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## The reception of the Beat Generation: a discussion

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## 9 THE RECEPTION OF THE BEAT GENERATION: A DISCUSSION

A rather trite conclusion to the research presented in this book would state that different contexts lead to different interpretations, or, using Iser's terms, different contexts produce different works of the same text. Nevertheless, such a conclusion would be problematic for several reasons, though the main one should suffice: by stating that such a result was expected, one would ignore that it is often not the *what* but the *how* which ultimately matters and which can truly illuminate the intricacies and nuances of the subject analyzed. It would therefore miss the possibilities opened by a comparative approach to reception, namely the ability to comment on the subject from a new and distinct point of view and contrast it with dominant discourses. After all, it is frequently the perspective of the Other which leads to a new, previously unobserved image of the subject. As a result, the subject is reimagined and redefined, thus becoming something slightly different. Importantly, discussing these reimagined subjects not only emphasizes their interpretive potential, but also can help explain exactly why certain cultural artifacts resonate across cultures while others are mostly limited to their original context.

The first impulse would be to say that the Beats are often understood to symbolize a whole generation of young people. As a result, the ideals and viewpoints of the authors of the Beat Generation are identified with those of the youth of the time and vice versa, the habits and behavior of the youth are said to be the same as those of the Beats. Yet the comparison of the American reception of the Beats with its Czech and Czechoslovak counterpart shows that this understanding has several gaps.

A more accurate statement would claim that this view of the Beats was common in the United States, which consequently played an important part in their reception. As Diana Trilling puts it, the audience at Ginsberg's and Corso's Co-

lumbia reading “*were* children, miserable children trying desperately to manage, asking desperately to be taken out of it all; there was nothing one could imagine except to bundle them home and feed them warm milk, promise them they need no longer call for mama and papa” (226). Therefore, the concretization of the Beats in the United States of the 1950s and 1960s explicates the Beats as a youth phenomenon and an indication of social unrest. This understanding of the Beats as the phenomenon of a generation reflects the emerging trend of sociological inquiry in the period through publications such as *The Lonely Crowd* or *Organization Man* and the decade’s various “teen-issues” films such as *Rebel Without a Cause*, which eventually spawned numerous beatsploitation movies and books trying to satisfy the public demand invigorated by the frequently sensationalized reporting; in turn, these beatsploitation works affected the discourse surrounding the Beats even further. This reception was undoubtedly further facilitated by the complexity of the term “the Beat Generation” itself. Not only did nearly every major Beat figure provide their own definition of the term, but the word “generation” in it was simply begging to be understood as encompassing the whole generation of Americans. Eventually, the term represented substantially disparate concepts for its users (Belletto 2–3); naturally, this made discussing the Beats even more difficult. As the descriptions of various exhibitions or anniversaries by American universities show, a generational or at least a subcultural reading of the Beat generation is present in the reception of the Beats even today. In other words, an inherent part of the Beats’ reception is the understanding of the Beats as heralds of a particular segment of society.

In contrast, the initial understanding of the Beats in Czechoslovakia does not significantly differ from the Czech understanding which followed: both periods view the Beats as a literary movement first, and the subcultural aspect is only faintly present. For instance, a 1965 article in *Mladý svět* (Young World), a publication targeted at the youth of Communist Czechoslovakia, published a short article on the Beats of France; the text describes the Beats as a generation of young, somewhat apathetic people whose largest “kicks” are sex and marijuana, though even these bring only temporary comfort (Gellé 6).<sup>74</sup> However, this article is in its treatment of the Beats as a whole generation quite a rarity in the overall Czechoslovak discourse on the Beats. The dominant image of the Beats, whether it is in the first Czechoslovak critiques or as one of the topics for the maturita examination, depicts them as a literary movement rather than a movement of rebellious youth. While the “*vlasatci*” of the 1960s somewhat resembled the Beats in their non-conformity, these have never been described as being the Beat Generation or

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74 Unlike the sensationalist portrayals in the United States, the article also describes the Beats as being against violence and criminal activity in general. Thus the resulting image is not wholly negative, especially since the article is followed by a short text on British youth hitch-hiking across the country.

associated with them in any way.<sup>75</sup> This aspect of the Beats is further articulated by the controversies surrounding the Beats – or rather the lack thereof – in Czechoslovakia. For instance, American media frequently ignored Ginsberg’s vision and determination and focused instead on the controversies surrounding him, thus opting to portray him as a rebellious troublemaker (Jařab, “Co Allen Ginsberg byl” 11). In contrast, the Czechoslovak reception is substantially less interested in the issues of sexuality and especially homosexuality. Granted, this is partly due to the relative scarcity of information regarding the Beats as well as to Ferlinghetti and Corso, both heterosexuals, being the first Beats to receive extensive coverage. That being said, Ginsberg’s homosexuality was explicitly mentioned for the first time only after he was deported from the country; while this aimed at painting him as a “sick” individual, Ginsberg’s sexual orientation was only raised when it was convenient to the regime. This ultimately serves as a reminder that the issue of sexuality was not a relevant factor for Czechoslovak readers in forming the popular discourse on the Beats.

Interestingly, Burroughs is mostly absent from Czech and Czechoslovak discourse on the Beats, which most likely helped the Beats to avoid significant controversy in the country. Unlike Ginsberg’s or Kerouac’s texts, Burroughs’s novels were simply unavailable to Czechoslovaks. Even today Burroughs’s cultural presence is rather minimal in the Czech Republic; this omission is further complemented by the idiosyncrasies of Burroughs’s writing (Rauvolf, “Beat po řesku” 24). As Rauvolf points out, translating Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* was at times a significant challenge and the later cut-up trilogy was even more daunting (Rauvolf, Interview). Not only is Burroughs’s work thematically more challenging than that of Kerouac or Corso, but also his literary experiments such as the cut-up method further complicate the understanding of his work; these experiments are difficult to successfully translate into Czech because of the extensive case system in Czech grammar, among other things. Nevertheless, Burroughs’s absence from the general discourse is again telling of the differences in reception, as it emphasizes the larger significance of Beat poetry in the Czechoslovak context. This, in turn, helps illustrate how publication history affects the canonicity of artists.

In the United States the Beats symbolized social protest, freedom of speech, but also a certain Otherness. Furthermore, morality was intertwined with the Beats due to the stereotype of beatniks, the obscenity trials, or their frank advocacy of homosexuality. Conversely, the Beats in Czechoslovakia represented individuality – rather than a communal or generational movement – unrestricted by the oppressive regime. In Czechoslovakia the immorality of the Beats, with the

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75 It should be noted that “Vlasatci” and the underground artists resembled the social understanding of the Beats at least in the denunciation aimed at them. When discussing the Beats and the underground artists, Martin Machovec observes that both subcultures were at times described as “barbarians” in order to be discredited (“Podzemí” 7).

exception of Ginsberg's deportation, was never much of an issue, as the regime itself was inherently immoral. The Beats actually represented a strong moral stance even if the socialist realist critiques written by Zábřana or Hájek are read at face value. At worst, that is when scrutinized under the standards of socialist realism, the Beats represent a somewhat progressive literary movement in the United States, which eventually might find the correct answer to the immoral Capitalism of the West. At best, they represent the struggle of ordinary Czechoslovaks for self-determination and individual freedom. This, together with the absence of a negative beatnik stereotype, made it far easier for Czechoslovaks to identify with the Beats.

The apoliticism of the Beats is also a significant feature of their reception in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic. Unlike in the United States, readers hardly viewed the Beats' apparent disinterest in politics as their unwillingness to engage with public issues. While the Beats often wrote socially conscious and critical poetry, they did not seem to follow any explicit ideology other than the critique of social norms that threaten the self. In other words, the social criticism of the Beats was a "novelty in the Czech lands," as the only available socially engaged art was explicitly pro-communist and controlled by the state (Kopecký, "Czeching the Beat" 99). As Inka Machulková argues, it was virtually impossible to ignore politics, because politics was present in every aspect of daily life, and being apolitical was therefore out of the question ("Já, beatnička"). Writing almost twenty years after the Warsaw Pact invasion, V. Žufan further explains the politicization of the mundane: "Everyone who lives in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic should realize that every apolitical act is fundamentally political under Socialism, and therefore act accordingly" (40, my translation). It is then the virtue of the communist regime itself which charged even the most meaningless acts with possible political explosiveness. This in turn charged the Beats with a strong social critique, which further emboldened the growing student movement and increased the efforts of many intellectuals to abandon strict Party lines dictating the lives of the country's citizens. Ginsberg's Prague visit emblemized the Beats as standing for personal liberties

These insights then lead to another conclusion: the Beats were – and still are – more canonical in the Czech lands than in the United States. In their home country, there were a few instances hinting at the change in the Beats' reception which would eventually take place, such as Donald Hall's gradual embrace of Ginsberg's poetry in his *Contemporary American Poetry*. Nevertheless, the interpretations of the Beats were significantly polarized, and it was not until the end of the 1990s that the Beats found a truly mainstream acceptance. This acceptance has at times grown to the point of mythologization, and frequently emphasizes the social aspect of the Beats over their actual writing. Granted, the Beats as individuals in many respects were larger than life, yet this mythologization is especially

noticeable with Ginsberg and Burroughs, the former often being hailed for his visionary or prophetic qualities, while the latter is often described as a subversive and countercultural icon. Importantly, this image was also cultivated by some of the Beat publishers. In other words, the Beat Generation authors are frequently viewed as individuals of considerable social impact, which then makes it a part of the appeal of the Beat Generation as a whole.

In contrast, the reception of the Beats in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic shows a more stable pattern. Currently, “Howl” and especially *On the Road* are embedded in the Czech canon of American literature to a greater degree than in their actual country of origin. Importantly, this canonicity considers these Beat texts as literary texts rather than cultural artifacts of significant social impact. The Beats being featured in the maturita exams is only the tip of their canonicity iceberg. A recent overview of American culture prepared by Český rozhlas (Czech Radio Broadcast) greatly emphasizes the role the Beats had in American literature and in American culture in general. Titled “Americký rok” (American Year), the radio series aims at introducing “seminal works of art” of the United States to a Czech audience (Velíšek). Not only does its literature section, which includes Joseph Heller, Thomas Wolfe and Langston Hughes, begin with Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, but Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg are also the only artists who are mentioned by name in the article’s title or featured in a photograph. Together with the constant high profile of the Beats and the lasting image of the Beats as important American writers, the conclusion is clear: The Beats are seen by Czechs as being more representative of American literature than they are by the Americans themselves.

Yet what is the cause of the differences in status of the Beats? A simple answer would suggest that the initial failure of the Beats in the United States was due to the overall *zeitgeist* of the period. However, such an answer warrants a more thorough discussion, as its logic leads to a rather paradoxical conclusion: totalitarian Czechoslovakia was ultimately more welcoming of the Beats than their own country.

What substantially hurt the reception of the Beats were the media theatrics and the very nature of the United States of the fifties. There was little willingness in the popular press to examine the Beat phenomenon in a somewhat neutral light without immediately dismissing it; in addition, media treatment often conflated the Beats and juvenile delinquency. Several factors contributed to such sensationalist treatment: the advocacy of drugs, support of homosexuals, disavowal of traditional authorities such as organized religion in favor of Eastern philosophies, or their romanticizing of outcast figures. These and others were in direct opposition to the values of the age, which advised one to get a job, follow conventions, and be a respectable citizen. In addition, Ginsberg’s *Howl* and later Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* faced obscenity charges, which further fueled the sensationalist reporting. As Chester MacPhee, the customs officer responsible for confiscating *Howl*, com-

ments, “The words and the sense of the writing is obscene ... You wouldn’t want your children to come across it” (qtd. in Ferlinghetti, “Horn on *Howl*” 125).

Leslie A. Fiedler offers a psychoanalytic reading of American society: he first observes that in American literature there is a “predominance of the Gothic tradition, of terror and death and violence, in the works we loved best” (“Second Thoughts” 9). Importantly, American Gothic differs from its European counterpart: “European Gothic identified blackness with the super-ego and was therefore revolutionary in its implications; the American gothic ... identified evil with the id and was conservative at its deepest level of implications, whatever the intent of its authors” (Fiedler, *Love and Death* 149). The id, housing the instinctual drives of a person, is then repressed, which in turn leads to serious consequences: American authors are unable “to deal with adult heterosexual love and [their] consequent obsession with death, incest, and innocent homosexuality,” Fiedler further argues (xi). It then makes sense that any work of art emphasizing inner drives, as the Beat “barbarians” did, is understood on the innermost level as dangerous to the status quo.

In this reading, the Puritan background of the United States is one of the major factors in the American reception of the Beat Generation. The Beats, importantly, were certainly too freethinking for their time; as Joyce Johnson writes, Kerouac “had depicted rampant promiscuity, homosexual relationships, and young women who actually wanted and invited sex” in the era when Henry Miller’s books were banned in the USA (“Kerouac”). Naturally, Kerouac and other Beats were not the only ones to challenge American normativity. Writers such as Henry Miller or Charles Bukowski reacted to the inherent Puritanism of American society and together with Gregory Corso or Allen Ginsberg, who aimed to provoke by their frank openness, have had a liberating effect on the writers that followed (Jařab, “Láska”). Yet this frank openness also provoked the popular media to connect the Beat Generation with juvenile delinquency, violence, or sex, which substantially affected their reception. Zima explains that in every context there are *intermediaries* who start the process of reception by notifying the public of the author and subsequently interpreting the author’s work (196). While Zima explains the concept of intermediaries for foreign literature requiring a translation, this concept is also applicable to domestic works as well. Unfortunately for the Beats, the role of the intermediaries in the United States was mostly undertaken by the popular press, which did not shy away from a strongly sensationalized depiction.

Zima’s concept of intermediaries also helps explain the overall positive reception of the Beats in Czechoslovakia. The most important intermediaries were Jan Zábřana and Igor Hájek and their role in the early 1960s was to present the Beats to the state in a palatable way in order to get them published; other intermediaries crucial for the success of the Beats in Czechoslovakia include Josef Škvorecký, Miroslav Kovařík, or the founder of Viola, Jiří Osterman. Since Zábřana and oth-

ers had a favorable view of Western literature and opposed the government-approved art of socialist realism, the Beats' initial position in Czechoslovakia was to their advantage. Ultimately, the Beats would hardly have been published if it were not for Hájek's careful editing of Beat texts and his double-speak commentary in his seminal "Americká bohéma." The careful selection of excerpts or the virtual exclusion of Burroughs also helped the Beats avoid the controversies they had to face back home. Nevertheless, the state also had an intermediating role by virtue of controlling every public discourse until the mid-1960s. While the Beats had to be carefully repackaged for the regime, which meant choosing the texts most likely to be published or adding an explanatory afterword denouncing their more controversial or defective aspects; the regime then further helped spread their works by approving the publication of new Beat texts or providing coverage of Ginsberg's visit in the press. Effectively, the controlled nature of the discourse in a totalitarian state led to another paradox – it made sure that the positive image of the Beats spread by Zábřana and others was not interfered with. The regime ultimately played a double role in the publication of the Beats in Czechoslovakia: it not only acted as the target of the Beats' critique in the eyes of their readers, but it also ensured that the intermediaries of the Beats were able to work relatively independently once the Beats as a publication topic had been approved.

The initial academic and critical reception in the United States strongly resembles its popular counterpart and shows the need for interpretive communities to reiterate their stances and identities. These comments overemphasize the threat to intelligence they see in the Beats; while Scott complains that the Beats are part of a larger trend that makes adults surrender their "once powerful authority symbols" in exchange for adolescent entertainment, Podhoretz claims that the Beats and their supporters are "against intelligence itself" (153; 318). Similarly to popular media, they frequently viewed the Beats as a social phenomenon, and overemphasized the more shocking aspects of the Beats, which was further compounded by Mailer's extremely influential "The White Negro." This treatment charged the Beats with even more sensationalism than they actually possessed, and it was this "beatnikized" image of the Beats that critics frequently responded to; when the poet W. H. Auden exclaimed that Diana Trilling should be "ashamed" for being "moved" by Ginsberg's poetry reading at Columbia, Trilling responded by saying "it's different when it's a sociological phenomenon and when it's human beings" (Trilling 230). For Trilling and others, the Beats were merely "a sociological phenomenon" most of the time and not much else. And while the Beats had some early supporters in academia, they were too few and far between to matter in the long run. So much for a formalist approach.

Curiously, the academics of New Criticism used the same rhetoric when denouncing the Beats as the Czechoslovak state-controlled media did when explaining Ginsberg's deportation in 1965. As the anonymous critic of Ginsberg said to *Rudé právo*,

the Beat's ideals "are not only inconsistent with the ideals of the current socialistic man, but they are also in direct contrast to the common sense and sentiment of all healthy and rational people" ("Kocovina"). When the status quo is challenged, appeals to decency and rationality thus manage to cross the divisive borders of ideologies.

The Czechoslovak critical reception was initially also extremely political, though naturally for completely different reasons. Socialist realism judged each writer on his or her ability to "properly" portray the real – that is portray it according to the ideology of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia – while formalist or structuralist readings were strictly forbidden as bourgeois. As a result, the early Zábřana and Hájek critiques read the Beats as not being sufficiently equipped to provide actual answers to the questions they raise, though these readings were not intended to be interpreted at face value, as the later criticism of Zábřana and Hájek shows. This changing criticism naturally corresponds to the waning influence of Ladislav Štoll and his ilk; in addition, this also shows the importance of interpretive communities and the interpretive "keys" they use to decode the content of a text, thus creating, in Iser's terminology, a work. The difference between a text and a work, and therefore the need to also read literary criticism as such, is most evident in the language of the literary critiques and its evolution throughout the 1960s. Reading the early critiques at face value, the Beats would be seen as proto-socialist writers who predicted the fall of American society as the direct result of its capitalist nature despite not possessing the right political ideology. In contrast, by the end of the 1960s the Beats were understood as being anti-authoritarian in general. While American interpretive communities saw the Beats as criticizing American society and its values, their Czechoslovak counterparts took their rebellious nature to represent an anti-consumerist as well as anti-authoritarian attitude. This reading is further cemented by Ginsberg's visit and subsequent deportation; from then on, the reception of the Beats in the Czech Republic includes a strong anti-totalitarian reading due to the historical role the Beats and Ginsberg in particular played in Czechoslovakia.

This historical role is further emphasized by Czech scholars; in contrast, American academia tends to slightly emphasize the social importance of the Beats over their actual writing. Whether it is the numerous Ginsberg stories or the seemingly never-ending list of Burroughs's monikers, a substantial amount of critical works helps disseminate the importance of the Beats as symbols representing certain values, attitudes, or ideals. The names of some Beat publications are already quite telling: for example, two important Burroughs biographies are titled *Literary Outlaw* and *El Hombre Invisible*, while an influential Ginsberg biography bears the title *American Scream*. Even though these titles are related to the writers – "literary outlaw" and "el hombre invisible" were some of the monikers Burroughs earned during his life, while "American scream" is a play on Ginsberg's *Howl* – they also further shape the overall discourse on the Beats. These monikers then not only promote Burroughs

as a subversive figure or Ginsberg as an American countercultural celebrity, but also shape the overall discourse of the Beats by reinforcing their status as cultural icons. Such a discourse then informs subsequent discourses on the Beats, as can be seen on the example of the Emory exhibition. The Beats are, in other words, a linguistic sign connoting a certain ethos, for example rebelliousness, an anti-authoritarian attitude, or sexual freedom. In a way, a substantial amount of scholarship indirectly supports the views of Norman Podhoretz or Harold Bloom in claiming that the writing of the Beats is secondary to their sociological importance. What Bloom or Podhoretz ignore is the tendency of readers to associate themselves with artists and cultural artifacts which embody an ethos they can identify with; this of course includes the critics themselves.

The role criticism plays in establishing and maintaining a discourse is further illuminated by viewing it through the lens of Bourdieu's field of cultural production. A non-trivial amount of American criticism still feels the need to constantly remind the reader of the initial animosity of academia toward the Beats. While playing a significant role historically, this stance is hardly true anymore, yet a substantial number of Beat Studies scholars still proliferate this idea in the context of current academia and its publishing industry. Using Bourdieu's notion of established authors competing with the new voices in academic discourse, one might view these scholars entrenched in Beat Studies as vehemently opposing any changes, and therefore challengers, in their area. These academics then in a somewhat Romantic fashion defend their subfield against "invaders" threatening to subvert their notion of Beat scholarship. Nevertheless, academia is an industry, and the new scholars cannot occupy the same subfield as the established scholars without changing the overall academic discourse.

Yet perhaps something else might be at play here too, namely the notion of "Beatness" and Beat identity. By painting the Beats as opposing the status quo of 1950s America, Bruce Cook indirectly argues that there were two Americas, and the Beats represented the "Other America," the America of dissent and protest. This Other America existed long before the Beats, going back to Ralph Waldo Emerson or Walt Whitman; the Beats were then merely its most recent manifestation. Kerouac, it seems, would agree. Connecting "Beatness" with everything from his grandfather's defiant challenge to thunderstorms – "Go ahead, go, if you're more powerful than I am, strike me" ("Origins" 70) – to "the inky ditties of old cartoons"; in Kerouac's mind it embodies "wild selfbelieving individuality" which was always a part of America destined only to slowly disappear around the end of the Second World War (71–72). Beatness, then, is in this view a manifestation of something universally present in American culture, something that was given a specific shape and voice due to the cultural and social context of the era, yet also something that embodies the very Americanness it often challenges. Put simply, it is an attitude and a way of approaching the world.

Cook's explanation of Beatness shows that for many readers the Beats are more than just writers; instead, the Beats represent an idea. Consequently, the aspect of *performance* and *identity* present in several of the readings should be noted. Milena M. Marešová unknowingly touches upon this when she discusses the oeuvre of the Czech writer Jan Pelc. Pelc, an underground favorite ever since publishing his debut novel ... *a bude hůř* (... *It's Gonna Get Worse*, 1985) depicting life in Czechoslovakia during the normalization period, is often hailed by his contemporaries; however, Marešová points out that this admiration is limited to a relatively close-knit group of readers. These readers either directly experienced what Pelc described in the novel or were drawn to Pelc's narrative due to their shared sensibilities. The novel, described by Marešová as being close to the novels of the Beat Generation, is celebrated by its readers due to the author's openness and authenticity. The author's actual experience creates a three-dimensional portrayal of life in communist Czechoslovakia, and readers can relive the era through the novel. Pelc's novel then represents a certain social group and its ethos by allowing one to experience the group's values through the act of reading; importantly, this experience further reinforces the group's identity and sense of belonging.

The emphasis on experience and identity is more than relevant for understanding the reception of the Beat Generation. While belonging to the same generation as the author might naturally be a contributing factor for appreciating a text, it is a common feature of Beat discourse to emphasize the Beat Generation as having a certain set of ideals and attitudes. Importantly, for some interpretive communities merely sharing such a reading is not enough; instead, as Marešová's reading of Pelc indirectly suggests, the reinforcing of an identity can be an important aspect of a literary text. As a result, reading the works of the Beat Generation allows one to identify with – and through the process of reading also acquire and perform – a Beat attitude. This notion is present not only in numerous popular interpretations of the Beats, but also in their academic reception, albeit in a less obvious manner.

As Kopecký explains, the Beats are popular because their notions are applicable even in today's world, which they achieved through their universal approach in promoting their ideals rather than a specific ideology (Kopecký, "Czeching the Beat" 101). After all, Kerouac himself explained the term "Beat" as an attitude standing for a "new *more*" ("Origins" 73).<sup>76</sup> In other words, since the Beats are often seen as important for embodying a certain viewpoint or ethos, a *performative* aspect of the act of reading is a vital part of the overall experience for some readers. Christopher Carmona's dissertation *Keeping the Beat: The Practice of the Beat Movement* indirectly provides an insightful commentary on the issue. Carmona starts by differentiating between the terms "the Beat Generation" and "the Beat Movement." The Beat Generation, usually centered on "The Beat Trinity" of Bur-

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<sup>76</sup> Notably, the identity of the Czechoslovak underground is defined as "new sensibility" (Vodrážka 16).

roughs, Ginsberg and Kerouac, is a term that delineates a relatively fixed group of artists who were in the spotlight in the 1950s and 1960s (3–4). Current scholarship understands the Beats as a “static literary and social movement,” when in fact it is “a fluid social and poetical movement” with a certain philosophy and rhetorical elements, Carmona adds. While it is often thought of in terms of white men, the Beats were actually inclusive and included men, women, minorities and practicing Jews and Buddhists (4, 163). As Carmona continues:

This is where the Beat Movement steps in: it is a continuation of the Beat Generation, as the Beats emphasized from the very beginning the importance of ideas and their evolution. In other words, the Beat Movement might be thought of as *the ethos of the Beat Generation applied to the current world*; the elements this ethos emphasizes is the notion of social change through focusing on the poor, the emphasis of performance, and the importance of small communities (iii-iv, emphasis mine).

Carmona later describes the Beat Movement as “a new entity with new ideas that blend together the ideology of the Beat Generation with the poetics and ideology of the cultures that the Beats represented in their early work” and as an expansion of the Beat Generation, which often includes women, African American, and Chicano writers and defines itself through poetry readings (220–21). Importantly, the Beat Movement is communitarian in nature and revolves around poetics, culture, and philosophies as well as the importance of freedom (11, 224, 240). Finally, Carmona concludes the following:

There are many factors that have allowed the Beat to keep on going from creating a poetics that spoke for and from the underclasses of America, to capturing the sound of the current times, and finally to creating a community of artists. Each of these rhetorical elements may have helped foster and shape a Beat philosophy, but it is through the simple act of *practice* that has kept the Beat ideologies alive for over sixty years. The Beat Movement is merely the next name to the list of Beat titles from the Beat Generation to Beatniks to Hippies to Neo-Beats and to Post-Beats. (245, emphasis mine)

Carmona here defines the Beat Movement as the current iteration of practices and ideals promoted by the Beat Generation back in the 1950s. However, while Carmona is more interested in the current followers of the Beat ethos, attention should be drawn to his notion of practice. Both Carmona and Marešová point out that belonging to a community and sharing its ideals greatly affects one’s sense of identity; importantly, this is also the basis of Stanley Fish’s interpretive communities. As a result, identification with and practice of these attitudes should be seen as an important part of the appeal of the Beats for some interpretive communities.

Importantly, this *performance* of an identity should not be understood as mere identification with the Beats' ideals. The performativity of Beatness requires an active endorsement and further practice of the ethos the reader identifies with; this is the "re-experiencing" and "sharing" that Marešová mentions when discussing Pelc's devoted fan base. Consequently, some readers emphasize the visions, ethics, and worldviews of the Beats as necessary for their interpretation. As Eco notes, "every reception of a work of art is both an *interpretation* and a *performance* of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself" (*Role of the Reader* 49). With "Beatness," however, one might not merely perform – that is create a specific reading of – a work, but also perform the work's ethos. In other words, some interpretive communities constitute their identities through a performative approach to the Beats, which not only demonstrates their adherence to the Beat ethos, but also helps validate their identity and a sense of belonging among other Beat readers.

For some, then, the appeal of the Beats lies in its performative aspect, hence the frequent emphasis on the various Ginsberg anecdotes or Burroughs monikers; these not only help constitute the nature of the Beat Generation author described, but ultimately also of the writer sharing the anecdote.

The performance of an identity or an ethos also ultimately helps explain why some Beat critics constantly reiterate that the Beats were for several decades excluded from serious academic inquiry. These are not merely factual statements or unconscious manifestations of the fears of established Beat scholars that their scholarly field is gradually changing. Instead, it is essentially a manifestation of their "Beatness," an ethos of individualism and protest, against the changing discourse on the Beats. By resisting the idea of academia's renewed interest in the Beat Generation, these comments unknowingly participate in the debate on the meaning of the Beat Generation; that is, what the Beats signify, by manifesting rhetorical qualities in line with the Beat ethos.

In other words, a sense of Beatness can be present in a discourse, thus in some cases emphasizing a performative reading of a text containing the ethos of the Beat Generation. Nevertheless, it can also be represented through the actual practice of the ethos of a given discourse; importantly, this practice can make itself apparent in indirect ways when visible in a discourse not directly related to the ethos in question. Whether performed through an actual practice of the Beat ethos, through the act of reading, or simply through identifying with the notion of Beatness in an advertising campaign, the ethos of the Beat Generation is for some interpretive communities a vital part of the Beats' appeal. The Beat Generation represents a set of ideals, attitudes, and ideas, and these are also the very properties surrounding and informing the discourse on the Beat Generation. As such, the Beats cannot be divorced from them without losing a substantial portion of their appeal.