attempt at a bourgeois family life is inevitably marked with the promise of failure in the ability to provide for this family. That Cassady traces his fear of family values through to his father's failure as a "breadwinner" does not only provide us with the opportunity to better understand how class struggles influence conceptions of gender and the social, but this psychoanalytical approach also stands in stark contrast to the Dean Moriarty figure, who is supposedly without a "profane history" (Bush 131). Cassady clearly does write in the pseudo-intellectual and psychoanalytical tradition Kerouac was more wont to avoid, using a vocabulary that elaborates on family heritage, class backgrounds and specific socio-political circumstances.

Another aspect of Lacanian psychoanalysis valuable to the analysis of Cassady's work is the notion of "the big Other" in sexuality, which argues that in any sexual encounter there is a symbolical presence beyond the two (or more) individuals present in the encounter:

This Third, which is always present as the witness, belies the possibility of an unspoiled innocent private pleasure. Sex is always minimally exhibitionist and relies on another's gaze. [...] Its status is similar to that of an ideological cause like Communism or Nation: it is the substance of the individuals who recognize themselves in it, the ground of their whole existence, the point of reference that provides the ultimate horizon of meaning. (Žižek 10)

The many letters in which Cassady boasts of his sexual prowess to Kerouac and Ginsberg do not merely provide a look into his private life, they also serve to delineate how Cassady constructs a "big Other" in his writings. Boasting of sexual encounters with various women to Kerouac, Cassady exhibitionistically brings Kerouac as a witness into the encounter, brings Kerouac's gaze to watch with him at the encounter, in order to judge and validate it. This is not to say that Cassady had sex with women for the approval of Kerouac, but that he, in boasting to Kerouac about it, thus reveals the presence of an "Other" that is used to ideologically validate his behavior. Žižek continues: "It is because of the virtual character of the big Other that [...] a letter always arrives at its destination" (10). A letter always arrives at its destination because the one who wrote it already had a particular reader in mind, and constructed the contents of the letter accordingly, acknowledging the existence of this reader and making him actively influence the reality of the letter. Whether the recipient receives the letter or not, the recipient's existence is "made real" by the one who writes the letter.

The same holds true for Cassady's sexual escapades with women. In his descriptions of sex women always seem to represent something greater than themselves. They are made into representatives of an ideology – whether one calls it social decorum, bourgeois ideals, or male-consumer power – that is approached through the sexual act. Women represent the social prestige Cassady dislikes and feels excluded from, and in a strange but traceable act of objectification he develops an ideology which dictates that sleeping with these women both enables him to gain that prestige and at the same time undermine those (men) upholding bourgeois ideals of a monogamous family household. Carden writes: "If women stand in for society as representatives of the bourgeois household [...] then in conquering women Cassady overcomes the society that has humiliated and punished him" (83). Cassady's poetics of resistance instructs him to take possession of and discard not only the consumer products he is prohibited from having, but also to take possession of and discard those "consumer" bodies that allow him to gain masculine prestige, those bodies that a male-dominated consumer society represents as valuable "possessions". As a result

women are objectified as possessions to be used up, to be loved only for their submission, and discarded before any failure in providing for a bourgeois household can take place. If the woman was of a higher class, if she was a teacher (e.g. *The First Third* 126), or if “she had a professor father, her grooving and swinging were all the more appealing because she was violating a moral decorum that bourgeois society had trained ladies to defend” (Stimpson 378). Thus appears an image of Cassady as “a traveling sex machine [who] measures his masculinity in terms of cars stolen and women ‘had’” (Carden 82). In each instance the female body stands as a substitute for fabricated social conventions that must be “unmasked” – an unmasking that is all the more successful when Cassady is able to reveal and exploit any repressed sexual desires.

Consider Neal Cassady’s introduction to “Auto-Eroticism,” his unfinished account of the many cars he has stolen and the women he picked up with them:

I stole my first automobile at 14 in 1940; by '47 when swearing off such soul-thrilling pleasures to celebrate advent into manhood, I had had illegally in my possession about 500 cars – whether just for the moment and to be taken back to its owner before he returned (I.E. on Parking lots) or whether taken for the purpose of altering its appearance as to keep it for several weeks but mostly only for joyriding. The virgin emotion one builds when first stealing an auto – especially when one can hardly make it to function properly, so takes full minutes to get away – is naturally strenuous on the nervous system, and I found it most exciting. (*The First Third* 105)

There is something disturbing about the equalization of women and cars in Cassady’s stories, as it hints at a desensitization to the living body and a simultaneous erotification of processed industrial material. Indeed, there are many arguments for the notion that in Cassady’s adolescent years women and cars were two interchangeable concepts, both of which could be “had,” ever so shortly and often against the will of other men – *especially* against the will of other men, because then his antics could reach their intended goal of undermining the bourgeois family’s “holy” status. The car awarded Cassady with the consumer prestige that he, as a lower class and uneducated laborer, was often excluded from. At the same time, however, it offered him spatial, and therefore social mobility. The car allowed Cassady to move through Denver freely, to visit different neighbourhoods in which he could enact the social prestige associated with the car he drove. To pick up women in these stolen cars proved to be an intense form of physical enacting of what it was like to be a part of the wealthier consumer class.

Cassady's poetics of mobility unfortunately takes pride in objectifying women and using them as commodities in such a manner that he only experiences masculinity when these women are consumed in great numbers and to the aversion of their supposedly socially respectable "owners". Yet this behavior is still only possible in an *a priori* male-dominated consumer society that has subsumed women to passive social spaces, and which, secondly, objectifies their bodies and represents them as commodities yielding their "owners" social prestige. The fact that Cassady adheres to this system of representation, and tries to attain masculine prestige within its boundaries, reveals a distinct identification with its underlying ideology. To use Žižek's words: "It is the reaction of people who are totally caught into the predominant ideology but have no ways to realize what this ideology demands of them, so it is kind of a wild acting out within this ideological space of consumerism" (Fiennes).

Although Cassady, in these excerpts of his work, clearly objectifies the female body, he only does so to the extent that this body has already been objectified by the society he lives in at large, a society which presents this body as a possession of prestige which can, as an act of masculinity, be "stolen" and "overused" by Cassady's delinquent antics. This is not to justify Cassady's objectification of women, nor his sexist "antics," but to remark that his poetics can only objectify women who have already been objectified in a consumerist class system in the first place. Otherwise it would not be a poetics of resistance at all, as it would resist nothing and upset no one, for the rationale holds that a woman who is "free" cannot be "stolen," nor can having sex with her act as a resistance to certain external ideologies (such as the bourgeois household). However, Cassady's behaviour is performative in the sense that it re-enacts these conventions under slightly different circumstances, thus upholding them. Much like Kerouac's *On the Road*, Cassady's work functions within the boundaries of an antithetical reading of masculine and feminine, upholding an antagonistic reading of gender. Contrary to Kerouac, however, Cassady's work places this antagonism in relation to an uneducated lower class laborer's struggle to attain social prestige. By embracing a poetics that favors mobility as a trope to resist the processes of industrial alienation and consumer exclusion, Cassady enters a strange sphere in which his attempts at attaining a sense of self-esteem tragically go hand in hand with the effort to keep women reduced to socially confined spaces.

### *Commodification and Social Exclusion*

Cassady's excessive consumerism puts him at the risk of being treated with suspicion and wariness, to the extent that even he himself would be treated as a commodity. To offer a new, interesting insight into Cassady's attempts at resisting commodification, I will briefly turn my attention back to *On the Road*. Carden writes of commodification in *On the Road*:

If Dean is an insatiable consumer who wrings the “kicks” out of others before discarding them, then Sal risks being consumed, emptied of value. [...] [At the end of *On the Road*] Sal loses sight of [Dean] when his social-climbing companions refuse to give his “idiot friend” a ride. Sal sits “in the back of the Cadillac and wave[s] at him. . . . Dean, ragged in a motheaten overcoat he brought specially for the freezing temperatures of the East, walked off alone, and the last I saw of him he rounded the corner of Seventh Avenue, eyes on the street ahead, and bent to it again.” At the end, Kerouac transfers the frightful possibilities of resistant masculinity—alien-ness, weakness, insanity—to the figure of Dean as a meaningless traveler, stripped of his power. (91-3)

By reading *On the Road* not only as a movement outward – into the marginal places and people of the US and Mexico – but also as Sal's struggle to resist feeling commoditized himself, the novel circumscribes a large loop. First the novel moves outwards, away from the confinement of middle class hegemony and intellectualism, out onto the road and its heterogeneous populace, with the protagonist (ab)using these people and their offbeat lives to rejuvenate his tiresome middle class experience of life. Yet ultimately the novel turns its movements safely towards home, returning to that same upper middle class driving through New York in Cadillacs, visiting theatres, and distrustful of vagrants. Despite Sal's continuous efforts to stand up for Dean, even against the likings of his own friends and family, the novel ends with Dean being returned to sender, “eyes on the street ahead, and bent to it again”. Sal resists being used as a commodity and thus emptied of meaning by Dean by commoditizing him first; he uses Dean in order to find a liberation from hegemonic structures and subsequently discards him, returning Dean to a life of meaningless vagrancy. Sal and Dean end up exactly where they started, despite embracing geographical and social mobility: Sal is with his upper middle class buddies heading to another theatre show (albeit with a reinvigorated view on life) unable to empathize with Dean's long voyage east, and Dean remains on the streets, powerless, unable to enact the societal part Kerouac's high class friends desire to see of him, and is thus forced back into a tireless movement. From this perspective *On the Road* is a terribly pessimistic novel about commodification, about male friendship as a form of

(ab)using the other – Sal uses Dean as much as Dean uses Sal – up until a point at which Sal realizes that despite their great feats of movement, their (class) differences simply cannot be overcome. The dangers of Cassady’s over-identification with a commodity consumer system is him being commoditized himself, used up for his antics, and discarded before any social ascension takes place.

It is worth noting, however, that the end of *On the Road* conflicts with its respective characters’ biographies at the time. During the novel’s publication Neal had been living with Carolyn and their children at Los Gatos for almost a decade, while it was actually the other Beats that were still moving about tirelessly. Ginsberg and Burroughs often went to Tangiers and Mexico, and Kerouac continually moved between New York, Mexico, and Los Gatos.

Another way of reading the persistent socio-political immobility of the vagrant is to look at it as a two-way process in which both the established authorities and those they exclude take efforts in upholding their antipodal positions. In order to better understand the psychology of Neal Jr., it is worthwhile to look at what Clive Bush writes of Jean Genet’s *The Thief’s Journal*:

Its greatness lies in the abstracted content of what it reveals – the banality of petty betrayal, sexual manipulation and violence among men who never had a chance – than in its capacity through tone and structural-aesthetic consideration to mock the moralising legitimations of law, police, petty officialdom and bureaucracy. The mockery is all the more powerful because Genet insists, radically, that *it is a condition to which both sides have given their consent.*” (138)

This leads to the question whether Neal Jr. should be read as an Other revealing himself “to be resistant, subversive, or articulating a grievance” (Puar, “I would rather” 52), or whether Cassady validates the very system that has alienated Neal Jr. by celebrating his identity despite his disadvantages? This latter interpretation suggests that Cassady celebrates his disadvantages without “articulating a grievance,” in the sense that without these disadvantages the self-approving celebratory counterpart of his identity would also cease to exist. This would tragically mean that the resistance he offers validates the unequal system that has produced him. A remark that Carolyn makes in her memoir certainly points towards this latter interpretation. After Neal loses thousands of dollars betting on races, Carolyn confronts him: “Neal, what dumbfounds me [...] is that you always manage to get caught. You slip up on some little thing every time. [...] Do you suppose subconsciously you demand to be punished?” (271). In Cassady’s work the beauty lies not in

overcoming solid class and social differences, but in celebrating an existence from within their solidity, their insurmountability, their ugliness even, as Cassady turns “failure into celebration in the face of a society which denies that very possibility” (Bush 153). Thus *The First Third* presents disadvantage as an opening, failure as a possibility, ugliness as the infrastructure of beauty, and exclusion as the only state from which to intrude – and as Neal Jr.’s life in the slums of Denver is celebrated he is delineated by his restrictions to the extent that to describe a life outside of them is to imagine a death.

This chapter has looked at the manner in which Cassady’s class background has influenced his conception of gender in his unfinished autobiography, and the mechanisms through which these restrictive conceptualizations are upheld. What is clear from *The First Third* is that Neal Jr.’s traumatic childhood in his family home has made him highly sceptical of family life. Through his mother he comes to feel excluded from the notion of a household, linking women to its social confinement. Because of Neal Sr.’s failure to provide for Neal Jr. as a breadwinner in a household context, family life also marks an impending failure in “manhood”. The inhospitable slum environment and its practices of consumer alienation cause Neal Jr. to develop a philosophy of life directed at physical mobility and self-control. Speed and stasis develop as antipodal themes in the novel, and throughout his early years Neal Jr. comes to celebrate any and all acts of mobility. During his adolescent years he tries to access male consumer prestige by stealing commonly prized “possessions”: cars and women. In this process women are objectified, and most of Cassady’s portrayed sexual relationships end before any failure in “manhood” can take place. This indicates that in Cassady’s work women always stand in as representatives of a larger ideological system, whether it is bourgeois ideals, social decorum, or capitalist morality. The issue with this objectification is that it reenacts a system that has already reduced women to a private sphere in which they act as representatives of the social. This has been a common critique of Kerouac’s *On the Road*, yet in *The First Third* this process of objectification is related to an uneducated lower class laborer’s struggle to gain social prestige. The dangers of Cassady’s frantic attempts at resisting these commodification processes is that he himself is used up by others before he can (ab)use them, which is what effectively happens at the end of *On the Road*, when Sal returns Dean to a life of powerless mobility. At the same time one could argue that *The First Third* validates the disadvantaged position of Neal Jr. and thus the system that has produced such positions, because the novel’s celebration of Neal’s identity is itself a product of these disadvantages.

## Chapter IV:

# Writing Home

### *The Vocabulary of Home, Family, and (Homo)sexuality*

Thanks to their personal psychological insights, Cassady's letters reveal a deep awareness of the complexities of maintaining unconventional social and sexual relationships. This chapter examines two key issues in the many letters Cassady wrote to his Beat peers. The first revolves around the conception of "home," for despite their preference for mobility and speed, many letters indicate that the Beats also glorified the home and family life, albeit unconventionally. Letters abound in which Cassady, Ginsberg, and Kerouac elaborately discuss plans to live together, to buy a house together, to share their income, to share the custody of their children, and, most of all, to help each other with writing. In one letter Ginsberg even argues that "home should be the center of emotional and spiritual life" (Gifford 82). In the context of Cassady's work this raises the question of how he romanticizes the concept of "home" in relation to his poetics of mobility. The second issue this chapter discusses relates to how Neal Cassady and Allen Ginsberg conceptualize their homosexual relationship with regards to the theme of "family". I will examine the vocabulary they use to conceptualize this relationship. In Cassady's case these letters reveal that his preference for mobility and self-control also plays an integral role in the perception of his homo- or bisexuality, and that Cassady's class background clearly influences the way he tries to situate his relationship with Ginsberg. Because Neal wanted to keep his homosexuality a secret from Carolyn, many of Ginsberg's early love letters were discarded or destroyed (e.g. Gifford iv, 5; C. Cassady, *Off the Road* 16, 246). Therefore, many of the remarks that are found in these letters refer to documents that are simply not at my disposal.

### *Conceptions of Home*

Although Cassady feels excluded from the bourgeois household, "the center of capitalist consumption" (Carden 83), he solves this issue by making mobility a central aspect of his envisionings of ideal family life. Fantasizing about buying a house together with Kerouac, Cassady writes: "For they [friends, family] come in as they wish. No hard and fast, naturally, rules or

obligations or expectancies or any such bourgeois strains in our veins toward them” (“The letters of Neal Cassady” 107). Cassady resists conservative conceptions of home in which life is determined by bloodlines and marriages, questioning their importance as central determinants of the household framework. Instead he prefers social flexibility and intellectual, intimate friendships. In the same letter Cassady continues by asking why one must “build a house and then have to go down the road apiece to see his friend and share his life?” (108). If we take account of Cassady’s youth in a broken yet confining home, it makes sense he instead prefers to write a definition of “home” that forfeits such inflexible boundaries, thus breaking with “rightwing imperatives to consider the family a holy site of bio-sociality” (Bush 149).

Cassady spent a great amount of time saving up for this dream, but it was not meant to last. The Beats never did end up buying a house together, as Kerouac’s plans would often change, or he would back out. In her memoir, Carolyn Cassady laments that “Jack’s dreams were incompatible with Neal’s job” (250). The Beats did, however, live together for short periods of time, when Kerouac moved into the Cassady household in the early 1950s, and Carolyn found herself providing for two men. These months of living together are recorded in her memoir:

I was a part of all they did; I felt like the sun of their solar system, all revolved around me. Besides, I was now a real contributor for once; my housework and childcare had a purpose that was needed and appreciated. I was functioning as a female and my men were supportive. It may have taken two of them to complete the role usually filled by one, but the variety was an extra added attraction. (167-8)

What is noticeable again is the difficulty in interpreting such a scene. Are Jack and Neal using Carolyn, is she being exploited? On the one hand, Carolyn would probably disagree with such an interpretation. On the other hand, Tim Cresswell writes that “a woman who is not given the option of taking to the road, who is consistently used by men and who stays within the realm of the home can come to believe that her choices constitute a lifestyle of her own choosing” (“Writing, reading” 423). In a letter to Kerouac, Carolyn clearly does convey a sense of self-blame, arguing that Neal’s obsessive behaviour was due to *her* “possessive attitude”. In that same letter she even apologizes to Kerouac “for tying up your great mind so long with my little one” (*Charters, Selected Letters* 357, 358).

Whether Carolyn Cassady’s or Cresswell’s interpretation is right, what is at least clear is that she takes up a motherly role with regards to Kerouac and Cassady. She writes: “I’d come

home from work and make dinner, after which Neal and Jack would jump up from the table and rush out into the night. [...] The more I behaved like the disapproving parent, the more they treated me as such – the mother, to be lied to and evaded” (100). In their letters Cassady and Kerouac often refer to Carolyn as the “mother,” and in Cassady’s writings sexuality is never expressed within the conceptual boundaries of the family home. The use of the term “mother” is interesting, especially since Carolyn repeatedly notes that her relationship with Neal was never that sexual, writing instead that it was best described as platonic. This suggests that, for Neal Cassady, sexuality and family life did not go hand in hand.

The theme of “child versus parent” is an interesting choice of words in Carolyn’s case, as it also recurs throughout Neal Cassady’s own letters, in which he repeatedly casts himself in the role of a child, for example when he laments his inabilities as a father to Ginsberg: “I’m a simple-minded, child-like, insipid sort of moronic and kind of awkward-feeling adolescent” (Gifford 35). To compare the lack of emotional responsibility (towards his children) and sexual attachment (towards Carolyn) with a child-like state suggests that Cassady, unable or unwilling to conform to his expected place in the family household, instead casts himself in a role commonly associated with the transgressor of its boundaries: the mischievous adolescent, with Carolyn portraying the role of the disapproving parent.

### *Intimacy and the Lack*

The above scenes suggest that, for Neal Cassady, (sexual) intimacy did not easily find a place in the heterosexual family context. Cassady’s relationship with Ginsberg is very different in that sense. A desire for intimacy is more explicitly expressed in their love letters, and, through its vocabulary, related to the concept of family, albeit in unexpected terms. In these letters Cassady explicitly expresses a deep desire for intimacy with Ginsberg, something that is hard to find in the letters to Kerouac, in which he boasts of conquering women and stealing cars. This desire for intimacy also stands in stark contrast to the emotional distance he experiences with women. Cassady even writes of this distance himself: “On one hand it bothers me to think I’m unable to be affected emotionally [by women] as much as other people seem to be, on the other hand, this objectivity of emotionality, has, in my life, enabled me to move freely in each groove as it came” (Gifford 16).

That this attitude of detachment manifests itself in Cassady's family life is also evident, for example when Allen congratulates Neal after having his first child with Carolyn. Neal writes back:

You should congratulate me – as you would congratulate me on, say, buying a car, or some such impersonal object. [...] The child and Carolyn are removed from my consciousness and are on a somehow, secondary place, or i.e. not what I think of, or dwell on, or am concerned about, except in a secondary way. (Gifford 35)

These words certainly evoke the notion of maintaining an emotional distance as a form of self-preservation. The reason I refer to them here is that this emotional distance contrasts with the desire for intimacy that is found in his love letters. However, as one would expect from Neal Cassady, the desire to be more intimate with Ginsberg is marked with a fear. He writes:

The thing that is uppermost in my mind at the moment is a fear [...] a real fear of losing you. It's a combination of a knowledge of lack on my part, not only academically, but, in drive as well, also, a sense of outcast that makes me feel at times as if I were really imposing on you for me to try and become closer. I have become more defensive psychologically in direct ratio to my increasing degree of realization of need of you. The thing that is closest to the truth is the simple statement that you are too good for me. [...] I feel as if I were a woman about to lose her man. (Gifford 8-9)

There are two things I wish to remark about this self-examination. Firstly, taking into account Cassady's preference for mobility and emotional detachment, it is no surprise he is both intrigued and scared by his intimacy with Ginsberg. Yet this intimacy is not plagued by bourgeois family ideals and a possible failure in "manhood" – as was the case with women. Comparing his auto-erotic fiction with these love letters, clear from both their tone and their vocabulary is that, for Cassady, the homosexual relationship offers an opportunity to experience a mutual intimacy outside of the bourgeois consumer sphere he felt excluded from.

Secondly, unable to find a proper terminology with which to describe the attachment he feels while being plagued by commitment issues, Cassady frames his position in relation to Ginsberg as that of "a woman about to lose her man". Masculinist frameworks dominate Cassady's work, and I have found no other instance in Cassady's writing in which he claims he feels "as a woman," nor any other instance in which he explicitly focalizes his views through a "feminine"

perspective.<sup>9</sup> In many of his short stories relationships and individual liberty are each other's antagonists (*The First Third* 81-95, 105-118, 124-141), destabilizing the possibility of a conventionally "healthy" heterosexual relationship. In the case of his relationship with Ginsberg, Cassady's vocabulary suggests a slight shift across his antipodal definition of gender, briefly placing himself in the position of the feminine "other" that is so often silenced in his own fiction. This shift suggests that the sphere of homosexuality influences Cassady's perception of his own gender performance – although certainly not his perception of gender as a whole, as the shift from masculine to feminine, brought on as the result of a lack, definitely upholds a very conventional reading of gender roles. According to this reading Cassady's homosexuality facilitates a shift from a masculine to a feminine gender role, a very traditional reading of homosexuality which seems to prevent the male homosexual from blamelessly embodying a masculine perspective.

***“By their fruits ye shall know them”***

Another issue that dominates these love letters is the intellectual or academic difference Neal feels towards Allen. Throughout their correspondence Neal laments his subordinate position, claiming he feels inadequate, uneducated, or simply trivial in Allen's presence. In response to this subjugation, Allen Ginsberg takes on an instructive role: "I can teach you, really, what you want to know now, I will give you money" (Gifford 29). Ginsberg sends Cassady dozens of books, and teaches him about literature and writing (Bush 137). Cassady's desire to ascend in class, at least intellectually, and Ginsberg's willingness to help him with this, seems to convey the belief that their relationship will flourish if they move towards each other on a class level – an unspoken assertion that establishes the close relationship of class and sexuality. They continually try to find a terminology with which to describe this intellectually slanted relationship, and after many letters Neal eventually offers a truce:

I suggest that instead of further, non-progressing, talk in this vein we fall into a mutual groove in which, however false in logic this may sound, we assume a responsibility toward each other (family tie idea), entertain a certain erotic attraction (lover idea) etc., until such time as we do see each other. (Gifford 15)

---

<sup>9</sup> With regards to this phrase it is certainly Freudian that Cassady links his sense of "lack" to femininity.

Noticeable about this sentence is the use of the terms “false in logic”. In a primary reading of this sentence, the false in logic arises from Cassady’s and Ginsberg’s physical distance: Neal argues they should act like family or lovers in order not to feel the physical distance in between them. However, the notion of “false” could have a more elaborate meaning in relation to the concepts of “family tie” and “lover”. Knowing full well that their homosexual relationship cannot be properly situated within either domain, but aware that they lack the terminology to locate it otherwise, Neal pragmatically places their relationship within established social realms. The nonchalantly placed “etc.” hints at the other stereotypical formats at their disposal. To situate their homosexual sentiments within socially established realms is considered “false” in the sense that these social spheres prevented proper placement in the first place, and as such these social spheres were themselves responsible for Cassady’s and Ginsberg’s efforts to reconstruct their vocabularies.

There is another issue with regards to the topic of “falseness” prevalent in Cassady’s writing: he often reproaches Kerouac and Ginsberg for coming across as inauthentic or insincere in their letters. In their effort to act out a closeness that was not there in a physical sense (living thousands of miles apart), Kerouac and Ginsberg would write to Cassady emphatically, describing their closeness, asking endearing questions, and the like. Cassady responds to such a vocabulary with skepticism:

Sensing a semi-indifference to me, you react just enough to fail to see that in that semi-indifference lies our freedom and any degree of closeness we have. [...] Let things fall into their natural order and don’t, after really coming on fine, take on a defensive, apologetic air which we both feel only because of a self-imposed sense of obligation, and excuse yourself for something that, in actuality, you are to be commended for. (Moore 41-2)

Instead of performing his friendships through language, Cassady insists on using language outside of its performative dimension, reading any indifference he feels towards Kerouac or Ginsberg as a possibility for real closeness. His insensitivity to the performative aspects of language hints at a common provocation thrown at Cassady: that he was a sociopath. Slavoj Žižek writes that “a sociopath *uses* language, he is not caught up in it, and he is insensitive to the performative dimension” (13). By reproaching Kerouac’s and Ginsberg’s efforts to maintain a closeness despite their distance, Cassady certainly proves himself insensitive to the performative dimension of

language. Instead, he prefers to meet Kerouac and Ginsberg in an affective “reality,” in their direct feelings, so to say, urging them to “scribble to each other what we feel, not think” (Moore 42).

Cassady continues his struggle to find proper terminology to locate his love for Ginsberg. After many letters he eventually settles on the term “father,” writing:

You stand head and shoulders above any one man I've ever known – that, in itself, is love – calls for love. [...] However, off the intellectual now, you are not an abstract symbol to me; nor quite a personal love which I must combat, fear – or flee. Rather, (at last I reach the point) I have a new vision to add to our collection – you are my father. (Gifford 38)

Again Cassady reiterates the mentality that dictates that one should “combat, fear – or flee” a personal love. At the same time his admiration for Ginsberg is revelatory; standing “head and shoulders above any one man” signifies love for Cassady, which suggests that love is something askew, something that moves up- or downwards. What remains is a love that is both emotionally distanced *and* intellectually slanted. Clive Bush writes: “Unable to find a middle way of characterising his relation with Ginsberg between a less than whole personal love and the abstract symbol of the master, ‘father’ becomes the tropological term for creating an emotional distance under pressure” (135).

There are two things I wish to remark about Cassady’s use of the term “father”. Firstly, there is the obvious religious connotation of such a term, which complies with the theological vocabulary that the Beats often use to describe their relationships. In this instance Ginsberg’s “Holy! Holy! Holy!” comes to mind, as well as Kerouac’s repeated use of the terms “angel” and “angelic”. By recasting his Beat relationships in such religious terms as “father” and “son,” Cassady metaphorically stages his homosexual relationship within a Christian context, thus implicating that holy sphere with its own sin. He also eliminates those who would be sceptical of his closeness to Ginsberg – for to devout Christians, family bonds are *a priori* defined contracts, the holiest of obligations.

Secondly, Cassady names Allen Ginsberg his “father” over Neal Sr., which seems like a form of recasting family bonds, and in a similar vein he would call Kerouac his “brother”. In this line of reiterating family heritage, Cassady also writes to Ginsberg that he needs to “free himself of Denver and all it implies before I can progress, at least, with you” (Gifford 9). Taking this train of thought to its utmost destination, one could argue that Cassady uses his Beat relationships to

rewrite his place in a cultural heritage, naming himself prodigal son to Ginsberg and barbarous brother to Kerouac (Kerouac often refers to him as Brutus (e.g. Charters, *Selected Letters* 358)).

Of course Ginsberg was reluctant to accept Cassady's terminology, and Neal eventually consents to this reluctance: "You're right – you're not my father. I have none. [...] I fear I've forgotten fathers & can't find one – so we'll forget it" (Gifford 48). I would not necessarily read this excerpt as a grievance. Instead, like "brother Kerouac," the lack of a father figure formulates itself as an opportunity, again allowing Cassady to reinvent his identity. Ginsberg does joke about the sentiment though, for example after Neal has his first child with Carolyn: "How does it feel to be a father? [...] It certainly feels fine to be a grandfather" (Gifford 53).

Thus in the two most significant relationships of his life Cassady casts himself in the role of the child, with his lovers somehow forced into playing his reluctant parents. What interests me in the use of this terminology is his background. In chapter I, I have already explained that Cassady was, at least in part, interested in Carolyn because of her class background, and in this chapter a similarly slanted pattern appeared in Neal's fascination with Allen. If Cassady is read as an uneducated laborer pursuing social prestige, then the formulation of his relationship with Carolyn and Allen repeats a stereotypical class struggle vocabulary; namely that the uneducated lower classes are like children to the upper classes, who are forced to act as their adults, teaching, controlling, punishing even, until they eventually reach their own maturity. Relating the terms mother and father to a class context establishes the interconnectedness of class and sexuality. What is interesting in this particular case is that the child itself first insists on such a vocabulary, and is then only able to articulate a sentiment of resistance by casting himself in the role of a mischievous adolescent. The belief that power relations are upheld by opposite sides within their own spectrum is thus echoed in the vocabulary that Cassady employs.

This chapter has examined the representation of such subjects as home and family in Cassady's letters, and discussed how these subjects relate to his homosexuality. Although the Beats often glorified movement and social mobility, in their many letters they similarly eulogize the home. Several texts document Kerouac and Cassady's life with Carolyn, a family life of sorts, in which sexuality is difficult to place, and in which Cassady takes up the role of the emotionally detached adolescent. In his affair with Allen Ginsberg Cassady does explicitly express a desire for intimacy, albeit in the domain of the homosexual relationship, which is not marked by restrictive bourgeois ideals that would undermine individual liberty. This suggests that homosexuality

influences Cassady's conception of his own gender performance to the extent that through it he is, briefly, able to shift away from the masculine perspective that dominates his other writings. However, by reading his own sense of intellectual lack through a feminine perspective, he upholds a dichotomous reading of gender. Despite the liberties he finds in his homosexual relationship, he also frames Ginsberg as a father figure. The result of this is a condition in which Cassady, unable to act out the role of the emotionally attached lover, instead casts himself in the part of the mischievous adolescent, thus upholding a stereotypical construction of binary class relations, albeit under very particular circumstances. Cassady's attempts at writing about his relationship with Ginsberg demonstrate the interconnectedness of class and sexuality, and how terminology from each of these spheres is borrowed in order to philosophically identify this relationship.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I set out to find an appropriate way of addressing the work of Neal Cassady: author, husband, father, lover, Beat hero, Beat villain. The first apparent issue with addressing his work is the pervasiveness of fictionalizations by other authors; the popularity of some of these makes it difficult to address Cassady's own work. Although many of these fictionalizations have been examined by literary critics, Cassady's own work has either gone overlooked, or it is incorporated in critical assessments that go hand in hand with the work of other Beat authors. The result of this is that the historical circumstances that have shaped his own work, and his relationships with the other Beats, have not been addressed properly. By examining his most popular fictionalization, Dean Moriarty, I have established the prevalent manner in which Cassady has been represented by other authors: as an anti-intellectual, primitive, bodily presence without a profane history. In response to a conservative social decorum that propagates responsibility, the Cassady figure is a mischievous adolescent boldly breaking rules and regulations. As a result of this he has been criticized for sexism, for celebrating linguistic facilism, and for promising liberation to white men at the cost of others.

Although such criticisms are very accurate in relation to the fictionalizations in which Cassady appears, it has become apparent that they do not address Cassady's own work, nor do they take account of the historical circumstances that shaped it. Especially the effects of class have been overlooked, and in many analyses Cassady's work is addressed alongside that of authors from different backgrounds. I therefore set out to approach Neal Cassady's work intersectionally, in order to examine in which manner his class background has influenced his conception of gender and sexuality, and vice versa. Despite this approach's embeddedness in the field of women's studies, it has proved very fruitful in addressing the work of Neal Cassady – never to whitewash it in order to excuse his masculinist frameworks, but fruitful in the sense that this approach helps place such attitudes in a historical framework that allows for a better understanding of them.

Cassady struggled with language throughout his writing life, and his background as an uneducated lower class laborer certainly played a large part in this. It obstructed his authorship both pragmatically as well as in a linguistic sense. This resulted in a severe distrust of language, especially an intellectual language that claimed to represent something larger than itself. In response to this he starts developing his distinctive oral prose style, which relies on natural

speaking rhythms and local dialect, and it foregrounds the body of the author in order to signify the words' meanings. Despite his background as an uneducated lower class laborer, Cassady marries "upwards," becomes close friends with literary authors, and gets a decent job at the railroad. At the same time, the authors he befriends embrace Cassady's oral prose style and celebrate the lower classes and others of marginal statuses. However, despite these various class shifts, Cassady's lower class background had an unavoidable influence on the larger body of his work, especially on his conceptions of gender and sexuality.

*The First Third*, Cassady's largest and most refined work, tells the story of his youth in the Denver slums, a childhood marked by poverty, social exclusion, and an impending sense of incarceration. His experience of family life is corrupted by humiliation and a failure in manhood he ascribes to its female representatives. This background shapes Neal's conception of gender, as women always stand in as representatives of a larger ideological system. Seeing how his fellow vagrants have become guilt-ridden over the downtrodden place they occupy in a dishonest system, Neal Jr. learns to exorcize any sense of guilt over his actions. This inhospitable childhood environment causes him to develop a philosophy of life directed at mobility, speed, and self-control – physical tropes with which he tries to escape the crippling effects of poverty. Financially excluded from accessing the system of male consumer prestige, Cassady instead achieves a sense of self-esteem by stealing its prized "possessions": cars and women. Women are objectified to be used up before any loss of self-esteem can take place, a philosophy which upholds a system that has already reduced women to act as the representatives of social morality. Although this has been a common critique of *On the Road*, the difference with Cassady's work is that it focalizes this act of objectification through an uneducated lower class laborer trying to access social prestige. This does not necessarily justify Neal's frantic behavior, but relates it to larger historical circumstances that problematize individual morality. If Cassady acts like a sociopath towards women – a common provocation – then he is, at least, a sociopath in relation to a much larger ideological system that only allows for him to gain social prestige by embracing aspects of sociopathy.

After reading *The First Third*, it might seem strange to see Cassady eulogize the intimate sphere of the family home. However, this is exactly what happens in his many (love) letters. His relationships with Allen Ginsberg and Carolyn Cassady are marked by, to use Clive Bush's articulate terms, an "emotional distance under pressure". Neal and Carolyn's relationship is described as platonic, suggesting that sexuality did indeed not easily fit into the Cassady household,

and his fiction also suggests that sentiment. In his homosexual relationship with Ginsberg, Cassady expresses a deep emotional desire for intimacy, riddled with a sense of intellectual lack he focalizes through a feminine perspective, suggesting that the sphere of homosexuality influences the conception of his gender performance, briefly helping him escape the masculine perspective that dominates his other writings, yet upholding a dialectic reading of gender. Cassady's major relationships are askew when looked at from the perspective of classism: he looks up to Carolyn and Allen because of their higher class backgrounds. This results in a vocabulary in which Cassady takes up the subordinate role of a child in relation to his lovers, a terminology which seems to voluntarily uphold an exhausted representation of class hierarchy and gender. Allen Ginsberg becomes Neal's father, a religious term common to Beat writing, and Carolyn, forced into the role of the sexless household representative, reluctantly plays his mother. Unable or unwilling to conform to his expected place in a family home, and in awe of its representatives (Allen, Carolyn), Cassady first casts himself in the role of their child, and is then only able to act out a sentiment of resistance by embodying the mischievous adolescent. Despite the awkwardness of this vocabulary, Cassady clearly uses such terms to reinvent his family heritage, to open up the possibility of altering his identity, and in these repeated attempts he discloses the scars that his disadvantaged background has left him with.

### *Assemblage versus Intersectionality, Assemblage and Intersectionality*

Because it is hard to find moments in Cassady's writing in which the different parameters that compose his identity intersect, and because his work is so fragmented, the notion of assemblage is useful in closing off the intersectional approach to his work. I have primarily studied those moments, texts, and historical events in which Cassady's identity proves itself to be composed of different factors that influence each other irrevocably. I have highlighted these excerpts from his work and addressed them as events in which several components intersect, arguing all the while that we cannot address one without also addressing the others. It is impossible, for example, to properly address Cassady's representation of gender in *The First Third* without also addressing his class background, as both are clearly informed by each other. However, these examples should not compel us to read his identity as a permanently fixed node on which these intersecting factors are cemented. The notion of class, for example, is proven to be unstable in Cassady's history:

despite his lower class background, he embodies various class “shifts” that problematize the inertia of an identity such as “lower class”. If we take into account Cassady’s poetics of mobility and his attempts at rewriting his heritage, reading him as a node on a tightly fixed grid again makes absolutely no sense.

The notion of assemblage, which argues that all identities are continually becoming, which argues that even the sturdy system to which we would reduce them is fleeting (its terminology, its connotations), this notion of assemblage can help to offer some articulate concluding remarks on this research. Cassady’s identity is flexible in many ways, something which is affirmed in the vocabulary he uses to rewrite his background as well as in the continually changing arrangements of his life. Take as an example Neal’s decade-long effort to live with Carolyn, an effort that clearly goes against the philosophy of emotional distance presented in *The First Third*, an autobiography he wrote *during* this period. This duality at first presents itself as a problem to an analysis of the author’s work, yet at the same time both of these efforts are marked, sometimes ever so briefly, by the intersecting components that I have discussed above. The addressed excerpts from Cassady’s work all refer to the same issues: how class background has shaped his conception of gender; how his conception of gender shapes his sexuality; and how his sexuality, in turn, manifests itself within a class context. In all our potential for becoming we are always held back, or held strong – we are always *held by* the complex parameters that compose our identities. Even at those moments in which Cassady moves away from expected patterns, renewing himself and his identity, he always acts in relation to them, moving in fleeting motions within their parameters. Therefore, the effort to approach Cassady’s work intersectionally has proven to be very fruitful, yet never absolute, for despite their obvious coherence and consistency, identities, organisms, do not necessarily *have* to follow a severe rule – a conclusion that can stand as a proper testimony to Neal Cassady’s writing life.

### *Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research*

Despite addressing a multitude of documents, this thesis has only scratched the surface of Cassady’s oeuvre, and these scratches were clearly intended to reveal very particular aspects of his work. Within the realm of intersectionality theory the component of race was completely left out, something which is troublesome considering the background of the theoretical field itself.

Although the subject of race is critically assessed in several articles (Prothero; Richardson), the Beats' whiteness is an ethnicity that is often left completely unmentioned, it presents itself as "simply there," revealing the depth of racial privilege. At the same time I presume that Cassady's whiteness has played an essential part in how his work has often been read right alongside that of Ginsberg and Kerouac.

Another intersectional component that has recently emerged in women's studies is that of *ability*, referring not only to the notion of disability, but also to how society programs the body to develop according to certain expectations. An example of this is how calloused hands are still embraced as signs of masculinity. Celebrating the body's conquest of different geographical landscapes is an ideological attitude that manifests itself through physical ability, and perhaps this is an attitude that has a connection with eighteenth and nineteenth century efforts of imperial exploration, or with the American Frontier. And what is the role of class in physical ability? Are there other authors of a lower class background that celebrate such physical ability? And what about female authors, or authors of different ethnicities, do they experience similar liberties in such acts?

Taking a step back from intersectionality theory, a completely different hypothesis that has intrigued me concerning Cassady's work is whether the physical mobility he centralizes in relation to consumer capitalism is also present in, say, European literature of the same period, or in any other literature marked by such technological developments? That is to say: Are these poetics of mobility translatable to other literary and cultural contexts? And if so, would this explain the popularity of the Beat movement abroad?

### ***Final Remarks***

When Neal Cassady was found in a coma alongside a railroad track in Mexico in 1968, the stories of his life had already spread widely across the US, and the stories of his death would follow soon thereafter. These stories have never really stopped, which testifies to his abilities as an admirable orator for so many different authors. That he was a struggling author himself, though at times more struggling than author, is often overlooked when the Cassady figure is brought to attention. With this thesis I have tried to lift the veil of a life that seems, at first, overexposed. Yet even overexposed images harbor ambiguities. Neal Cassady was an author who, in his work, expressed

how his childhood experiences had shaped a grown man who was fully aware of his flaws and obsessions, who was even able to put them into decent, inventive prose, but who was nonetheless unable to escape the limitations that the conditions of his birth placed on him. Fortunately for us he learned to celebrate these disadvantages by writing them into literature, thus mapping them out in the deepest, most comprehensive fashion possible.

## Bibliography

- Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter," in: *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2008: 801–31.
- Berrigan, Ted. "The Art of Fiction No. 41," in: *The Paris Review*, No. 43, 1968.
- Brinkley, Douglas. *Windblown World: The Journals of Jack Kerouac 1947-1954*. Viking Penguin, 2004.
- Bush, Clive. "'Why do we always say Angel?': Herbert Huncke and Neal Cassady," in: Lee, Robert A. (ed.). *The Beat Generation Writers*. Lumiere Press/Pluto Press, 1996: 128-157.
- Campbell, James. "Kerouac's Blues," in: *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 59, No. 2, 2001: 451-459.
- Carden, Mary Paniccia. "'Adventures in Auto-Eroticism': Economies of Traveling Masculinity in *On the Road* and *The First Third*," in: Holton, Robert & Holladay, Hilary (eds.). *What's Your Road, Man? Critical Essays on Jack Kerouac's On the Road*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2009: 77-98.
- Cassady, Carolyn. "Excerpts from writing," found on: *The Neal Cassady Estate*, 2013. (Visited on 11-11-2016.) <http://www.nealcassadyestate.com/neal.html>
- *Off the Road: My Years with Cassady, Kerouac, and Ginsberg*. William Morrow and Company, 1990.
- Cassady, Neal. *The First Third*. City Lights Books, 1972.
- Charters, Ann (ed.). *The Portable Jack Kerouac*. Viking Penguin, 1995.
- (ed.). *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters: 1957-1969*. Penguin Books, 1999.
- Coolidge, Clark. "Kerouac," in: *The American Poetry Review*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1995: 43-49.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," in: *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Vol. 140, 1989: 139-167.
- Cresswell, Tim. "Mobility as Resistance: A Geographical Reading of Kerouac's *On the Road*," in: *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1993: 249-262.
- "Writing, Reading and the Problem of Resistance: A Reply to McDowell," in: *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1996: 420-424.
- Dardess, George. "The Delicate Dynamics of Friendship: A Reconsideration of Kerouac's *On The Road*," in: *American Literature*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 1974: 200-206.

- Dickstein, Morris. *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties*. Penguin Books, 1977.
- Douglas, Ann. “‘Telepathic Shock and Meaning Excitement’: Kerouac’s Poetics of Intimacy,” in: *College Literature* (John Hopkins University Press), Vol. 27, No. 1, 2000: 8-21.
- Fiennes, Sophie (dir.). *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology*. Zeitgeist Films, 2012. Narrated by Slavoj Žižek.
- García-Robles, Jorge. *The Stray Bullet: William S. Burroughs in Mexico*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Gifford, Barry (ed.). *As Ever: The Collected Correspondence of Allen Ginsberg and Neal Cassady*. California: Creative Arts Books Company, 1977.
- Guattari, Felix. “I am an idea-thief,” in: Guattari, Felix. *Soft subversions: Texts and interviews 1977–1985*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009: 22–33.
- Hall, Richard W. “Phonic Literature—A New sound for a New Age,” in: *The English Journal* (National Council of Teachers of English), Vol. 62, No. 3, 1973: 383-393.
- Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*. New York: The Viking Press, 1979.
- “The letters of Neal Cassady to Jack Kerouac,” in: *The Missouri Review*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1999: 91-123. Author unknown.
- Lyons, Leonard. “Lyons Den,” in: *Daily Defender* (Chicago), page 5, column 1, 27 January 1959.
- Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959.
- McDowell, Linda. “Off the Road: Alternative Views of Rebellion, Resistance and ‘The Beats,’” in: *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1996: 412-419.
- McNeil, Helen. “The Archaeology of Gender in the Beat Movement,” in: Lee, Robert A. (ed.). *The Beat Generation Writers*. Lumiere Press/Pluto Press, 1996: 178-199.
- Moore, David (ed.). *Neal Cassady: Collected Letters (1944-1967)*. Penguin Books, 2004.
- Morgan, Ted. *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs*. W.W. Norton & Company, 1988.
- Mortenson, Erik R. “Beating Time: Configurations of Temporality in Jack Kerouac’s ‘On the Road,’” in: *College Literature* (John Hopkins University Press), Vol. 28, No. 3, 2001: 51-67.
- Paton, Fiona. Review of *The View from “On the Road”: The Rhetorical Vision of Jack Kerouac*, by Omar Swartz. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 2000: 115-119.
- Prothero, Stephen. “On the Holy Road: The Beat Movement as Spiritual Protest,” in: *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 84, No. 2, 1991: 205-222.

- Puar, Jasbir K. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke University Press, 2007.
- . “‘I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess’: Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory,” in: *philoSOPHIA*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2012: 49-66.
- Richardson, Mark. “Peasant Dreams: Reading *On the Road*,” in: *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2001: 218-242.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Saint Genet, Actor and Martyr*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1963. Trans. Bernard Frechtmann.
- Seelye, John D. “The American Tramp: A Version of the Picaresque,” in: *American Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1963: 535-553.
- Smyth, Jacqui. “Getaway Cars and Broken Homes: Searching for the American Dream ‘Anywhere but Here’,” in: *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1999: 115-132.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Can the subaltern speak?” in: Ashcroft, Bill (ed.). *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Taylor & Francis, 2006.
- Stephenson, Gregory. “Friendly and Flowing Savage: The Literary Legend of Neal Cassady,” in: *The Daybreak Boys: Essays on the Literature of the Beat Generation*. Southern Illinois University Press, 1990: 154-171.
- Stimpson, Catharine R. “The Beat Generation And The Trials Of Homosexual Liberation,” in: *Salmagundi*, No. 58/59, 1982-3: 373-392.
- Swansburg, John. “The Self-Made Man: The Story of America’s most pliable, pernicious, irrepressible myth,” found on: *Slate*, 29 September 2014. (Visited on 11-11-2016.)  
[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/history/2014/09/the\\_self\\_made\\_man\\_history\\_of\\_a\\_myth\\_from\\_ben\\_franklin\\_to\\_andrew\\_carnegie.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history/2014/09/the_self_made_man_history_of_a_myth_from_ben_franklin_to_andrew_carnegie.html)
- White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. London: John Hopkins University Press, 1973.
- Woolf, Michael P. “The Madman as Hero in Contemporary American Fiction,” in: *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1976: 257-269.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *How to Read: Lacan*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2007.