

UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Faculty of Philosophy

English Studies

Elina Vesala

From Bowery Bums to Eastside Intellectuals  
Human Environment in Jack Kerouac's *The Town and the City* and *On the Road*

Master's Thesis

Vaasa 2016



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	3
1 INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 American society and the Beat Generation	6
1.2 Jack Kerouac	12
1.3 The Material	13
1.3.1 <i>The Town and the City</i>	14
1.3.2 <i>On the Road</i>	17
1.4 Studies on Kerouac and urbanism	20
2 URBAN THEORIES AND SUBURBANIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES	23
2.1 Theories of urban sociology	24
2.2 Urban Literary Theories	28
3 HUMAN ENVIRONMENT IN <i>THE TOWN AND THE CITY</i> AND <i>ON THE ROAD</i>	34
3.1 Human environment in <i>The Town and the City</i>	35
3.1.1 Opportunity in <i>The Town and the City</i>	35
3.1.2 Independence in <i>The Town and the City</i>	37
3.1.3. Emotional bonds in <i>The Town and the City</i>	38
3.1.4 Outsiderness in <i>The Town and the City</i>	41
3.2 Human environment in <i>On the Road</i>	46
3.2.1 Inspiration in <i>On the Road</i>	46
3.2.2 Border crossing in <i>On the Road</i>	49
4 CONCLUSIONS	56
WORKS CITED	59



---

**UNIVERSITY OF VAASA****Faculty of Philosophy**

**Discipline:** English Studies  
**Author:** Elina Vesala  
**Master's thesis:** From Bowery Bums to Eastside Intellectuals  
Human Environment in Jack Kerouac's *The Town and the City* and *On the Road*  
**Degree:** Master of Arts  
**Date:** 2016  
**Supervisor:** Tiina Mäntymäki

---

**ABSTRACT**

Tämä tutkielma käsittelee kaupunkitilaa ja keskittyy erityisesti ihmisympäristöön Jack Kerouacin kahdessa romaanissa *The Town and the City* ja *On the Road* (suom. *Matkalla*). Tarkoituksena on tutkia miten ihmisympäristö esitetään valituissa kirjoissa. Ihmisympäristöllä tarkoitetaan ihmisiirteitä, jotka muodostavat kunkin tapahtumapaikan, kuten väkijoukot, ohikulkijat, kodittomat, katumuusikot tai kerjäläiset. Teoriapohjana käytän kaupunkitutkimusta, erityisesti kirjallisuuden näkökulmasta.

Jack Kerouacin teoksia on tutkittu niiden julkaisusta alkaen paljon, mutta kaupunkiympäristöä tai ihmisympäristöä kirjojen kaupungeissa ei ole tutkittu laajasti. Kirjojen kirjoittamisen aikaan amerikkalainen kaupunkikuva oli muuttumassa uusien lähiöiden kehittymisen myötä, joka tekee aiheesta erityisen mielenkiintoisen.

*The Town and the City* ja *On the Road* -romaaneissa kaupungit ovat yleisimpiä tapahtumapaikkoja ja myös pääroolissa kirjojen päähahmojen lisäksi. Teoksissa kuvaillaan tarkasti hahmojen ympärillä avautuvaa kaupunkiympäristöä, keskittyen erityisesti monipuoliseen ihmisympäristöön. Kaupungit ja niiden ihmisympäristöt avaavat *The Town and the City* -romaanin päähahmoille mahdollisuuksia itsenäisyyteen mutta myös ulkopuolisuuden kokemukseen uudessa kaupunkiympäristössä. *On the Road* -romaanissa päähenkilöt ovat kokeneita kaupungissa eläjiä, joille kaupunkien monipuolinen ihmisympäristö toimii inspiraation lähteenä ja mahdollisuutena ylittää olemassa olevia ja kuviteltuja rajoja.

---

**KEYWORDS:** urban literary studies, human environment, American urban image, Beat Generation, Jack Kerouac



## 1 INTRODUCTION

Jack Kerouac was part of the Beat Generation who mainly flourished in an urban environment and also wrote about issues that were considered to be urban during the 1950s and 1960s, such as new types of music, art and in general new ways of living. Moreover, Beats longed for freedom of speech and expression, which might not have been possible in smaller towns or in suburban surroundings (Raskin 2004: 10). These artists needed an environment where their works would be appreciated and where they would be able to enjoy other forms of culture and the urban surroundings were able to provide them these.

As Kerouac is one of the best-known Beats, and a significant American writer, he and his works have been studied in great detail. However, not much has been written academically about the Beats' way to deal with the urbanity of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, even though urbanism can be seen as an important element when considering the ongoing changes in the American society. I was unable to find any previous studies on urban space in Jack Kerouac's works, but there seems to be academic studies focusing on the theme of nature in his work, such as Rod Phillip's work "*Forest Beatniks*" and "*Urban Thoreaus*": Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, Lew Welch, and Michael McClure (2001).

Therefore, the aim of this study is to find out how urban space is constructed through human environment in Jack Kerouac's two novels, *The Town and the City* (1950) and *On the Road* (1955). By human environment I mean the human features that constitute a setting, such as crowds, passersby and generic fixtures of cities such as musicians, beggars and homeless people.

Roy Kozlowsky (2004: 195) has described the Beat generation's endeavor as a spatial project, which can be followed by overlaying significant works from the Beat writers. The spatial project was defined by the post-war American political space, and it is divided into three different spaces: the continental, the urban, and the domestic space. I

will focus on the urban space in this thesis and Kozlowsky's (2004) material will be used as a starting point for the study and I will develop the ideas further.

This study's theoretical framework draws on urban studies and urban literary studies. To be able to understand the urban setting of the post-war American society, urban studies are needed to understand the specific era in the American urban history, as then great changes were happening and movement from the city centers to the suburbs began. The on-going changes in the American urban image in the time of the publication of the two novels analyzed will be discussed in the light of the American urban history. Modern urban literary studies will be used as part of the theoretical framework for this thesis. Hana Wirth Neshet's *City Codes* (2008) is used to analyze and discuss *The Town and the City* and *On the Road*, as *City Codes* analyzes modern literature in terms of their urban space and presentation, including my main subject, the human environment.

### 1.1 American society and the Beat Generation

The Beat Generation, Jack Kerouac among them, created significant works of art in terms of aesthetics but also as reflectors of their time and society that were going through great and historical changes in the United States during the 1940s and the 1950s. For example the effects of the Cold War, such as the fear of communism and the growing economy of the United States led to a general conformist atmosphere within the American society. Moreover, the rising level of prosperity and increasingly popular suburban way of living were significant reasons behind the rise of commercialism which increased the level of conformism in the United States. (Raskin 2004: 3-5.)

The Beat Generation formed in the United States during the 1950s as a group of friends and artists who shared a similar passion towards life and arts and a discontent towards the current conformist society of the United States. Allen Ginsberg, probably the best known poet of the generation described the frustrated feelings of the visionary young



artists in the following way: “Everything seemed to run on a routine of unspiritualized mediocrity. Standardization and mechanization and control of the individual psyche seem a *fait accompli*” (quoted in Raskin 2004: 161). In comparison with the general public of the time who preferred the commercial and conformist society, the Beats seemed very open-minded and free-spirited people. People like the Beats began to gather in American cities like New York and San Francisco where they would inspire and support each other with their new ways of creating and discovering art and literature. Cities and the urban space were important for the new generation as the urban surroundings had a wider variety of culture and thus a wider variety of people within them, and therefore the new generation with its ideas would have more space for itself and more opportunities to gain support. In small towns with a more narrow cultural and ideological space, new and radical ideas that the Beat Generation had, might not have flourished and gained supporters as they did in the cities.

The Beat generation was originally formed in New York where Kerouac met Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassady, William Burroughs, John Clellon Holmes and other early members of the generation (Raskin 2004: 6). Some of them were part of some minority groups that would not have been accepted in the middle-class suburbs of the time; for example their political, religious or sexual interests were against the mainstream populations’ interests and would thus not have been tolerated in the newly built suburbs.

The origins of the term “Beat Generation” is often credited to Jack Kerouac as he brought up the word “beat” in a conversation with another member of the generation, John Clellon Holmes in 1948 by saying “Ah this is nothing but a beat generation.” They were discussing the Lost Generation and were thinking whether the current generation should be “a found generation” or perhaps “an angelic generation”. (Ginsberg 1995: 17.) The Lost Generation was a group of American writers who had experienced the First World War in one way or another and at the same time had come of age. Members of the group included for example Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, T.S. Eliot and Gertrude Stein. The war affected the group of writers greatly, especially in terms of their exile from the American society. They had moved to Europe in the 1910s or 1920s

and formed a group in France. Many writers of the group moved abroad in order to see America and its society more clearly. (Morley 2012: 147 – 149.)

Four years after the discussion with Kerouac, Holmes wrote in the *New York Times Magazine* an article titled “This Is The Beat Generation” describing the term as follows: “It involves a sort of nakedness of mind, and ultimately, of soul, a feeling of being reduced to the bedrock of consciousness.” (quoted in Ginsberg 1995: 17). In Holmes’ article the Beat Generation was mentioned in print for the first time, and Holmes described the generation to be open-minded and looking for their visions and enlightenment. Later also Jack Kerouac defined “beat” in his book *Desolation Angels* (1965: XX):

Everything is going to the beat — It’s the beat generation, it be-at, it’s the beat to keep, it’s the beat of the heart, it’s being beat and down in the world and like oldtime lowdown and like in ancient civilizations the slave boatmen rowing galleys to a beat and servants spinning pottery to a beat [...]

Kerouac’s description of the Beat Generation mixes the passionate beat of the music to the state of being beat down, being outside society or at the low depths of society and working to the beat of a drum as a slave for the higher classes of society.

An important feature of the Beat Generation was a new kind of spirituality with which some members of the generation aimed for enlightenment and inspirational visions influenced by the Far Eastern religions, such as Zen Buddhism. By committing themselves to the new kind of spirituality they opposed the traditional Christianity of the United States and the consumerism of the post-war era. (van Elteren 1999: 80.) Moreover, the Beats were highly influenced by the repressed African American culture in the United States; the Beats would draw influences from the African American language and jazz, especially bebop which was still considered to be the music of the African American minorities (Holton 2004: 22). These African-American influences would become manifested later in the works of Kerouac and Ginsberg, as they would describe for example wild bebop shows and use the slang of the minorities.

What van Elteren (1999: 81) calls “romantic version of racism” is that the Beats and especially Kerouac imagined “blacks as pre-social, at ease with play”, especially referring to their skills and interest in jazz music. Moreover, the Beats promoted so-called voluntary poverty alongside natural primitivism as a way to prevent them from being in touch with any influences from the commercial world (van Elteren 1999: 84). Also Kerouac blurred the lines between chosen and forced outsiderism when considering the racial oppression in the United States during the time of the Beat Generation. The Beats had voluntarily chosen to leave mainstream society with an aim to experience something new and real, whereas the blacks of the mid-20th century had not chosen to be outside American society; they were left there because they were different and for them it was very difficult even to try to join mainstream culture as they were harshly discriminated against.

Jack Kerouac, other members of the Beat generation and artists in general moved to the centers of big cities to gain acceptance and support from like-minded people. Suburbs and outer parts of cities were considered to be more intolerant towards minorities such as gays, politically or religiously deviant persons, and in general the suburbs were mainly populated by traditional white middle class families who had fled the cities and their growing restlessness and lack of space for housing. (Beauregard 2006: 100). Those left behind in the cities were mostly elderly people who had lived in the city all their lives, young singles, childless couples and minorities (Bauregard 2006: 47). Therefore artists looking for inspiration, freedom or market for their work were most likely to move to big cities such as New York, Los Angeles or San Francisco and specifically to areas with significant bohemian influences such as Greenwich Village in New York or North Beach in San Francisco. Such was the case with the Beat Generation.

As artists, including the members of the Beat generation, decided to stay in the cities because of the opportunities and freedom the cities were offering, they were placing themselves outside the mainstream society on purpose. Russell Jacoby (1987: 28) explains that “[t]he self-proclaimed outsiders flourish exclusively on the inside.” This

means that the artists needed to be inside the metropolis to be able to live their lives as they wished and to create their art, which forced them to be outside the society. The ideas some of the artists, especially the Beats used in their works were controversial, for example sexuality, freedom of speech and spirituality. Novels dealing with these topics were not suitable to publish according to some critics, and there were two famous obscenity trials at the time, one being on Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956) and another on William S. Burrough's *Naked Lunch* (1959) (Raskin 2004: 214-220.). The conformist society of the time did not find the use of drugs and some activities described in the books to be acceptable, and the conservative parts of society felt threatened by the Beats' new ways of expressing themselves through literature.

Beauregard (2006: 135) uses the term bohemians for the artists, musicians, novelists, poets, gays and lesbians and other escapees from the mainstream who do not want to be part of the family-centered suburbia. This term can also be used for the Beat Generation, as Russell Jacoby (1987: 54) argues in *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*. Jacoby (1987: 27-28) explains how bohemians needed to live in cities: they simply lived off of them and the size or the wealth of the city did not matter, but the atmosphere or the texture of the urban surroundings would be the more important reasons. Moreover, according to Jacoby (1987: 27) the busy streets, cheap eateries, reasonable rents and decent environs of certain cities nourished the bohemians.

However, these ideal bohemian environments would be easily damaged, for example by economic depression, prosperity, urban renewal or slums, and many of the changes were taking place in many of the great American cities from 1940s to 1960s (Jacoby 1987: 28). Jacoby's statements make it more understandable that the Beats were an urban generation and urbanity was an important part of their ethos. Jacoby (1987: 55) also claims that the Beats were the last urban bohemians, as after them the ideal urban environment for bohemian living was damaged, for example by higher rents and a lack of services. After the "urban collapse" artists moved to the countryside, and thus the bohemia became rural and also invisible, as in the countryside they would not gain as

much attention, and the bohemian culture had gained its crucial vitality from urbanism (Jacoby 1987: 52-53).

A significant change in the Beat movement came after some of the mainstream population of the United States, especially the young started to accept and even idolize the Beats. The young saw the new generation as a way of rebelling against the previous generations, and therefore the art and lifestyle of the Beat Generation became partially integrated into the mainstream culture. However, most of the Beat artists still did not want to become part of the mainstream society even though it might have meant more success for their art. The artists and the original Beats got a group of followers, Beatniks, who later became a trend of the early 1960s. As most of the Beats wanted to stay outside society they excluded themselves to remote places or inside their own heads with meditation, drugs or alcohol. (Phillips 1995: 24.)

The Beats can also be seen as precursors for the hippie movement of the 1960s, as they both were youth countercultures rebelling against the prevailing industrialization and conformism in their societies (Albright 1999: 351). However, Albright (1999: 352-353) also argues that although the hippies and the Beats had a great deal in common, they were also very different in some points of view. For example many of the Beats lived in isolation as the hippies preferred large communities. In addition the Beats were seen as pessimists and socially apathetic while the hippies were mostly optimistic activists. They also had great differences in their generations' overall taste in arts; for example in music the Beats preferred jazz in small, dark clubs as the hippies created psychedelic rock which was played in big festivals and outdoor concerts. (Albright 1999: 351-353.) When compared to the Beat Generation, the hippies lived as part of the society and were rebelling against it from the inside, positively believing that they could make a change in the world. Poet-publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who lived as part of the Beat Generation and also among the hippies wrote down the most important influences the Beat Generation had on the hippie counterculture:

[...] the turn toward Far East, Buddhist philosophy and mysticism in general, ecological consciousness, political positions. Further parallels were pacifism and antiwar positions, and generally the fact that both were youth revolts, maybe the first revolts of the Twentieth Century against mechanization and industrialization. What hasn't been said enough is that the counterculture was a youth revolt that, it seems to me, began with the Beats. (Puterbaugh 1999: 362.)

Therefore, as the Beats can be seen as the inspiration and the beginning of the hippie movement, they did not only affect their own era during the 1950s but also the cultures of later decades and later generations.

## 1.2 Jack Kerouac

Jean-Luis “Jack” K  rouac was born on March 12 1922 in Lowell, Massachusetts to French-Canadian parents. He spent his childhood in the small town of Lowell and moved to New York after receiving a football scholarship to Columbia University. However, after injuring himself on the football field and having continuous arguments with his coach, Kerouac decided to drop out of the university. After dropping out Jack continued to live in New York and joined the United States Merchant Marine in 1942. (McNally 2003: 4, 30-31, 43-47.) During his Merchant Marine days he wrote his first book, *The Sea is My Brother*, which was unpublished until 2011. The first published work during his lifetime was *The Town and the City*, which came out in 1950 and was followed by *On the Road* in 1957.

From a young age Kerouac did not seem to fit into the small town life: he studied hard and focused on reading and writing and dreamed of becoming a writer or a journalist. These life goals were uncommon among his classmates who often continued their family businesses or enlisted to the army. (McNally 2003: 22-30.) Therefore since early childhood it seemed, as the city would give Kerouac the possibilities he had been looking for and dreaming of.

During the time between the publication of *The Town and the City* and *On the Road* Kerouac travelled all over the United States, mainly between East and West and back to New York, where his parents had moved and where his mother still lived. His father had died of cancer in 1946. Between the years 1950 and 1957 Kerouac had some odd jobs, was a heavy user of drugs and alcohol and suffered occasionally from depression. During this time he wrote drafts that would later be published and be known as *The Subterraneans* (1958), *Doctor Sax* (1959) and *Tristessa* (1960) among others. (see McNally 2003.)

Kerouac had all his life dreamed of becoming a literary figure; however, when he became one, he could not get any joy or satisfaction from it. His life seemed to be filled with his dependency on alcohol and on his mother with whom he lived. Moreover, Kerouac would feel lonely, as his friends had begun to disappear from his life because of his severe alcoholism. (Watson 1995: 294.) Kerouac described his feelings to Allen Ginsberg in the following way: “I see nothing ahead of me but ease and joy and yet my mind is so dark, and so lonesome, sometimes I could cry on your shoulder or Bill’s or Neil’s any minute.” (quoted in Watson 1995: 294).

Kerouac spent his last years in St. Petersburg, Florida, with his mother and his new wife. He finished his last novel *Vanity of Duluo* in 1968 but died the next year at the age of 47 following his mixed use of alcohol and drugs. (Watson 1995: 295-299.)

### 1.3 The Material

*The Town and the City* (henceforth TC in references) was the first novel to be published by Kerouac in 1950. It never gained much commercial success, but *On the Road* (henceforth OR in references) changed it all, as it became very popular among critics and readers, even though it dealt with sensitive topics such as drugs and sexuality. After *On the Road* Kerouac did not have difficulties to publish the rest of his works, and he became a well-known writer who gained fame across the United States and even abroad.

The novels have some common themes, yet possibly the most obvious and important common theme is the city and the urban surroundings. Although urban space is a recurring and significant theme in both novels, they have slightly different approaches to the theme. In *The Town and the City*, the urban space and the city in general are seen through the eyes of people coming from a small town, outside the metropolitan area, whereas in *On the Road* the viewpoint is mainly of a person who has spent quite some time in urban surroundings and has come to see it as a home and feels comfortable in it.

### 1.3.1 *The Town and the City*

After the Second World War Kerouac's parents had moved from Lowell to Queens and in 1946 Jack decided to stay at their home to nurse his father who had cancer, while his mother kept working in a factory to support them. Later that year his father died and grief-stricken Kerouac swore to write "a huge novel explaining everything to everybody". That is how Kerouac got his inspiration for *The Town and the City*, and he continued to write the novel for two more years, while his mother supported him. (Charters 1991: xii.) When *The Town and the City* was published it gained some reviews, for example *Newsweek* called the novel "almost a major work" and *New York Times* thought it was "a rough diamond of a book". However, the critics thought that the negative views of the city were "exaggerated". Despite the rather substantial number of reviews the novel sold poorly. (McNally 2003: 125.)

When compared to the rest of Kerouac's works *The Town and the City* is an exceptional novel, as it has the style and structure of a more conventional novel. For this novel he used Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929) as his literary model but afterwards he would be disappointed with it and would create his own way of writing that would be called "spontaneous prose" (Charters 1991: xii).

Like everything else Kerouac wrote, also *The Town and the City* is autobiographical. The novel focuses on the Martin family from around the year 1935 to the end of the



Second World War in a small town of Galloway, Massachusetts and later in New York. The family consists of the parents and their eight children. Galloway represents Kerouac's hometown Lowell and the family is like Kerouac's own family, yet Jack himself is divided between three characters: Peter, Francis and Joe.

The story of the novel centers on the breakup of the first seemingly happy Martin family. The family's breakup is caused by the father, who is unable to maintain the family's standard of living and his business ends in a financial disaster. The novel follows the children and how they react to the situation. To increase the troubles of the family, the Second World War breaks out and makes the family's situation feel even more hopeless; the romantic surroundings of the countryside and small town life give away to the sometimes harsh reality of city life. This all is seen through the eyes of a small town person, as some members of the family are forced to move into a city. McNally (2003: 102) describes how "Jack's story told the whole legend of wartime America itself, a picture upon which was written the great story of wandering, sadness, parting, farewell and war."

The character who is followed in most detail and who seems to be most like Kerouac himself is Peter, who is a romantic at heart and dreams of leaving the small town of Galloway for a big city full of possibilities. After struggles of becoming part of the local football team and gaining some respect in it, Peter wins a football scholarship, which later makes it possible for him to enter Pennsylvania State University. Therefore, with his skills in football, he is given the possibility to fulfill his dreams and move away from his hometown to a big city and also to have the chance to study seriously in a respected college. However, he soon drops out of the university and joins the Merchant Marine to enter the Second World War as many of his hometown friends and brothers already had. After the war and Peter's several passages with the Merchant Marine he seems to be unable to decide what to do with his life, but he stays in New York where his parents and youngest siblings have moved, uprooted by the war. While living in New York Peter meets urbanites and academics, whose backgrounds are very different from his. However he ends up making good friends with many of them.

Francis is the second oldest of the brothers and he is seen as the most intellectual character in the Martin family. He aims for academic excellence and can sometimes be very arrogant and even rude towards his family. He cannot stand the family's life in Galloway, and therefore, after he gets into Harvard he is only seldom seen with his family, and he prefers the company of his new intellectual, urban circles. Despite his general negative attitude towards traditions, also Francis signs up for the army, yet during the trainings he realizes how he could not be part of the orderly world of the military. Francis manages to wiggle out of the service by faking a serious headache, acting slightly out of his mind before the psychiatrist and finally ending up in a locked ward before getting out and getting "an honorable medical discharge" (TC: 329).

The oldest son of the family, Joe, is more of a country boy than urban city dweller. He fixes cars and takes care of his younger siblings, yet has some adventures of his own. He is a good-hearted working-class youngster who does not go to college but, instead, starts driving a truck around the country and later enlists in the army. After the war Joe dreams of having a farm with his family outside his hometown Galloway.

*The Town and the City* has several ending scenes and one of them is the funeral of George Martin, the father of the family. He had died of an illness in New York and Peter had taken care of him while the mother of the family had been working to support them. The family finally has a reunion at the funeral, even though many members of the family have passed away, some in the war and now the father after the war. The final scene in the novel is when Peter takes off on the road,

[...] travelling the continent westward, going off to further and further years, alone by the waters of life, alone, looking towards the lights of the river's cape, towards tapers burning warmly in the towns, looking down along the shore in remembrance of the dearness of his father and of all life (TC: 499).

This is where Kerouac's next novel, *On the Road* begins and gives more light to the journeys he would have after the death of his father. Moreover, *On the Road* presents

more urban characters, as the novel is set in different cities, and the rural side of the United States is shown only very rarely.

### 1.3.2 *On the Road*

*On the Road* is the novel that gave Kerouac the fame and publicity he had earlier wished for but later cursed. It made him the image of the new generation and the so-called King of the Beats. Ann Charters (1991: viii) explains that Kerouac became the King of the Beats because he was the one who defined the generation in his novel *On the Road* and thus gave the readership the idea of him being a spokesperson for the new generation. However, Kerouac might not have agreed on being the definer or spokesperson of the Beats, as around the time of the publication of *On the Road* journalists were mostly interested in the emergence of the new radical generation instead of Kerouac's ideas on religion or his feelings on his French-Canadian roots (Charters 1991: ix). Therefore, even though Kerouac had been able to find his personal voice and have the novel published, he still struggled to gain the kind of publicity and understanding he had been seeking for.

While writing *The Town and the City* in 1947, Kerouac had his earliest road adventures and was thoroughly overwhelmed by them; therefore he decided to base his new novel on those experiences. The style of the new novel started to take shape as Kerouac realized how inspirational jazz music, especially bebop was. He enjoyed the wildness of the music and wrote how "I like things to GO and rock and be flipped, I want to be stoned if I'm going to be stoned at all, I like to be gassed by a back-alley music [...]" (Charters 1991: xv.) He was looking for a unique and new way of expressing the feelings he and the people around him were having. What helped Kerouac to find the right style were mostly his closest friends, his frequent correspondence with them and the life he experienced while on the road.

After the novel was published in 1957 the conservative newspapers gave it negative reviews and even "denied its existence as art" and saw it as an immoral way for the Beat

Generation to rebel against the mainstream (McNally 2003: 240). Despite the negative reviews *On the Road* made the best-seller list for five weeks, Kerouac got approached by movie companies for movie rights and he got an aggressive fan base. The public wanted Jack to be the wild Dean Moriarty of *On the Road* and the King of the Beats, even though in reality he was the novel's Sal Paradise, the narrator and the quiet observer. Kerouac did not enjoy all the attention but was instead wondering: "What am I doing here? Is this the way I'm supposed to feel?" (McNally 2003: 242-243).

One of the main characters of *On the Road* is Dean Moriarty, Kerouac's fictional portrayal of Neil Cassady. Another main character is Sal Paradise, an aspiring young writer whom Kerouac wrote to portray himself next to the "great amorous soul" of Moriarty and to be the narrator and the moral background of the story (Charters 1991: xx). Rest of the characters include other members of the Beat Generation and Dean's and Sal's girlfriends and wives. The wives and girlfriends seem to change often in the novel, but they were among the reasons why Dean and Sal kept travelling and being on the road from one city to another.

*On the Road* is divided into five parts. In these five parts Sal crosses the United States from east to west three times and once from north to south, all the way to Mexico City. In the first part Sal hitchhikes alone from New York to San Francisco to meet his friends and while travelling he visits Chicago to see the local jazz scene. One of his hitchhikes was "the greatest ride of his life" at the back of a pick-up truck with some farmer boys and hobos, sharing a bottle of whiskey (OR: 22-23). When finally reaching San Francisco, Sal is thrilled by all the possibilities the great western city has to offer with its people, music and places to see and experience and wonders how "There is something brown and holy about the East; and California is white like washlines and emptyheaded – at least that's what I thought then" (OR: 71).

Second part of *On the Road* begins when Sal and Dean meet in New York after having been apart for over a year. Dean is on the run from his wife and baby daughter, but has his young girlfriend Marylou and a common friend Ed Dunkel travelling with him. Sal

and his group travel through New Orleans to San Francisco, where they enjoy what the city had to offer, for example the wild jazz scene of San Francisco: “I never saw such crazy musicians. Everybody in Frisco blew. It was the end of the continent; they didn’t give a damn.” (OR: 160-161).

In the third part it is spring 1949 and Sal begins another journey from the East coast to West to meet Dean. They decide to travel eastwards, as the West has not brought them what they had been looking for. They stop in Denver and in Chicago to get as much out of the cities in the short time they were going to spend in them. They go to jazz concerts, meet new and old friends, Dean steals cars and spends their travel money on entertainment.

Some months later Sal and Dean decide to drive to Mexico to see what they thought would be freedom and real wild life. What they face while travelling in Mexico is heat, drugs, brothels, poverty and a countryside that is nothing like in the United States. According to Dean, Mexico City “is the only city in the entire land” and the rest is rural and almost untouched land, far away is the hectic urban life of New York. (OR: 252). As they reach Mexico City they see it as “the great and final wild uninhibited Fellahin-childlike city that we knew we would find at the end of the road.” (OR: 275.) Even the capital still has some wildness in it and it seems completely different in comparison with Washington, D.C. where Sal had visited earlier during his travels.

Another member of the Beat Generation, William Burroughs, explained some of the effects which publishing *On the Road* had on American society and also some of the reasons behind the rise of the popularity of the Beat Generation after *On the Road*:

After 1957 *On the Road* sold a trillion levis and a million espresso coffee machines, and also sent countless kids on the road. This was of course due in part to the media, the arc-opportunists. They know a story when they see one, and the Beat movement was a story, and a big one ... The Beat literary movement came at exactly the right time and said something that millions of people of all nationalities all over the world were waiting to hear. You can’t tell anybody anything he doesn’t know already. The

alienation, the restlessness, the dissatisfaction were already there waiting when Kerouac pointed out on the road. (Quoted in Charters 1991: xxvii.)

Kerouac's *On the Road* inspired people to express themselves to the full despite the limitations the current society had set on them. They could enjoy new kinds of culture such as jazz or enlighten themselves with new types of eastern spirituality, or travel the country with likeminded people looking for experiences they could only get on the road or in an urban surrounding.

#### 1.4 Studies on Kerouac and urbanism

Even though I was unable to find previous studies on urbanism in Kerouac's novels, I was able to find some that deal with a similar topic. Roy Kozlowsky's *Beat Spaces* (2004) focuses on Kerouac's *On the Road* and its representation of the American post-war space and shortly mentions the urban space, with focus on its politics. In his article Kozlowsky explains how

Beat writers developed, as individuals and as a group, an engagement with space that informed their writing methods and literary production. Their aim was to carve out the concrete space of America an alternative, fictional space that would define the relationship between the space, society and power. (Kozlowsky 2004: 194)

Kozlowsky (2004: 195) describes the Beat endeavor as a spatial project which can be recovered by overlaying the most important works from the Beat writers. He continues by defining *On the Road* by its political space of the post-war America and dividing it to three different scales: the continental, the urban, and the domestic space, yet he does not go into great detail with his study of the urban space, as he gives only few examples from the novel and explains them shortly (Kozlowsky 2004: 194-195).

In *Beat Spaces* Kozlowsky (2004: 194) explains how *On the Road* maps "the concrete historical space as it was forged by the systematic transformation of American politics,

economy, demography, and technology, which began with the Roosevelt's New Deal and climaxed in the early Cold War era." Kozlowsky pays special attention to the historical situation the American society was in at the time and sees how *On the Road* critiques specific developments in its structure and organization, for example the changing structure of urban life and the redefinition of domesticity.

According to Kozlowsky (2004: 206), by 1950s the suburbs were expanding ten times faster than the cities in order to accommodate the new, growing post-war generations. Also in the eyes of mass media the inner city was the counter-image of the suburbs: full of dangers and crime with high percentages of poverty. Kozlowsky sums up that in this context the works of the Beats goes against the grain of "the great spatial transformation of American urban space", as they would make the cities the privileged sites of their poetics. He continues that the Beat writers incorporated the experiences of the city into their poetics, focusing especially on the marginal groups of people and spaces, so that they could escape the processes of normalization. (Kozlowsky (2004: 207.)

By positioning themselves outside the American society, Beat writers were exploring different social strata of the city: Kerouac for example was very interested in black urban culture, especially jazz. Kozlowsky (2004: 208) highlights how in *On the Road*, the cities that the main character Sal Paradise visits, were the centers of bebop activity. What is remarkable in these jazz scenes in *On the Road* is how they are represented as urban events, "spilling from the stage to the public space of the street (Kozlowsky 2004: 208)." Therefore the jazz culture was truly a part of the city as the concerts and the parties often continued on the streets of the city and not only hidden from the public eye in some basement clubs.

Kozlowsky (2004: 210) claims in *Beat Spaces* how even though the discovery of the complexity and plurality of urban experience might not have been an explicit agenda for Kerouac and the other Beat writers, the members of the Beat generation were helping to prefigure the rediscovery of the city by urban theorists such as Kevin Lynch and Jane Jacobs. Moreover, Kozlowsky (2004: 210) names the urban project of the Beats to be

the exploration of the postwar conditions of urban disorder and inequality and Kerouac made these aspects of the city to be the foundation of his poetics and politics.



## 2 URBAN THEORIES AND SUBURBANIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES

I will discuss some urban theories and the growth and effects of suburbanization in the United States in this chapter. Urban theories are relevant for my study as I use them to analyze Kerouac's novels in terms of the urban space present in them. I will also discuss some earlier studies on the field of urban literature studies that are relevant for my study.

In part 2.1 I will discuss Beauregard's (2006) theories of urban sociology in order to help the reader to understand American society and its changes during the time of publication of *The Town and the City* and *On the Road*. I will discuss urban literary theories in part 2.2 to take a brief look at the topic, for example Richard Lehan's *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (1998) which focuses on earlier urban literary studies and Hana Wirth-Nesher's *City Codes* (2008) which focuses on modern literature and their urban influences.

Before moving on to the theories I would like to define the term modern because of its importance to the American society and the Beat Generation. Moreover, city is a modern concept. Modernism affected the Beat Generation and Jack Kerouac greatly, as the time of modernism is cited to be from the 1890s to the 1930s (Morley 2012: 3). Modernism was coming to an end around the time many members of the Beat Generation were about to start their lives as grown-ups and independent individuals. The factors that formed modernism in Western society were for example the development of modern industrial societies, rapid growth of cities, rejection of Enlightenment thinking and the horrors of the First World War (Morley 2012: 2-5).

The American modernist writers, such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway and Williams Carlos Williams, wrote about "the confusing experience of life in the city, the bewilderment of diversity, the fragmentation of identity and the excitement of forging a new identity." (Morley 2012: 3-4.) For Americans the experience and the shock of modernism were greater than they were, for example to Europeans as the

American economy was developing quickly. The shock of consumerism, industrialization, immigration and the city were considered to be part of the experience of the modern world and modernist literature. (Morley 2012: 3-5.)

The American city, especially New York, has long been synonymous with modernity. Louis Wirth (1938: 1), the great sociologist, noted that “the beginning of what is distinctively modern in our civilization is best signaled by the growth of great cities.”. The growing American economy brought immigrants and new businesses with their skyscrapers to the cities. Never before in the history of American cities had poverty and affluence been living in such a close distance. The wealthy businessmen gazed down from their skyscraper offices to the poor neighborhoods of the new Americans, who had arrived from other countries to start their new lives from scratch. (Morley 2012: 59 – 61.)

## 2.1 Theories of urban sociology

The urban theories that are discussed in this study are theories of urban sociology. Beauregard (2006) takes a look at the general suburbanization of the United States with a sociological focus and his work *How America Became Suburban* (2006) shall be discussed first. After this I will focus on some major urban sociologists' theories.

America in the late 1940s and early 1950s was in a turning point: the country had got out of the Second World War and was about to enter the Cold War with Soviet Union. Within the borders of the United States the image of the country was going to change from the current urban setting to a suburban one. The change from urban to suburban was due to several different factors and caused physical and mental changes in the United States. These changes had an effect on the lives of the Beats, on the way in which Kerouac experienced the urban life and the city in the 1940s and 1950s, thus these changes affected the way Kerouac wrote about the urban experiences.

As the Second World War came to an end, the economy of the United States was growing and the American citizens were able to spend the money they had saved during the wartime (Beauregard 2006: 1-2). Due to high productivity and booming international trade most Americans were able to enjoy rising wages and new work opportunities which led to growing size of the middle class (Beauregard 2006: 13). As the middle class grew and the cities were getting crowded people started to move away from the urban centers to suburban areas outside the central cities. Some cities were crowded because of housing shortages that were common during the Second World War. There were housing shortages because some cities had witnessed great growth in their population because war industries had started their productions and lured new workers into the cities in the 1930s and 1940s (Flanagan 2010: 218).

After the war the movement from the inner cities to the outskirts of the cities became possible for example because of the wealth of the middle class, new and productive postwar housing industry and low-cost mortgages offered by banks for new home-buyers. Moreover, the automobile had turned into a consumer object middle-class families could afford and thus the husbands would be able to commute from the suburbs to their workplaces and other locations outside the suburbia. (Beauregard 2006: 44.)

Another key element for the mass urbanization was consumerism that had taken root in the new suburban lifestyle. As people had more money, they were able to buy new home appliances to their newly built homes, and with the growing need for new consumer products the producers needed to increase their production levels. The increase in the productions levels led to even more profits and later more increases in the wages of the workers. The rising domestic prosperity was caused by the consumption-focused suburban lifestyle, and therefore it became a circle feeding itself. (Beauregard 2006: 101.)

The mass urbanization of the United States in the 1950s had severe effects on the old industrial cities and to city centers in general. Beauregard (2006: 40) calls this kind of change 'parasitic urbanization'. Before parasitic urbanization there was distributive

urbanization, which allowed for the national growth to be shared (Beauregard 2006: 3). Parasitic urbanization is characterized by suburbs that are gaining all the profits from the new way of living, while central cities are losing their residents. Moreover, the central cities begin to lack employment and as a result will suffer from poverty and criminality. When middle class citizens were leaving the urban centers they took a great amount of businesses with them, since many companies were forced to move to different kinds of business centers at the edges of the suburban areas to be closer to the consumers of their products. (Beauregard 2006: 40.)

The parasitic urbanization resulted to other problems in the city centers as well. After the Second World War African Americans from the rural south moved to the cities looking for new employment possibilities, yet they faced discrimination in terms of housing and employment (Beauregard 2006: 21). Therefore, poverty and racial discrimination became problems of the city centers, and they led to the growth of slums. Slums became characteristic elements of the American urban areas from the 1940s to the 1970s, as poverty-struck non-white citizens had to move to old neighborhoods or public housing projects. (Beauregard 2006: 16, 21.) Moreover, a slum and a ghetto were not race-neutral terms; therefore they always seemed to allude to an area populated by non-white middle-class citizens, which gave cities a stigma of race, as the suburbs were unable to tolerate difference or minorities.

Before urbanism there had been some tension between the urban and the rural parts of the country, however after the Second World War the tension transferred to the central cities and the new suburbs because of the fear of racial pollution, aversion to physical decay of the cities, defense of property values and their representations. Beauregard goes as far as calling this “the postwar antiurbanism”. (Beauregard 2006: 75.) Postwar antiurbanism’s effects were that the white, suburban media saw poverty associated with black, unwed mothers on welfare, city crime became black crime and juvenile delinquency was connected to black teenagers. In the 1960s all this resulted in the Civil Rights Movement, political militancy and election of black mayors. (Beauregard 2006: 76). Therefore the suburbanization of the United States gave the city and the blacks a

stronger symbolic link, while the city threatened as well as enhanced the suburbia, as people still had jobs and entertainment within the city.

In *Urban Sociology* (2010) William G. Flanagan lists Max Weber, Georg Simmel and Oswald Spengler as the most important urban sociologists or as great influences to modern urban sociology. Max Weber was one of the first theorists of the 20th century to define what a city's essential characteristics are and what constitutes its "citiness". Weber saw the city as a fusion of fortress and a marketplace, which diversified market economy upon which most of the inhabitants of the city were primarily dependent on. (Flanagan 2010: 76-78.)

Georg Simmel focused more on the experience of the urbanites in the cities. For example, Simmel thought that urbanites must develop a special capacity to avoid emotional involvement in surroundings in order to survive in the densely populated cities. This led Simmel to think that the urbanites are socially isolated, yet set free from one another with all the given possibilities and chances in the urban environment. Moreover, he compared a metropolis and a small town and saw how in these small towns or villages people were able to embrace each other in more deeply felt manners and form emotional relationships, but this same surrounding has a narrow set of expectations and allows a very little individualism or autonomy which would have been possible in larger cities. (see Simmel 1976.) Simmel's theories were rather special at their time in the early 20th century in the field of urban theories, as he saw the city as full of possibilities instead simply as a place of solitude. (Flanagan 2010: 78.) Moreover, Simmel's theories of the city life support the idea that artists and other people who could not express themselves in small towns would be able to embrace their creativity and other possible hidden aspects of their lives in the urban environment where people would have more possibilities and be able to find like-minded groups.

Oswald Spengler saw the city as a central actor in the story of every great civilization, as according to him all great cultures have been urban cultures and the city has worked as an engine of the civilization process. Spengler also explains how the soul of the city

sets it apart from other environments and areas of living, as the city became aware of itself and as a special entity, which is superior to its environs and it is also beyond understanding of the peasants living outside the city's borders. (Flanagan 2010: 80.)

Spengler's urban theories are important as they set the city apart from its surroundings and also, because Kerouac was greatly influenced by Spengler's theories, especially by his theories of the "fellaheen". Originally the term fellah has referred to "a peasant or an agricultural laborer in an Arab country (as Egypt)" (Merriam Webster Dictionary 2015). However, Oswald Spengler (1991: 185-186) uses the term fellaheen to refer to the people who survive from one civilization to the next by living outside the civilization and thus they are not affected by the fall of the civilizations.

Kerouac refers often to the fellaheen in his works, for example in *The Lonesome Traveller* (1960: 22) he writes "...but you can find it, this feeling, this fellaheen feeling about life, that timeless gayety of people not involved in great cultural and civilization issues.". For Kerouac the most important aspect of being a fellah seemed to be the timelessness of it and not being part of any specific culture or civilization. Kerouac altered the term from Spengler's post-apocalyptic vision to be more positive and focused on the proudness of the fellaheen and their origins. People who lived outside the society in Kerouac's time were for example homeless people, bums, hobos and minorities such as African Americans or Mexicans. These social outsiders represented the fellaheen for Kerouac and were a great source of inspiration for him, as he saw them as martyrs of their era (Lardas 2001: 124).

## 2.2 Urban Literary Theories

Richard Lehan (1998) gives a historical perspective on urban literary theory in his work *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History*. Lehan draws examples from literary expression and the history of the city from different historical eras all the way from Greek mythology to modern American writers, such as Thomas Pynchon.

Lehan argues how the structure and function of cities have influenced the form of urban novels and proves this by linking different developments in the urban literature to the developments of the city and the historical stages of urbanization.

For example in his analysis of Herman Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street* (1853) Richard Lehan (1998: 173) writes how Melville sees modern humanity as a product of the city and how Bartleby challenges the city and its purpose by divorcing himself from it and the crowd. With the purpose of the city Lehan refers to New York and its Wall Street and their capitalist function and how Bartleby seems to be surrounded by walls and other physical boundaries. The boundaries of the city could also be mental limits, for example in his personal life and in his novels, Jack Kerouac was challenging the city of his time by crossing imagined borders within American cities. Kerouac and his friends crossed the imagined borders of cities in terms of ethnicity, race and class, for example when they went to listen to bebop in an African American neighborhood.

In *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel* Hana Wirth-Nesher (2008: 8) analyses novels that represent different "real" cities and also differing representations of the same feature of the city according to the novel's social and cultural context. Therefore Wirth-Nesher assumes in his work that the representations of the city will depend on the cultural and social position of the subject and thus aims to complement existing works of urban literature that have often been written from a historical point of view. Examples of earlier works on urban literature are such as Richard Lehan's study arguing on equivalence in shifts in city function and the cultural signs encoded in literary texts and Burton Pike's observations on a change in the relationship of the individual to the community in several centuries of urban literature, poetry and prose. (Wirth-Nesher 2008: 8.)

In his analysis, Wirth-Nesher (2008: 3) points out the city setting as a problematic site that has been marginalized when discussing the modern novel, which usually focuses on the characters, plot and theme. In the novels that Hana Wirth-Nesher has chosen to

analyze, the urban setting is the locus for the tensions and the contradictions in the novel itself and in the historical moment, as the cities are real, existing cities in our world. For example a street name or a view out of a window might not seem an important factor to the experienced reader. However, the name or the view might be an important cultural locus in the novel and the images form the modern urban novel (Wirth-Nesher 2008: 9-10). Hana Wirth-Nesher (2008: 3) also focuses on the differences among the discourses of the metropolis, claiming that we might learn more about how we read cities by paying attention to detailed aspects of the urban setting in novels, and thus studies of the urban spaces are important.

When explaining that it is unavoidable to make some general claims, Wirth-Nesher (2008: 8) begins with one of the central themes in the book: how cities deliver inaccessibility, yet they have promised plenitude. As a result, the urbanite has to deal with never-ending series of partial visibilities, such as:

[...] figures framed in the windows of highrises, crowds observed from those same windows, partly drawn blinds, taxis transporting strangers, noises from the other side of the wall, closed doors and vigilant doormen, streets on maps or around the bend but never traversed, hidden enclaves in adjacent neighborhoods. (Wirth-Nesher 2008: 8.)

When the urbanite is faced with these limitations, he inevitably reconstructs them in his imagination and because no city dweller is exempt from these partial exclusions and imaginative reconstructions, every urbanite is to some extent an outsider. However, the effect on inaccessibility is different for each urbanite, as it is in connection with their level of “outsiderness”. The problem of the city dweller is that he is “constantly aware of life going on without him” and being afraid of missing something. However, for an experienced urbanite this should not be a great difficulty as he learns to live with the sensation of partial exclusion and he uses mental reconstruction and inventing worlds to replace the ones that are inaccessible. Therefore, the author identifies the cityscape by what it conceals and by the gaps the city dwellers are facing. (Wirth-Nesher 2008: 8-9.)



Wirth-Nesher compares the experience of an urbanite to an author's way to represent a city in a fictional world, as both cases require an imaginative mapping of the area. He explains the difficulty in the following way: "Just as for the city dweller the city itself is a text that can never be read in its totality, the modern urban novel acts as a site for the problem of reading cities." (Wirth-Nesher 2008: 10.) Moreover, when writing a real city into a fictional world the author, as well as the reader, when reading the novel, faces the problem of signification, for example the reader from a particular culture can signify a certain landmark with a whole repertoire of meanings, for example James Joyce assumed the reader to identify landmarks of British imperialism in Dublin. It is also possible that the author uses urban tropes from previous authors that have gained their place in the literary or artistic tradition, such as Hugo's sewers in Paris or Dickens' law courts. (Wirth-Nesher 2008: 10-11.)

The problematics of signification can also be seen from Jack Kerouac's perspective: in his novels the black urban areas signified inspiration, culture and possibilities, as for the majority of the middle class people of his era the ghetto signified danger and a culture that was seemingly different from their own. Also, the general significations of the cities which Kerouac visited were different for him and for the majority of society, for example Chicago was the heart of bebop music for Kerouac, while for the majority the city might have seemed to be a dying industrial city with a large African American community. Moreover, the cities of the United States might not have represented freedom and individuality to everyone, as they did for Kerouac in the 1940s and 1950s. What a city signifies to a person depends on the person's class, ethnicity and a general cultural understanding, among other things.

In *City Codes* Wirth-Nesher identifies four aspects of the cityscape in the representation of the city in narrative: the natural, the built, the human and the verbal environment. The natural environment mainly refers to the inclusion or the intervention of nature in the built environment and never outside the city borders. The built environment refers to city layout, architecture and other man-made objects such as trams, curtain walls, and roofs. This environment and these objects represent either actual existing artifacts in

real cities or are purely invented. Wirth-Nesher refers to the human environment as human features that constitute a setting, such as commuter crowds, passersby and street peddlers. The human environment can also refer to types of people who are generic fixtures of cities in certain periods or locales, for example the doorman, the street musician, the beggar etc. The verbal environment refers to written and spoken language within the city, for example the street names and advertisements and the auditory environment of a city or an area of a city. (Wirth-Nesher 2008: 11-14.) In Kerouac's novels the human environment is of great importance as the people are the main reasons of his travels or visits to different cities and locations. The bohemians construct the cultural surroundings of the big cities. Moreover, the people of the street have great role in the city images Kerouac constructs, as his characters idolize them and pay special attention to them, unlike other people of his era might do.

In his study, Wirth-Nesher (2008: 17) wants to reject commonplaces about the modern city, such as loneliness and isolation in order to be free to look at the differences of urban spaces and to draw on alternative traditions. He wants to define a shift in the representation of the city from premodern to modern, as the novels with representations of a city are as old as the novel itself. The author sees "home" as one of the most distinguishable features between the modern and the premodern urban novels. For example in traditional English novels the home is a refuge from the outside, from the street and public as in the modern novels the home has been infiltrated by the outside and has become more problematized. (Wirth-Nesher 2008: 18-19.)

Wirth-Nesher (2008: 20) suggests that the chronotope of the modern urban novel is a space that conflates the public and the private of the urban space in a wide variety of ways. In comparison to previous novels, the opposition of the private and the public does not exist in the setting of the novels. Most of the action in the modern urban novels takes place in a space that is a combination of public and private, such as coffee houses, theaters, museums, pubs, restaurants, hotels and shops. And even inside private homes its residents can be exposed to the gaze of a stranger. (Wirth-Nesher 2008: 20.)

*The Town and the City* and *On the Road* are modern novels also in terms of their space, as they have a great amount of elements in which the public and the private space conflate, and according to Wirth-Nesher (2008: 20), this is a chronotope of a modern urban novel.

Wirth-Nesher (2008: 21) also explains how the problematizing of the home and the indeterminacy of the public and private spaces affect the theme and the form of the modern urban novel. As the private self is in conflict with the public world, it is replaced by a self that constructs and is constructed by the cityscape. By drawing attention to the self, Wirth-Nesher (2008: 21) wishes to demonstrate how in the modern urban novels the cityscape is inseparable from self, and that the strategies for representing the intersection of characters and place are a result of the exclusion experienced by the character, author or the reader.

### 3 HUMAN ENVIRONMENT IN *THE TOWN AND THE CITY* AND *ON THE ROAD*

The setting in *The Town and the City* and in *On the Road* is partially the same: the city of New York. However, the books have a very different outlook on the cities; *The Town and the City*, as the name suggests, has the viewpoint of people moving from a town to a city, and this affects the way these people see New York and other cities in the United States. In *On the Road* New York is only one of the many cities in which the seemingly urban characters of the novel roam, and they tend to compare the cities to other cities, instead of comparing the rural and the urban.

The cities that are discussed, mainly New York and San Francisco, are real cities that still exist and they are visited and habituated by actual people, therefore the cities have different and perhaps important connotations to people regarding their own experiences and how the cities are seen, for example historically or culturally. Hana Wirth-Nesher (2008) discusses this problem of signification in terms of well-known cities or landmarks within the cities.

The main focus of the analysis will be on how the human environment of the urban surroundings is present in *The Town and the City* and *On the Road*. Wirth-Nesher (2008: 11-14) refers to the human environment as human features that constitute the setting of a novel or people who are generic fixtures of cities. Therefore the analysis will focus on what can be considered to be the human features of the novels and what they tell about the novels.

First I will analyze *The Town and the City*, dividing the analysis to four thematic subchapters. In chapter 3.2 I will continue to the analysis of *On the Road* with two thematic subchapters.

### 3.1 Human environment in *The Town and the City*

In *The Town and the City* the Martin family first lives a unified and at least seemingly happy life in the small town of Galloway. However with the changes the Second World War brings, the family is forced to move to New York and live a life in urban surroundings.

I have divided the analysis of the human environment in *The Town and the City* into thematic subchapters of opportunity, independence, emotional bonds and outsidersness.

#### 3.1.1 Opportunity in *The Town and the City*

As *The Town and the City* begins in the small town of Galloway and slowly the members of the Martin family move from the countryside to different cities in the United States, the reader is able to see and experience how the change can affect different people. The parents of the family feel threatened by the change and the city life, as they are accustomed to living in a small town and might experience some of the problems of urban life which urban sociologists have listed in their theories, such as emotional involvement and feeling of isolation (see Simmel 1976). However, some of the children of the family see the chance to move to a city as a great opportunity in their lives. Here Peter considers his opportunities before leaving for prep school which is located in a city away from his small home town:

The night before Peter left for prep school he lay in bed and felt that strange mingling feeling that American boys have when they are about to leave home for the first time: that drowsy fear of leaving the bed, the room, the house that had been the first comfortable basis of life before anything else, the house that is as familiar and plain as an old sweater, to which one always returns after excitements and fatigues to sweetly sleep: and yet at the same time he felt that similarly drowsy excitement of going off from the house – to railroad depots, coffee counters, new cities, smoke and furor and windsmells strange and new, to sudden unimagined vistas of river, highway, bridge and horizon all sensationally strange under unknown skies, and the smoke, the smoke! (TC: 122.)

Peter feels fear as he is used to living in Galloway in his familiar home with the familiar people and surroundings. However, the city offers Peter something he has not been able to have in his hometown: independence and freedom, in terms of growing up but also as an aspiring writer looking for inspiration. Peter also seems ready to leave his private, countryside home behind and move to a more public space, which the city offers with its coffee shops and railroad depots. Later Peter is able to visit the city of New York with his friend and Peter's feelings of the city are described as the following:

They were sitting in a cocktail lounge with him in the great rare city of their youthful hopes – New York, the unbelievable and miraculous place of places that had been the lore of their hearts since childhood, the road's end of young aspirations and secret boyish plans. (TC: 145.)

Peter has been dreaming of visiting New York on his own since his childhood and as the dream becomes reality he seems to be struck with the possibilities the city has to offer. New York seems to be the place to realize one's dreams and plans.

The reader is given a glimpse of a different New York City through the eyes of Francis Martin, the intellectual child of the Martin family who has lived in the city for several years now.

For Francis, New York meant Greenwich Village freedom to live with a woman in a small apartment, to roam the little bookshops around Washington Square on misty nights, to haunt the bars where almost everybody had something to say about art, to attend parties where fantastic-looking people tossed off psychodynamic analysis, [...], and all the latest word in the easiest manner known to man, to writhe, finally, in the melodrama of "modern frustrative horror" in a chi-chi setting. (TC: 459.)

Francis' New York is similar to Peter's, as they both spend their days with people who are intellectuals thinking outside the box. However, the people with whom Francis lives and spends his time in New York are more academic and more conservative than some of Peter's friends. Francis' friends have power and wealth, which they use to ensure their position in the world and to enjoy the pleasures of the prosperous intellectual life in New York.

Francis has lived his first years in New York in Greenwich Village, which has become the place to be for intellectual outsiders of American society. However, soon Francis notices that he feels more comfortable with people who live in the East Side uptown. According to Francis, the intellectual in the East Side “[...] leaned towards more sophistication, a kind of *Time* and *Life* worldliness, warier, fingering at the hem of wealth and society [...]” (TC: 460). Francis is fascinated with the possibilities these wealthy and powerful people might give to him, as he has already got a job in a prestigious company and connections to high-level people. Francis’ life and the people with whom he spends his time in the city, seem to go towards a more conservative direction, especially when compared to the idealist young Francis, whose life Peter admired. Francis makes it clear how he does not miss his hometown or the countryside, and how the urban surroundings with its intellectual people are the place for him to be. This fact makes him the only member from the Martin family who does not idealize the countryside or have nostalgic feelings about his childhood. Francis seems to have adopted the urban way of living and seems to be happy with it.

### 3.1.2 Independence in *The Town and the City*

In *The Town and the City* there are few descriptions of people outside the Martin family in the urban surroundings, and many of the descriptions of the urban dwellers often have similar elements. For example, when young Peter is visiting New York for the first time, he pays attention to “an illkempt man [who] came staggering out of the shadows of a doorway holding out a cigarette butt in a gesture demanding that someone light him up.” (TC: 142). In addition, when the Martin family’s father George is visiting Chicago, he finds himself lost in thought near a railroad track watching over a merry company of railroad men. He thinks about all the adventures the railroad men could have had during their lifetimes, all across the American continent and finally ends up wondering, “Why was it that he had not been with them all this time? What had he done, where had he gone, why was it that he could not live again, and live forever, and do all the things he had forgotten to do.” (TC: 333).

The man Peter sees in New York and the railroad men George sees in Chicago have something in common: they are urban people, part of the human environment of the cities and moreover, they represent Kerouac's ideals of the fellaheen. The bum in New York and the railroad men in Chicago are outside society, therefore more or less free of society's rules and regulations. Even though the railroad men have a job, for George Martin they seem to be free to do and go, as they like. George Martin, who has devoted his life to his work and family, feels regret for not having had experiences of the fellaheen life and secretly in the urban night of Chicago yearns for those lost experiences.

For Peter, the moment in New York when he comes across with the bum, is quickly over, as other people occupy his attention. However, the moment seems important because it is his first experience of the fellaheen-like people in an urban setting. The bum was able to draw the boy's attention and stay in his mind for some time. Later in his life Peter faces many people like this bum, and he begins to consider people like the bum to be his equal, while at the moment Peter feels more distant to them and does not understand them.

The setting of the novel changes completely when the rest of the Martin family, the parents and the youngest brother Mickey, move to Brooklyn, New York. The mother thinks "how this city would never last" and the father knows how the lights and amusements of Manhattan would "not be for people like you and me" (TC: 343, 346). For Mickey the vastness of the city and its lights are full of adventures and excitement, for him the new urban surroundings bring possibilities that the countryside could not offer.

### 3.1.3. Emotional bonds in *The Town and the City*

The Martin family's parents, especially George Martin, experience the urban life and its human environment as an isolated and emotionally empty space, as Georg Simmel



(1976) had theorized. As the parents had lived their whole lives in rural areas, they had not developed the kind of special capacity to avoid emotional involvement in surroundings, which urbanites must have in order to survive in cities (Flanagan 2010: 79). Therefore, for George Martin his experiences in the New York metro or a cafeteria feel odd and even wrong. The people with whom he sits in the Manhattan cafeteria do not pay any attention to their surroundings and merely focus on their dinner, which for George Martin feels strange, as they share an intimate space. In the New York metro the urbanites still pay no attention to the people around them, while for George Martin it is almost impossible not to look at people with curiosity, study their faces and try to learn something about them.

For the Martins the emotional distance people have in New York is unfamiliar, as their small town life had included daily encounters with people whom they were able to embrace and form emotional relationships with. According to Simmel (1976), bonding between urbanites is more unlikely because of the dense population of cities, yet the emotional distance gives urbanites freedom and possibility of individualism which might not be allowed in small towns with set structures and values. However, for the Martins the emotional distance between the citizens of New York seems to cause suffering, as “[George] Martin was more alone at this time in his life than he had ever been.” (TC: 351). He begins to dream of his boyhood days and how every time he walked down the main street of his hometown, he met a familiar face and exchanged a few words with him.

Peter’s friend Leon Lewinsky wants to prove to Peter and himself too, that the people in New York are mad, and thus Lewinsky makes an experiment in the New York metro while Peter is observing the situation. Lewinsky sits down in the metro and places a newspaper in front of his face. The newspaper has a hole in it, so that Lewinsky can stare at the person he has chosen to target in his experiment. He tests how long it takes for the targeted person to realize he is being observed, and whether he would do something about it. As Lewinsky had expected, the targeted person soon notices the fact that he is being observed and becomes nervous of the attention. In a while other people

in the same car realize what is going on and seem to get uncomfortable because of it. They avoid looking at Lewinsky while pretending nothing is happening. However, there is a small boy in the car who sees the situation differently: he bursts out laughing, finds the newspaperman's actions hilarious and goes directly to him to see the man behind the paper. For Lewinsky the experiment proved his point, and it also presented that

[...] children cannot recognize madness. That is, they understand what is mad and what is not mad, they simply understand. And finally – they haven't had time to burden themselves with character structure and personality armors and systems of moral prejudice and God knows what. Therefore they're free to live and laugh, and free to love [...]. (TC: 378.)

For Lewinsky the madness of people seems to represent the emotional distance they have created in order to survive in the urban setting. People avoid contact with each other and unpleasant situations, where they might need to face some of the many strangers in the city. Therefore, in a situation where someone is breaking these unwritten laws of not contacting with strangers, the people aim to avoid the person and consider him to be somehow unfit to the society. The child in the metro has not yet learned the structures of emotional distance, but he still realizes that there is something strange in the newspaperman's actions. However, because the child has not yet learned the general behavioral conducts of the city dwellers, he finds Lewinsky's experiment to be funny and he dares to question what is happening and get close to the man behind the newspaper. For Lewinsky the actions of the child are something he aims for and he finds preferable over the set structures of emotional distance in urban settings.

In addition, the newspaper scene in the metro shows how the people in cities have to manage with the conflation of public and private space. The people aim for privacy in a public space, such as the metro, by trying not to pay attention to the people around them. However, occasionally their private bubble is burst and the people have to face the other people in the public space.

### 3.1.4 Outsiderness in *The Town and the City*

Outsiderness is also a theme that stands out in *The Town and the City*. As cities form populations with certain social structures there are always people who are left out, either by their own will or by some unlucky event. These outsiders are described in *The Town and the City* for example as bums, hobos, homeless and addicts of different kinds.

The pattern of urban emotional distance in *The Town and the City* is broken, in addition to Lewinsky's experiment, with the few encounters with people outside society, people who are described as bums, hobos and New York madmen. For example, George Martin comes across with "old Bowery bums" who sleep on the pavement "on a raw November afternoon" (TC: 348). George stops to stare at the old bums, and he is free to do so as they do not seem to mind the stares because they are outside society, deep in their own worlds and do not follow the unwritten laws of the urban dwellers. Another exceptional encounter happens when George Martin faces a madman in a public park. The madman is making a speech wearing worn-out clothes and a long beard, and while giving his speech he addresses the people who are walking by personally. The fact that the madman addresses other people in his speech and therefore wants their attention is unusual in a typical city setting: he disturbs the mass of people who are performing their tasks and not standing out from the crowd. The madman and the Bowery bums are quite the opposite from an average New York City urbanite: the bums do not aim to be part of the crowd or part organized society around them. Therefore they represent the fellaheen of New York City.

The human environment in New York is generally described with masses of people moving with determination from one place to another. The average people are not given specific descriptions, they are only "a horde of poker faced men and women" (TC: 349) or "the multitudes of New York, the sea of heads" (TC: 358). However, when Peter arrives to New York after the war has ended, he gives a more specific description of the New York urbanites than what his parents have given. Peter is able to do this as he has been travelling around the United States during his years in the Merchant Marine and

has seen many American cities. The fact that he has seen many cities in a short time has given him the impression that all cities and the people in them in the United States are alike:

He looked about him at the people passing by - the same people he had seen so many times in other American cities on similar streets: soldiers, sailors, the panhandlers and drifters, the zoot-suiters, the hoodlums, the young men who washed dishes in cafeterias from coast to coast, the hitch-hikers, the hustlers, the drunks, the battered lonely young Negroes, the twinkling little Chinese, the dark Puerto Ricans, and the varieties of dungareed young Americans in leather jackets who were seamen and mechanics and garagemen everywhere. (TC 361.)

Unlike his parents, who have not had previous experiences of living in the city, Peter is able to identify some generic fixtures of cities that are the same across the United States. Yet what is worth noticing is the fact that many of the people Peter lists above are somehow outsiders or minorities in the urban setting or in the American society. Peter sees these outsiders and minorities in the heart of New York, on Times Square, as that was one of the places they inhabited. When the suburbs started to grow, minorities lived in central cities all across the United States and wealthier people moved away from the central city locations to more peaceful and spacious locations in the new American suburbs (Beauregard 2006: 40).

Peter continues by listing the cities and the areas where he has met those people before: “It was the same as Scollay Square in Boston, or the Loop in Chicago, or Canal Street in New Orleans, or Curtis Street in Denver, or West Twelfth in Kansas City, or Market Street in San Francisco, or South Main Street in Los Angeles” (TC: 361). These locations are central areas of different cities and therefore support the fact that the people listed earlier form part of the human environment in central cities. It is also worth mentioning that despite the fact that Peter can be considered to be the main character in the novel, his descriptions of his experiences in other cities during his Merchant Marine days are minimal in the novel. Only few places are mentioned and described in a more detailed manner, such cities are for example Washington DC and New Orleans.

Peter keeps describing the American city-dwellers in New York now with more details. He sees “the occasional whore in purple pumps and red raincoat” and “some incredible homosexual flouncing by with an effeminate shriek of general greeting to everyone, anyone” (TC: 361). Peter’s focus changes from these outsiders of the American society to other types of outsiders: “the quiet men with lunchpails hurrying off to work [...], seeing nothing, stopping for nothing, hurrying for busses and trolleys, and vanishing.” and “the occasional elderly gentleman wearing a look of fear and indignation at having to endure the proximity of such “riff raff”.” (TC: 361). The businessmen are outsiders in the city centers because they mainly live in the suburbs of the cities and only have to visit the central cities on work and business matters. The elderly gentleman might live in the city center but he has most likely seen the city change into its current state, which includes high levels of crime and poverty. This makes him fear his old neighborhoods and most likely feel like an outsider. Peter also describes the crime-ridden state of central New York as he sees “The occasional crooks and thieves and murderous hoodlums who passed in silent, arrogant, gum-chewing groups.” (TC: 361-362). With his description, Peter makes the current situation in central New York clear: the people who are left are the outsiders of the society and the occasional visitors from the outside, such as tourists and businessmen.

At this point, when Peter is monitoring Times Square, he understands how these same characters exist in every other city in the United States but nowhere they are as intense and wonderful as on Times Square. “All the cats and characters, all the spicks and spaces, Harlem-drowned, street-drunk and slain, crowded together, streaming back and forth, looking for something, waiting for something, forever moving around.” (TC: 362). Peter has even become familiar with some of the young drifters on Times Square during his Merchant Marine years. He had met some of them on other continents, and many of them have in some point of their lives ended up to the Times Square where Peter would meet them again.

Peter's undying interest in people around him becomes obvious when he enthusiastically lists over twenty types of people he sees on Times Square. The list includes people like Park Avenue millionaire, Brooklyn machinist, Greenwich Village intellectual, an old farmer lost in the city, a smoothly attired zooter, a cadaverous morphine-addict and a sad young soldier-boy, Private John Smith (TC: 362-363). The list gives a clear image of the human environment of New York City's Times Square, and therefore gives the reader more understanding of the urban image of the whole city and what it might be like in central New York. Peter is watching and analyzing these people, because he feels that he and the rest of people in the world "[...] came from the single human soul, and his soul was like their souls. He could never turn away in disgust and judgment. He could turn away angrily, but he would always come back and look again." (TC: 364). The oneness of souls Peter feels with the people makes him interested in the people around him; he tries to understand them and experience what they are experiencing in the city.

Peter seems to become part of the human environment in New York when he becomes friends with a poet, Leon Lewinsky, a hoodlum called Jack, and a dope addict, whom his friends call Junkey. Together they observe the busy streets of New York from cafeterias and bars and meet with other people like them, who are young and seem to drift aimlessly in cities and between cities, who do not match the general ideal of a young American. Most of them would also be outside society willingly or unwillingly, with their ideas and lifestyles. For example, Leon Lewinsky is a 19-year-old boy with Russian-Jewish artist parents, and Leon himself is a poet with an eager and open mind. Peter's new friends are outside society because of their ideas that are against the mainstream's ideals of living or politics. They are bored with the current state of things and cannot stand the commercial way of living, which was getting more common among the middle class. They prefer to talk about poetry and philosophy, and generally to question the common ways of thinking. Therefore these new friends of Peter have some elements in common with the fellaheen, or at least they aimed for a life of the fellaheen, the life outside mainstream society.

However, the way Peter and some of his friends live their lives is controversial, as they promote so called voluntarily poverty as a way to prevent them from being in touch with any influences from the commercial world (van Elteren 1999: 84). This means that they voluntarily live a life of a different standard, which they could actually afford. The people whom they idealize, such as the racially discriminated blacks or hobos, do not have an option to return to their parents for money or protection, or to return to their day-to-day jobs after they have run out of money. For example, Dennison, who is one of Peter's New York friends, has a wealthy family and a degree from Princeton; however, he lives in a cold-water flat for twelve dollars a month in a dubious neighborhood. During the last few years he has willingly started a habit of using morphine regularly to analyze its effects on him and his writing, and he can do so as he has a trust established by his millionaire grandfather to support his living, which at the moment includes the drug use.

The reason why Peter makes friends with Leon Lewinsky, Dennison and the others becomes clearer when Peter has an argument about his comings and goings with his father. As Peter currently lives with his parents in Brooklyn, they are able to monitor his movements and Peter and his father end up arguing about Peter's friends. In George Martin's opinion Peter's friends are "a bunch of dope fiends and crooks" (TC: 420) and he worries that Peter will begin to use drugs too and throw away his life. However, Peter explains how "I want to know everything about New York [...]. It seems I don't care what people do, as long as it's something different. I get curious." (TC: 420). Peter sees his friends as a possibility to understand the world around him and perhaps to gain some meaningfulness to his life that otherwise seems empty and without a purpose.

Even though the city has given Peter a great deal and he has been able to find like-minded people, and also to find himself in the city, he still has contradictory feelings about it. He has seen how his parents, especially how his father would not adjust to the ways of living in New York, and his understanding towards his parents seems to deepen as he meets his friend's old grandmother who had spent her adulthood in the countryside of Missouri during the mid-19th century and had only recently moved to the

city of New York. Peter imagines the change the grandmother has gone through and how her old home and neighborhood has changed.

These places and raw simplicities had now gone into the night, far beyond the incomprehensible sprawl, the cancerous smoky suburbs, the street-demented scab of and wreckage of New York City [...] – so easily forgotten in the turmoils of city-time and city-talk and city-life and city-sarcasm and city-weariness [...]. (TC: 431.)

Peter seems to have great sympathy and respect for the grandmother because he sees her as a representative of his own parents and grandparents and also as an outsider in the city. Moreover, Peter believes they are the ones who have experienced “labor and belief and human joy” (TC: 432) in their purest form, as the modern urban dwellers are full of sarcasm and weariness. The old days seem to represent for Peter a kind of hope that no longer exists in the modern world.

### 3.2 Human environment in *On the Road*

*On the Road* continues from where *The Town and the City* leaves: the main character is starting his journeys on the road to explore the urban places that come along the way. The protagonist, Sal Paradise, lives in New York and travels around the United States, from one city to another, visiting friends and family and looking for inspiration.

I have divided the analysis of the human environment in *On the Road* to two thematic subchapters of inspiration in *On the Road* and border crossing in *On the Road*.

#### 3.2.1 Inspiration in *On the Road*

Throughout the novel the main characters, including the protagonist Sal Paradise, are looking for inspiration to boost their artistic work or simply to make their lives more exciting and interesting. Inspiring moments are often connected to the human



environment they face in the urban surroundings or when travelling from one city to another.

When Dean meets Sal's New York friends, the first thing they seem to talk about are the people they know all around the United States: how crazy or creative they are and what they had been doing with their lives. When they describe a city they have visited, they describe the people they have met there. For them the human environment of the city is the most important feature of the city and it makes their experiences to be what they are in the novel. Therefore the human environment serves as a source of inspiration for the group of friends.

As Sal watches Dean and the rest of his friends get to know each other, he explains why he has chosen to be with such a companion of artists, criminals and drug addicts.

[...] they danced down the streets like dingedodies, and I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes 'Awww!' (OR: 7.)

Sal understands that the people with whom he is in New York are not ordinary, middle class Americans, but they are "the mad ones", as he himself describes them. He also sees most of his New York friends as intellectuals, for example Carlo Marx is a poet with a "nutty surrealist low-voiced serious staring talk" and Old Bull Lee is critical about everything and has taken the criticism as his way of living (OR: 9). And some of his current friends Sal knows are criminals. Dean, his latest friend was something from the middle, he was a shining intellectual "without the tedious intellectualness" and his criminality was joyous, and in Sal's eyes acceptable (OR: 9). Throughout the whole novel on his journeys and in New York, most of the people Sal describes are somehow special or not the ideal suburban Americans of the 1950s. The only exceptions who gain more attention seem to be his aunt and his sister. Sal lives with his aunt in New Jersey

when he stays in New York for longer times, and occasionally she supports him financially, as she has a steady income of her own.

The reader also gets glimpses of middle class Americans and the American countryside when Dean goes hitchhiking. The people who let him ride in their cars or trucks represent another kind of America for Sal; they are the people in the suburbs or in the countryside whom also seem to interest Sal, as long as they have interesting and inspiring stories and experiences to share with him. For example, truck drivers who make their living on the road always seem to be full of inspiring stories from all around the United States and Sal is eager to listen to them, as they have seen numerous cities and met even more people all across the country. In addition, Sal gets to see parts of the countryside when hitchhiking, or at least people who are from the countryside, for example, when Sal is travelling from New York to Denver, he gets rides from local farmers along the way and gets to see and understand their ideas and living. These people Sal meets on the road are very different from his friends in the urban America, the farmers or the hobos he meets have not studied much or at all, and the middle class people Sal meets often represent the consumerist society which Sal normally wants to avoid in the urban setting.

After once again changing their location from New York to San Francisco, Sal and his companions are faced with another kind of human environment when compared to their east coast New York.

Everybody looked like a broken-down movie extra, a withered starlet; disenchanted stunt-men, midget auto-racers, poignant California characters with their end-of-the-continent sadness, handsome, decadent, Casanova-ish men, puffy-eyed motel blondes, hustlers, pimps, whores, masseurs, bellhops – a lemon lot [...]. (OR: 154.)

The people in San Francisco neighborhoods where Sal and Marylou try to find work are described to be desperate, all looking and longing for something. However, the desperation of the San Francisco people seems different to the ones in New York: San Francisco has “end-of-the-continent” sadness, there was nowhere to go further west but

ocean (OR: 154). Since the first settlers arrived in the United States, west had offered new hopes and possibilities, but once the settlers or in this case the “withered starlets” whom Sal described, reached the western end of the continent and the place could offer them nothing, the hopelessness was devastating for them.

If the end of the continent and its cities caused hopelessness and devastation to others, some were able to draw inspiration from the special location. For example jazz bloomed in San Francisco as described by Sal: “I never saw such crazy musicians. Everybody in Frisco blew. It was the end of the continent; they didn’t give a damn.” (OR: 160 – 161). The special kind of desperation in San Francisco was turned into inspiring music that affected the local human environment, for example as jazz poured from the private spaces of the jazz clubs to the public streets of the city.

### 3.2.2 Border crossing in *On the Road*

In *On the Road* some of the human environment is separated from each other with visible borders, for example apartments and coffee shops, and in some cases with invisible or imagined borders, such as neighborhoods with people of different ethnicities or races.

The polarization between the urban and the rural is not clearly visible in *On the Road*. However, the reader is occasionally reminded of how people needed to move from the rural areas to urban centers and how they might feel about it. In cases such as these the characters are crossing visible borders when moving from the countryside to the city, as well as crossing invisible borders if moving from one type of culture to another.

The following scene shows how Marylou, a young girl from Western parts of the United States has come with Dean Moriarty to New York and she is experiencing her first day in the big city with other people like Dean: young, urban bohemians who live in the central city, often in cold water flats such as the one described below. In the following scene the opposition between the country and the city is still visible, as the New York

pad is described as “evil” by the stories Marylou has heard back in West.

Marylou was a pretty blonde with immense ringlets of hair like a sea of golden tresses; she sat there on the edge of the couch with her hands hanging in her lap and her smoky blue country eyes fixed in a wide stare because she was in an evil grey New York pad that she'd heard about back West [...] (OR: 4.)

General attitudes towards city life had changed after the Second World War in comparison with, for example the previous polarization of the country and the city. Wirth-Nesher (2008: 37) explains how the elimination of the polarization of the city and the country is a mark of the modern urban novel, so that the city has become more or less the whole universe of the novels and the country exists only in the cultural repertoire of characters. However, in *On the Road*, the polarization is more between the city and the suburban surroundings, as city centers were considered unsafe and unideal places to live as poverty and crime rates had grown higher due to the decline of the city centers and the new opposing forces of the city lived in the suburbs (Beauregard 2005: 16).

Describing the New York pad as “evil grey” shows the general attitude towards New York and its atmosphere in terms of colors and light. New York can easily be described as grey, especially if the point of comparison is the countryside or the suburbs, which were often green because of the surrounding nature in its different forms, and neither tall buildings nor smog would be there to hide the view. New York is often described as a grey or sad place even by the characters who belonged to the urbanite-Beats who idolized the city, yet it seems that the gloominess and they greyness of the city were a source of inspiration for the artists, as they lived there and kept returning to the city from their journeys. Sal Paradise describes New York in the following way: “somewhere far across, gloomy, crazy New York was throwing up its clouds of dust and brown steam” (OR: 71). Moreover, the industrial side of the city with its greyness and clouds of dust is still visible to the citizens of New York, even though during the 1950s the industries and the populations in cities such as Chicago or New York were growing smaller and smaller due to the changing economic structure of the whole

country. New York was one of the cities in the US who had the biggest absolute losses in their population from the 1950s to the 1980s. (Beauregard 2006: 26-27.)

When Sal Paradise arrives for the first time in *On the Road* to his visionary city, San Francisco, to meet his old friend Remi Boncoeur, the first things he notices are the streets and the trolley wires, the ways of movement in the urban environment of San Francisco. The streets and the trolley wires can be used as visible borders to break the city into different sections and neighborhoods.

I wandered out like a haggard ghost, and there she was, Frisco – long, bleak streets with trolley wires all shrouded in fog and whiteness. I stumbled around a few blocks. Weird bums (Mission and Third) asked me for dimes in the dawn. I heard music somewhere. ‘Boy, am I going to dig all this later! But now I’ve got to find Remi Boncoeur. (OR: 53.)

The fog brings some mystery to the imagery of the city, yet the whiteness Sal describes keeps the image also hopeful, especially in comparison with the grey cities on the east coast. In addition, it is worth noticing how Sal marks the place where he meets the bums by telling us the exact street names.

The first people he describes are the “weird bums”. Bums, hobos and other outsiders are the people with whom Paradise connects and is interested in in all places he goes to, as their way of living is close to the ideal way of living Paradise has imagined. In the 1940s and the 1950s, as industrial work started to disappear from the cities and more working-class people moved to the cities from the countryside, poverty grew in the urban areas (Beauregard 2006: 40). Bums and homeless people became even a greater part of the urban imagery and part of the human environment of the modern urban novels.

Remi lives in an area of San Francisco which was built for the Navy Yard workers during the Second World War. The place was special, as it was “the only community where whites and Negroes lived together voluntarily; and that was so, and so wild and joyous a place I’ve never seen since” (OR: 53). The fact that white and black people

lived in a same housing project was rare in the time, as racial discrimination was part of society and neighborhoods were divided between different races. In addition, unequal economic division led to an increase in the number of slums in central cities all across the United States.

After his time in San Francisco and later on the countryside of California, Sal arrives back to New York and is overwhelmed by the experience of returning to New York and to Times Square:

seeing with my innocent road-eyes the absolute madness and fantastic hoorair of New York with its millions and millions hustling forever for a buck among themselves, the mad dream – grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City. (OR: 96.)

Jack Kerouac and other Beat writers had different types of techniques to explore the urban space and to incorporate urban subjectivity into their textual operations. They were drifting in the city without any clear destination, and they experienced the urban space under the influence of drugs and they explored spaces that had escaped rationalization and modernization. For example in *On the Road* the characters always seem to end up on the Times Square after their road trips. When living in New York the members of the Beat generation were highly attracted by the Times Square, as it was still an area which had not been organized or rationalized into separated, normalized functions and there they met the drug dealers, pimps, prostitutes and other outsiders of the society who greatly inspired their art and way of living (Kozlowsky 2004: 209).

Once in New York Sal, Dean and their local friends attend enormous parties that last for days and spread from one apartment to another across streets and even neighborhoods. The parties are described as wild and filled with hundreds of people moving from one apartment to another. (OR: 112 – 115.) As the parties spread across different apartments and even neighborhoods, the people in the parties are crossing visible borders of the houses and imagined borders of public and private space. Most of the people are strangers to each other, yet they meet in someone else's home that has been turned into

a mad party. The lines of private and public are conflated in these parties, as someone's home becomes a public meeting place for strangers. Moreover, the whole idea of public and private in *On the Road* (1955) appears to be conflated as the main character is continuously on the move. When Sal is travelling, he lives in public spaces such as buses, trains and different stations. When he is visiting a friend or even hitchhiking a ride from a stranger, he steps into their private space, making it less private and more like a public space.

When Sal and his friends are on the road, their use of space is similar to the people they admire, the fellaheen or the people outside the society. When travelling, Sal and his companions are located in public spaces and they are visible to the gaze of strangers which is what the fellaheen often experience, as they are often described as homeless or spending most of their time in public spaces, in front of strangers. For the fellaheen there is no privacy in the city, they are one with the city and always visible to the public.

The jazz Sal listens to and the concerts he sees are described throughout the novel as something raw and wild, but in San Francisco the jazz players seem to go even further with their ecstatic performances. The players and the crowd are mad, people are stumbling into the club from the street after hearing the music, and everyone is dancing and sweating together. The description of a single jazz concert in San Francisco lasts for over three pages (OR: 178 – 182). What is remarkable in this description and the event itself is that they are in a black neighborhood (“little Harlem on Folsom Street”) and every person Sal describes, for one exception, is black. The jazz musicians and everyone else in the jazz club are black except for Sal and his friends. (OR: 178-179.) This is unusual at the time as racial discrimination was still legal and white people had their own jazz clubs which did not play bebop.

In these jazz scenes in San Francisco Roy Kozlowsky's (2004: 208) idea of jazz being an urban event in *On the Road* holds true, as in the scenes the music lures people from the street into the clubs and after the performances the people continue their

celebrations of jazz on the street while walking home or moving to the next gig (OR: 178 – 182). Once again the private space of the clubs changes into the public space of the street which proves that the urbanites described in *On the Road* are able to move across imagined or even visible borders. Imagined borders in the case of the racial discrimination and visible borders with the private and public spaces of the clubs and the streets.

San Francisco is not the only place where Sal and his companions go to see jazz concerts. Almost all the cities visited in *On the Road* were centers of bebop in the United States at the time, and the characters are witnessing the rise of bebop from the black jazz clubs to the knowledge of the general public. As Sal is walking home from a San Francisco night club in a black neighborhood, he sees the jazz players and the crowds going home and states the following: “Holy flowers floating in the air, were all these tired faces in the dawn of Jazz America.” (OR: 185.) Sal knew that despite bebop’s limited audiences at the time, it would become something big.

In *On the Road* (1955) the main characters visit black neighborhoods from time to time in different cities in the United States. As other white people in the 1950s did not visit black neighborhoods unless they really needed to, the main characters’ urban images are different from the majority of white people at the time. Sal and the other characters cross imagined borders in the city when they move from the white neighborhoods to the black ones, which were often be described as slums or ghettos. For example, when Sal is once again leaving San Francisco with Dean, he leaves from Mission district, which was a minority district with immigrants from Europe and especially from Mexico:

Mission Street that last day in Frisco was a great riot of construction work, children playing, whooping Negroes coming home from work, dust, excitement, the great buzzing and vibrating hum of what is really America’s most excited city – and overhead the pure blue sky and the joy of the foggy sea that always rolls in at night to make everybody hungry for food and further excitement. (OR: 187.)



Sal describes San Francisco as “America’s most excited city” and according to what he has described, the excitement comes from the people he has met and from all the excitement the city has to offer, including the jazz concerts, colorful and inspiring neighborhoods and the unique “end of the continent” feeling the city has.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I have analyzed how urban space is constructed through human environment in Jack Kerouac's first two novels, *The Town and the City* and *On the Road*. I used urban studies and urban literary studies to get better understanding of the American society in the 1950s, when the analyzed novels were published. I also used Hana Wirth-Nesher's *City Codes* for the more specific analysis of the urban space and human environment in the novels.

Before writing this thesis I had assumed the two novels would be very similar in terms of their description and use of urban space, as at the time of writing the novels Kerouac had lived in New York and other cities for quite some time. However, my analysis proved that *The Town and the City* and *On the Road* are quite different in terms of their city descriptions and use of their urban surroundings and more specifically the human environment.

Almost half of the length of *The Town and the City* is used to describe the life of the Martin family in their countryside home in Galloway. Once the family is forced to move to the city of New York, it becomes obvious how some members of the family would not be able, or at least would need a great amount of time to adjust to the life in the urban surroundings. Therefore in *The Town and the City* some of the characters are viewing the city from afar, unable to integrate into the human environment of the city. Especially the parents of the family are unable to adjust to the social rules of the urbanites, thus they are unable to use the opportunities given to them in the new urban environment and therefore are left outside the social structures of the city. For example, the parents do not understand the social distance people have in urban spaces, such as the city of New York and thus feel rejected and left outside when trying to connect with the masses of the urban dwellers.

Most of the children of the Martin family are able to take advantage of the possibilities the city has to offer them. For example Francis, who never seemed to feel at home in

Galloway and thought that “[...] just leave this town and this house and going off as myself – [...] – that’s a thought of freedom” (TC: 192), is able to integrate into the intellectual societies of New York and is even able to understand different hierarchies of the different intellectual neighborhoods in the city and uses this for his own good. Also Peter is using the possibilities of the urban surroundings in order to widen his social circles and to understand the world around him.

In *The Town and the City* the main characters are learning to use the opportunities the city life and its human environment has given them but in *On the Road* the protagonist and his friends are already living the urban life more or less to the fullest. They are aware of the opportunities and possibilities of the city and are therefore able to take advantage of the possibilities and their independence in the city, for example for their inspiration in arts. As Sal and his companions in *On the Road* are aware of the different structures and human environments of the city, they are able to move freely and even cross imaginary borders that limit the lives of some urbanites. Sal is crossing imaginary borders in cities in terms of ethnicity, race and class, for example when attending jazz concerts in black neighborhoods.

The characters of *The Town and the City* witness different types of outsiders among the human environment of New York, the occasional homeless, bums and drifters in the city but for example in the case of George Martin they are looked upon with bewilderment or with slight interest in the case of Peter. In *On the Road* these people, the fellaheen, have become a source of inspiration for the protagonist, almost an ideal way of living. The protagonist, Sal Paradise, is able to cross the imaginary borders of the city and thus observe closely or even become part of the outsiders of the urban space.

The human environment in *On the Road* is more varied in comparison with *The Town and the City* most likely because the main characters are more experienced urban citizens and visit several cities throughout the novel. Especially San Francisco brings variety to the description of the human environment, as the city’s human environment is

very different in comparison to New York. The general description of New York in the two novels is often grey and full of smog. In *On the Road* San Francisco is seen with blue skies and fog. San Francisco writer Anisse Gross (2015) describes and explains the differences of the two cities the following way:

If New York is about “making it”, San Francisco is about making it in one’s own offbeat way. A storied safe haven for outcasts, a bedroom for bohemians, this city is about pursuing the dream – not the American dream, but the dream of the west, the limits of self-expression and identity.

In addition to the cities themselves, also the people seem to be distinct in them: New York streets are filled with businessmen in a hurry as San Francisco has its “withered starlets” and “disenchanted stunt-men” (OR: 154), the people of entertainment and pleasure. These people form part of the human environment in the cities and therefore the way the human environment is experienced in the two novels is different. *The Town and the City* tells the story of possibilities and gaining once independence in the city as *On the Road* focuses more on how the city and its human environment inspire the protagonist to become a person free of limitations and imagined borders within the urban space.

Jack Kerouac’s works have been studied in great detail but more in terms of their way to discuss, for example religion, poetry or race. During the past five years we have seen a great increase in interest towards writers of the Beat Generation, as some of their novels and experiences have been brought alive on new films and hopefully this awakens new interest towards the generation and its writers. In that case Wirth-Nesher’s other three aspects of the representation of the city in narrative could be studied: the natural, the built and the verbal environment in addition to the human environment studied in this thesis. Moreover, it would be interesting to know if Kerouac’s later works or works of other Beat writers share the similar urban elements with *On the Road* and *The Town and the City*.

## WORKS CITED

## Primary Sources

Kerouac, Jack (1950). *The Town and the City*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

Kerouac, Jack (1955). *On the Road*. London: Penguin Group.

## Secondary Sources

Albright, Thomas (1999). "Visuals: How the Beats Begat the Freaks" In *The Rolling Stone Book of the Beats: the Beat Generation and the American Culture*. Ed. Holly George-Warren. New York: Rolling Stone Press. 351-356.

Beauregard Robert, A. (2006) *When America Became Suburban*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Burroughs, William (1959). *Naked Lunch*. New York: Grove Press.

Charters, Ann (1991). "Introduction" in *On the Road*. Jack Kerouac. London: Penguin Group.

Flanagan, William G. (2010). *Urban Sociology*. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Ginsberg, Allen (1956). *Howl and Other Poems*. San Francisco: City Lights Books.

Ginsberg, Allen (1995). "Prologue" In *Beat Culture and the New America 1950-1965*. Ed. Lisa Phillips. Whitney Museum of American Art: New York. 17-23.

Grans, Herbert J. (2011). "Urbanism and Suburbanism as Ways of Life" in *The American Urban Reader*. Ed. Pub. 31-40.

Gross, Anisse (2015). "Reading American Cities: Books about San Francisco." *The Guardian*. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2015/feb/26/reading-american-cities-books-about-san-francisco>

- Holton, Robert (2004). "The Sordid Hipsters of America": Beat Culture and the Folds of Heterogeneity." In *Reconstructing the Beats*. Ed. Jennie Skerl. Gordonsville: Palgrave Macmillan. 11-26.
- Jacoby, Russell (1987). *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*. New York: Basic Books Inc. Publishers.
- Kerouac, Jack (1958). *The Subterraneans and Pic*. London: Penguin Group.
- Kerouac, Jack (1960). *The Lonesome Traveller*. New York: Grove Press.
- Kerouac, Jack (1965). *Desolation Angels*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group.
- Kerouac, Jack (1968). *Vanity of Duluoaz*. New York: Penguin Group.
- Kerouac, Jack (1993). *Good Blonde & Others*. Ed. Donald Allen. San Francisco: City Lights Books.
- Kozlowsky, Roy (2004). "Beat Spaces" in *Cold War Hothouses: Inventing Postwar Culture, from Cockpit to Playboy*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press. Available at: <http://site.ebrary.com.proxy.tritonia.fi/lib/tritonia/docDetail.action?docID=10482146>
- Lardas, John (2001). *The Bop Acopalypse: The Religious Visions of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press. Available at: <https://books.google.fi/books?id=msyApN2HdsYC&printsec=frontcover&hl=fi#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- Lehan, Richard (1998). *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Merriam Webster Dictionary. "Fellah" [Cited 7.1.2015] Available at: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fellah>
- McAdams, Lewis (2001). *Birth of the Cool. Beat, Bepop & the American Avant-Garde*. Great Britain: Schribner.
- McNally, Dennis (2003). *Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, the Beat Generation, and America*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press.
- Morley, Catherine (2012). *Modern American Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Phillips, Lisa (1995). "Beat Culture: America Revisioned" In *Beat Culture and the New America 1950-1965*. Ed. Lisa Phillips. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art. 23-40.

- Phillips, Rod (2001) *"Forest Beatniks" and "Urban Thoreaus": Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, Lew Welch, and Michael McClure*. Peter Lang International Academic Publishers.
- Puterbaugh, Parke (1999). "The Beats and the Birth of the Counterculture" In *The Rolling Stone Book of the Beats: the Beat Generation and the American Culture*. Ed. Holly George-Warren. New York: Rolling Stone Press. 357- 363.
- Raskin, Jonah (2004). *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg's Howl and the Making of the Beat Generation*. Berkley & Los Angeles: University of California Press. Available at: <http://site.ebrary.com.proxy.tritonia.fi/lib/tritonia/docDetail.action?docID=10062274>
- Simmel, Georg (1976). *The Metropolis and Mental Life. The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: Free Press.
- Spengler, Oswald (1990). *The Decline of the West*. (Transl. by Charles Francis Atkinson.) New York: Oxford University Press.
- van Elteren, Mel (1999). "The Subculture of the Beats: A Sociological Revisit." *Journal of American Culture* 22:3, 71-99.
- Watson, Steven (1995). *The birth of the beat generation: visionaries, rebels, and hipsters, 1944-1960*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Wirth, Louis (1938). "Urbanity as a Way of Life." *American Journal of Sociology*. 44:1, 1.
- Wirth-Nesher, Hana (2008). *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel*. New York: Cambridge University Press.