

**UNIVERSITY OF PARDUBICE FACULTY OF ARTS
AND PHILOSOPHY**

BACHELOR THESIS

2020

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American Consumerism of the 1950s and the Beat Generation

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Bachelor Thesis 2020

Univerzita Pardubice
Fakulta filozofická
Akademický rok: 2017/2018

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

Jméno a příjmení: **Barbora Bičišťová**
Osobní číslo: **H16103**
Studijní program: **B7507 Specializace v pedagogice**
Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk - specializace v pedagogice**
Název tématu: **Americký konzumerismus 50. let a Beat Generation**
Zadávající katedra: **Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky**

Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Studentka se ve své práci nejprve zaměří na historické kořeny amerického konzumerismu a způsob, jakým se ve společnosti 50. let projevoval. Kromě toho poskytne ucelenou kulturní charakteristiku soudobé americké společnosti, kde zmíní i konkrétní historické události ovlivňující zásadně kulturní život v 50. letech. Literární obraz doby bude studentka analyzovat v dílech vybraných členů tzv. Beat Generation. Kromě konkrétních literárních děl bude součástí analýzy a forma protestů, kterou beatnici volili.

Rozsah grafických prací:

Rozsah pracovní zprávy:

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná**

Jazyk zpracování bakalářské práce: **Angličtina**

Seznam odborné literatury:

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Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **30. dubna 2018**

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **31. března 2019**

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V Pardubicích dne 30. listopadu 2018

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Mgr. Olga Roebuck, M.Litt. Ph.D. for her guidance and support provided to me while I was writing this bachelor thesis. I would also like to express my thanks to my family for their ongoing support and patience.

ANNOTATION

This paper focuses on the rise of consumerism in the United States in the fifties and on the events that were most influential concerning the development of causes. It further presents the most typical expressions of material tendencies in consumers.

The main aim of this paper is the identification of these expressions in the work of Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Gregory Corso and their attitude towards the material values of the consumer society.

KEYWORDS

Consumerism, consumption, materialism, Beat Generation, Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, mass production, society, USA, 1950s

ANOTACE

Tato práce se zabývá vzestupem konzumerismu ve Spojených státech v padesátých letech, událostmi, které měly na tento vývoj zásadní vliv a projevy typickými pro konzumenty s materialistickými tendencemi.

Hlavním cílem této práce je identifikace těchto projevů v dílech Lawrence Ferlinghettiho a Gregoryho Corsa. Práce se dále zaměřuje na postoj těchto autorů k materialistickým hodnotám konzumeristické společnosti.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Konzumerismus, spotřeba, materialismus, Beat Generation, Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, masová produkce, společnost, USA, padesátá léta

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Introduction

Materialistic values, excessive consumption in order to make oneself visible and its consequences were and are to this day all accompanying the prospering economy of the United States. From the very beginnings of the American settlement, there were certain behaviours awakening in the country's citizens that would eventually lead to the surge of consumerism. This bachelor thesis explains all of the factors accompanying mass consumption and analyses the way materialism and consumerism of the American society influenced the work of Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Gregory Corso.

Among the most influential factors were the fact that people could finally work only for themselves, were able to become rich without being born into status, which was often presented through possession of luxurious commodities and was a great part of the idea of living the American dream. Furthermore, slavery, industrial revolution and finally American capitalism were all of great influence to the development of the 1950s' widely spread consumerist thinking. Industrial revolution enabled mass production¹ and facilitated delivery that gave consumers access to large amounts of goods and commodities at a good price², thus allowing them to consume more, but it also caused sameness of products and the workers' detachment from the final product.

Consumerism itself was often advertised through media as the true freedom and people were and are to this day influenced to make purchases out of desire³ on daily basis even though they have no biological need for consumption of these goods and commodities. Furthermore, even though people feel free to make these purchases, they were perceived as imprisoned in the "circle of production and consumption" by the Beat Generation⁴, because their consumer behaviour was not of true human nature, rather than that, the need was artificially created by the media.

¹ Van Horn, *Work in America: an Encyclopedia of History, Policy and Society*, 287

² Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 13.

³ Halliwell, *American culture in the 1950s*, 2.

⁴ Amien Essif, "Beat Consumption: The Challenge to Consumerism in Beat Literature," In *Pursuit - The Journal of Undergraduate Research at the University of Tennessee: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 3* (University of Tennessee, 2012), Available at: <http://trace.tennessee.edu/pursuit/vol4/iss1/3>, 7.

Many artists reacted to the consumerist behaviour and the society in general in their own way and the Beat generation writers were against such values and valued freedom far more. This, however, does not mean the Beat Generation were elided from consumption completely. The movement's members were consumers just as much as the rest of the society, what was different was their attitude towards commodities and their use. According to Essif, the Beat Generation mostly disagreed with the use of commodities and goods as a source of experience and happiness. They perceived the consumers as imprisoned and as the author further claims, William S. Burroughs even compared their consumerist behaviour to the behaviour of people addicted to drugs and alcohol⁵, only now people were addicted to material objects, money, purchases and consumption.

According to the analysis of Ferlinghetti's and Corso's work, both of these writers perceived the Americans' excessive consumption in a different manner than was typical for the rest of the society. Not only they opposed the consumption of material objects and their use for consumers' experience, they also noticed the impact such excessive production and consumption had on the environment as well as on an individual.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti's poems analysed in this paper are *Don't let that Horse*, *Junkman's Obligato* and *I am waiting*, all of which express certain opposition towards materialistic values of the consumer society as well as towards the impact of the consumer culture on the environment including people who are part of the culture.

Concerning Gregory Corso, the writer expresses similar attitudes to the ones of Lawrence Ferlinghetti and these are to be found both in his poetry, more specifically *The Mad Yak*, *The American Way* and *Marriage*, and in his letters, which were later edited into *An Accidental Autobiography*, in which the reader is not only presented with Corso's life, but also his attitudes, beliefs and behaviour.

1. Consumerism and consumer society

First of all, to be able to identify a consumerist society in chosen literature, it is necessary to define what consumerism actually means and how such society behaves. According to Mansvelt, consumer culture is defined as a culture where the possession, use and consumption of goods is the means of pointing out and measuring one's well being. The

⁵ Essif, "Beat Consumption: The Challenge to Consumerism in Beat Literature", 7 – 8.

purpose of goods and commodities in such culture is no longer to only fulfil basic biological needs, but to point to one's status, to communicate one's individual self-identification.⁶ Meaning people purchase commodities purely out of want and desire, on a large scale and rather than the products bought being essential for people's survival, they act as a medium for socialization and communication.

In consumer culture people are manipulated to believe that the obtaining and possession of goods and commodities allows them to better integrate themselves into the society. It is possible to say that a consumerist society concentrates more on needs that are not biological, it has a lot to do with the need to be recognized, to belong and to be respected as expressed by Bocoock in *Consumption*: "Rather the person In the big City consumes In order to articulate a sense of identity, of Who they Wish to be taken to be. The body decoration and clothing, for example, which a particular individual uses as a means of marking themselves out from others, have to be interpreted and understood by others"⁷ Thus, It all depends on the society in which a person is brought up, taking into account that the 1950's in the USA are the origin of modern consumer culture.

Not only that people living in a consumer society spend their earnings on products as well as services that they don't have any biological need for, they consume these goods on a massive scale. This excessive purchasing of commodities as well as their disposal is called mass consumption. Mass consumption, together with mass production are the gist of consumerism and according to Bocoock, both need to be the main goal of the country's economic system for it to thrive.⁸

Such economic as well as political system is called capitalism. As explained by Chappelow, "capitalism is a system that allows private individuals and businesses to own capital goods"⁹ and thus allows them to own their own establishments, to produce and sell goods and offer various services. These businesses need to take into account the general demand for particular goods and the accessible supply in the general market to be able to direct their production and selling most effectively.¹⁰ Such statement points out that in a capitalist system, it is highly desirable for individual establishments that people purchase and

⁶ Juliana Mansvelt, ed. c2011, *Green Consumerism: An A-To-Z Guide*, The Sage References Series On Green Society: Toward A Sustainable Future (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 81.

⁷ Robert Bocoock, *Consumption* (London: Routhledge, 1993), 17.

⁸ Bocoock. *Consumption*, 17.

⁹ Jim Chappelow, 'Capitalism', *Investopedia*, updated Jun 25, 2019.

<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/capitalism.asp>

¹⁰ Ibid.

use goods, commodities and services excessively, granting the businesses access to higher profits.

Furthermore, as Bocoock claims, mass consumption is not only desirable, but essential for the sustainability of capitalism as there would be no point in producing such a large amount of goods and commodities without being granted profit upon what has been invested in the end¹¹. Thus meaning that the aim of establishments is not the well-being of consumers, but their own prosperity and earnings, indicating, as Bocoock said, the utter indifference of capitalists to actual human needs, manipulating the society to buy many times more than is necessary, to spend their earnings on products they have no actual need for, only in the name of making more money that the businessmen themselves are going to spend on unnecessary products and services again to show their status.

What is more, capitalism impacts one's thinking in a way that people actually believe that they need and want to buy the products. As Johnston believes, capitalist system is responsible for the creation of a world in which expensive products of no genuine use "become the measure of value"¹² and therefore manipulates people into mindless consumption.

When one wonders how it is possible to manipulate such a great part of the society into recklessly spending their money, the attention shifts to marketing strategies. Commercials to this day greatly influence consumers as, according to Mattson, marketers drew their strategies to perfection distinguishing between age, class, environment or even time at which the commercial is going to be aired.¹³ The result being that those exposed to such commercials do not for instance realise that the person in the commercial is not smiling because she just bought the particular product, but because they are paid to do so, leading to the watcher's persuasion that they themselves will have a reason to smile after purchasing the product, or that they will simply lead a richer life.

However, even though it might seem that it is the rich who consume the most since they actually have got the resources to do so, it is often the other way around. As Mattson claims, marketers were always able to focus on groups of people that are most prone to

¹¹ Bocoock, *Consumption*, 34.

¹² Allan Johnston. "Consumption, Addiction, Vision, Energy: Political Economies and Utopian Visions in the Writings of the Beat Generation." in *College Literature* 32, no. 2 (2005): 116. Accessed April 15, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/25115269

¹³ Kevin Mattson, *When America Was Great: The Fighting Faith of Postwar Liberalism* (New York: Ruthledge, 2004), 144.

manipulation such as teenagers¹⁴ or for example the working class of the 1950s¹⁵. Even though the financial situation of the working class was getting better under some employers such as Henry Ford, they were still not to be considered rich. There are also surveys showing that excessive consumption is not exclusively the case in rich families, but that often it is the poor households that consume more than they earn¹⁶. This might also be closely linked to what has already been mentioned – that people are manipulated to think that thanks to a particular object or a piece of clothing their life will suddenly be easier, because they either saw someone using the object or wearing the dress for instance. Such behaviour has again everything to do with the need to be recognized and to belong.

On the other hand, claims have been made by Bocoock that “The lower middle classes and working classes, both black and white, were not yet caught up in these processes, for they were too poor“¹⁷ In such case people actually do spend their earnings on essentials only, as was previously written, to fulfil their basic biological needs. However, “Henry Ford, the American car manufacturer, paid high wages to workers, and aimed to sell cars to working-class families.“¹⁸ mentions Bocoock, further commenting on the influence Ford’s strategy had on the evolution of mass production¹⁹ which again went hand in hand with mass consumption, since being able to afford the cars, even the working class started to spend money on products not essential for survival and therefore allowing the consumerist lifestyle to spread from the rich to the poor.

Additionally, as was previously written, mass consumption is often not powered by the need for something, but by the desire of something. Furthermore, such desire is not an intrinsic one, meaning it is not a true desire, something that people feel they want, it is a desire influenced by other people. As Mansvelt claims, people buy the products they buy because they want either other people to notice they have the resources to spend²⁰, or to feel like they belong, assuming obtaining and possessing luxurious products, be it brand clothes, jewelery or visiting costly restaurants, will help them do so. As Bocoock wrote in his book,

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bocoock. *Consumption*, 23.

¹⁶ Angus Deaton, *Understanding Consumption* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 138-139.

¹⁷ Bocoock. *Consumption*, 17.

¹⁸ Bocoock. *Consumption*, 20.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Masvelt, *Green Consumerism*, 67.

commenting on the analysis of Veblen's, people often consumed products to copy the way of living of the British upper classes,²¹

However, desire as such is not sufficient to let mass consumption thrive. To be able to spend their earnings on various products, people need the earnings and the access to the mentioned products. As was previously written, Ford managed to fuel his mass production by paying large wages to his employees, which allowed them to buy the cars Ford produced, while granting Henry Ford a profit. This concerned not only movables, but also real estate. According to Carlisle, American government of that time made sure through mortgage offers as well as the use of cheaper materials and techniques made housing more accessible to families and therefore house purchases became a "large part of consumer spending"²²

Moreover, as Carlisle claims, owning a house played a great role in fulfilling the American dream²³ and the most affordable way to live in one's own property was not to live directly in the city, which resulted in the formation of suburbs, from which people decided to commute to the city for work²⁴. Furthermore the need to commute creates need for a car, as cars were perceived as the most reliable form of transportation²⁵ and considering that cars at that time were already common²⁶ and as was previously written, even the working class could afford one at that time, the mass consumption as well as mass production of cars takes place, followed by the need for gasoline. Desire then changes into need, without anyone caring to distinguish between these two and that is where consumerism takes place.

Concerning the consequences of consumerist behaviour, with excessive production and consumption also comes excessive disposal of goods, commodities, materials and even services. According to Carlisle, the 1950s were the years during which Americans started to widely consume prepacked frozen meals, that were only to be heated²⁷. Such comfort comes with the use of materials that are not necessary when buying fresh food, such as plastics and aluminium²⁸. The impact of the preference of comfort and the desire to achieve the American

²¹ Bocoock, *Consumption*, 15.

²² Robert Carlisle, *Handbook to Life in America: Postwar America, 1950 to 1969* (New York: Infobase publishing, 2009), 40.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Carlisle. *Handbook to Life in America: Postwar America, 1950 to 1969*, 45.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Carlisle. *Handbook to Life in America: Postwar America, 1950 to 1969*, 44.

²⁸ Carlisle. *Handbook to Life in America: Postwar America, 1950 to 1969*, 45.

dream, which included working many hours a week, making a lot of money and spending it, on the evolution of consumerism was great.

Despite the illusion that such products are extremely handy when it comes to saving time, they are directly linked to the ecological footprint the planet faces nowadays. Oceans full of plastics and other waste are shown to people on daily basis. However, to be truly able to change the nature's state for the better, consumers themselves need to take responsibility for their purchases. Hopefully, according to Mansvelt, the so called 'green consumerism' is becoming more popular with consumers as they are becoming more 'committed to ethical and sustainable ways of production'²⁹, thinking through their purchases and making decisions not solely on the price, but also on the circumstances accompanying the finalization of the product, such as child labour, environmental pollution or depletion of resources.

In conclusion, a consumer society is a society where people judge others and themselves based on how much money they make, spend and what house, car and other luxurious products they possess. Spending of earnings is no more to only buy products to fulfil basic biological needs, but products that one desires and has the possibility to buy since they make more money than is necessary for survival. Consumerism often takes place within the pursuit of the American dream, where one is busy pursuing material objects, giving space to inventions like prepackaged meals, where other materials than just raw food are used, leading to even larger consumption and consequent ecological footprint. However, contemporary consumers themselves are becoming more thoughtful when it comes to choosing products that contribute to sustainability.

2. History of the USA and Consumerism

The colonization of the American continent began in April 1607 with three ships harbouring in the Chesapeake bay. According to Nevis, the formation of the nation had not been facile, many people died from hunger or various diseases³⁰, and yet, through many wars including the War of independence, the Civil War fought between the North and the South in the name of abolishing slavery and both the World Wars, it developed into the economical, political and industrial power that is known to the public nowadays.

²⁹ Mansvelt, *Green Consumerism*, 83.

³⁰ Allan Nevis and Henry Steele Commanger, *Dějiny spojených států* (Klatovy: AMLYN, 1994), 9.

2.1. Consumerism and The Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution greatly contributed to the rise of consumerism by enabling the mass production and decline in prices to take place. As Van Horn defines the Industrial Revolution: “it was the transformation of the old methods of creating consumer goods into new ways of production through introduction of new technologies and machines,”³¹ further explaining the statement, Van Horn writes about the shift from a slow and handmade production by craftsmen, which was also due to the length of production and the small amount of products made rather expensive and only rich people could afford to purchase products crafted by craftspeople.³² It was therefore ordinary for families to „make their own furniture, clothes and shoes“ with their own hands.³³ This, however, means that every product was very different, original and could somehow point out one’s individuality. Whereas later on, thanks to the Industrial Revolution and the machines and devices that emerged with it, craftsmen were able to produce more products faster, which resulted in a lower price of the goods and commodities produced,³⁴ but also in the similarity of products as Van Horn states in the encyclopedia: „The Industrial Revolution gave rise to the idea of mass production, the process companies use to produce the same product at a very efficient and inexpensive rate.”³⁵ People could therefore afford to purchase the products they needed comfortably and were able to show their status, they were not, however, showing their individuality.

Furthermore, as Van Horn claims, the way people worked also changed greatly during the Industrial Revolution. As was previously mentioned, people were used to making products by hand, which changed with the arrival of new devices and machinery that facilitated the production. However, in 1913, “moving assembly line was introduced by Henry Ford“, completely changing the way in which automobiles were produced, greatly influencing their prices as well³⁶. Concerning working conditions themselves, however, there was lack of satisfaction within the worker’s job. According to Van Horn: “There was a disassociation between the worker’s job and the final products,”³⁷ since the workers did the same activity the

³¹ Van Horn, *Work in America: an Encyclopedia of History, Policy and Society* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 284.

³² Van Horn, *Work in America: an Encyclopedia of History, Policy and Society*, 285.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Van Horn, *Work in America: an Encyclopedia of History, Policy and Society*, 286.

³⁶ Van Horn, *Work in America: an Encyclopedia of History, Policy and Society*, 285-288.

³⁷ Van Horn, *Work in America: an Encyclopedia of History, Policy and Society*, 287.

whole shift³⁸, their job thus becoming rather toilsome. Such work, unlike the one of craftsmen, who always made the whole product, brings no feelings of achievement or experience whatsoever to the worker, which might have also contributed to the pursuit of experience through food and product consumption, as will be discussed further in this paper.

2.2. Consumerism and ethics

The question of ethical behaviour often arises when one takes into consideration what accompanies the mass production that takes place from the beginning of the industrial revolution. However, the question of ethics goes further into the past and the violations of ethical behaviour include the enslavement of Africans, nature destruction, which Ferlinghetti often points to while describing America as a “concrete continent”³⁹ as well as working conditions of people in the beginnings of mass production.

Slavery is an example of one’s selfishness and indifference towards other human beings when it comes to self-enrichment. It is widely discussed within the context of the 19th century USA and the Civil War, but slavery dates back to the very beginnings of the colonization. According to Hillstrom, settlers brought the first African slaves in the 1600s, figuring that the slaves would prove helpful in helping the settlers build their desired life out of American wilderness, planting and harvesting crops for them, building houses and shops and managing household chores.⁴⁰ Thus the want to ease one’s life while being selfish towards others can be dated all the way back to the very beginnings of the settlement, purpose of which was firstly religious freedom.

On the other hand, as Dr. Herrick claims, first people from Africa arrived to America as free men and laboured side by side with other men, such perception of equality gradually changed and in the year of 1641, Massachusetts, followed by other states, recognized slavery as a legal institution⁴¹ On one hand, the legislators of that time called for freedom and equality, as mentioned by Crèvecoeur in his article “What is an American?“, claiming the country to be the place where many different nations melt into one.⁴² By different nations

³⁸ Van Horn, *Work in America: an Encyclopedia of History, Policy and Society*, 289.

³⁹ Lawrence Ferlinghetti, “1“, in *A Coney Island of the Mind* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1958), 9.

⁴⁰ Kevin Hillstrom and Laurie Collier Hillstrom, *American civil war, Almanac* (UXI: 2000), 2.

⁴¹ John M. Herrick and Paul H. Stuart, *Encyclopedia of social welfare history in North America* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2005), 15.

⁴² Henry St. John de Crèvecoeur, “What is an American?“ in *Letters from an American farmer* (Blackmask Online: 2002), 20-22.

meaning those of Europe and only to those did the human rights belong, allowing the citizens to pursue the American dream using their slaves as tools to achieve it.

Back then however, slavery was perceived as economically efficient, helping white citizens to become wealthier and thus was on the rise, most of all in the Southern states, where farmers used slaves to grow crops such as rice and tobacco⁴³ However, by the end of the 1700s, the persuasion of the immorality of slavery was to be seen in most of the colonies⁴⁴ and after the war of Independence, the leaders were in search for such a solution concerning the question of slavery that would be acceptable to everyone,⁴⁵ eventually forbidding the importation of slaves within the next twenty years, precisely in the 1808.⁴⁶

However, the evolution of the question of slavery changed with the invention of a cotton gin in the year of 1793, boosting the production of cotton in the South for which there was a great demand in Europe, and therefore boosting the Southern economics as well.⁴⁷ Such economical prosperity of the South came with a price, slavery became widely used again, as farmers needed a labour that would plant and pick up large amounts of cotton, since then, slavery was on the rise and so was South's prosperity and its dependency on the institution.⁴⁸ Even back then people were willing to sacrifice any ethical persuasion in the name of wealth and prosperity, back then it was slavery, nowadays we talk about child labour⁴⁹, animal abuse linked to rising demand for animal products⁵⁰ and environmental pollution.

The dependence of the South on slavery played a great role in the development of the regions. Since the gist of the Southern economy was cotton growing, people stayed in the countryside and few big cities developed and railroads were built⁵¹, compared to the North where industrialization was in full swing, fabrics were built, enabling the beginnings of mass production⁵². Since Northern regions were able to prosper greatly without the help of slaves, its citizens had a different perception of slavery and were often againsts it. As Hillstrom believes, though, many Northerners still opposed the idea of freeing the slaves as they feared

⁴³ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 2.

⁴⁴ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 3.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 5.

⁴⁷ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 6.

⁴⁸ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 7.

⁴⁹ Josephine Moulds, "Child Labour in the Fashion Supply Chain", The Guardian. Accessed April 2, 2020. <https://labs.theguardian.com/unicef-child-labour/>

⁵⁰ US Department of Agriculture, *Agriculture fact book 2000* (USDA Office of Communications, 2000), 2 – 4.

⁵¹ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 11.

⁵² Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 12.

they would lose their own prosperous life.⁵³ Such behaviour is quite typical for consumerist thinking, even though one knows some ways of production or of becoming prosperous are not ethical, they do not want to put their own prosperity and abundance at risk.

However, despite the disagreement among both the Northern and Southern white population, abolitionist parties and societies grew in number of members and by the 1840, the abolitionist movement was considered a powerful force.⁵⁴ So long did the disputes continue that the South expressed themselves as preferring the division of the Union rather than abolishing slavery⁵⁵ and later on, even after an attempt to maintain peace by agreeing on a compromise including the Fugitive slave act⁵⁶, in the year of 1861 the disagreements escalated into the Civil War, dividing the country into the Confederation and the Union⁵⁷ lead by Abraham Lincoln. The war ended eventually on the day of April 9, banishing slavery through the 13th Amendment for good⁵⁸

Later on, the country initiated the time period called Reconstruction, which focused on repairing what had been damaged during the war⁵⁹ as well as building new businesses and factories in order to provide people with jobs⁶⁰ and also ensuring the equal rights of whites and blacks in the South, however, this aspect of the Reconstruction was difficult to achieve⁶¹ and the Reconstruction failed to ensure the equal rights of blacks and whites, however, it laid basis for the upcoming Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.⁶²

Until the year of 1914, the United States focused on various social programmes, such as pensions for retired people. These pensions were mostly provided to the military veterans.⁶³ Social security surely also enables consumption to be on the rise as people know they need not save all of their money for worse times.

Other aspects of ethical thinking include the respect for nature and animals, this is a topic widely discussed nowadays as a reaction to global warming, deforestation and ocean

⁵³ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 20.

⁵⁴ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 21 – 22.

⁵⁵ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 38.

⁵⁶ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 42.

⁵⁷ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 104.

⁵⁸ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 233.

⁵⁹ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 236.

⁶⁰ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 236.

⁶¹ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 234 -235.

⁶² Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 235.

⁶³ John M. Herrick and Paul H. Stuart, *Encyclopedia of Social Welfare History in North America* (California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2005), 25.

and air pollution. It was not so common in the 1950s, nevertheless, the Beat Generation did introduce this topic in their work from time to time, expressing their disagreement with objects becoming waste soon after the purchase or with the need of nature and animals to take back what has been taken from them.⁶⁴ Further on, pointing to the rarity of people valuing nature is Johnston's analysis of Ginsberg's *Sunflower Sutra* where he claims the sunflower to be a way of escape from the surroundings for which the „economic conditions are responsible“⁶⁵ or Gregory Corso's pointing to the exploitation of animals linked to the mass consumption of animal products in his poem *The Mad Yak*.⁶⁶

2.3. History of consumerism

As was previously mentioned, consumerism can be linked to the ongoing pursuit of the American dream. Historically, the desire to live the American dream dates back to the very beginning of the US nation's formation. Back then, pilgrims who settled on the American continent in the 1600s decided to migrate for various reasons, however, what they had in common was the vision of freedom to live their desired life. As Crèvecoeur explains the term American in one of his essays, an American is a person who works for themselves and their own success, not for their lord.⁶⁷ The settlers were therefore their own lords, motivated to work thanks to the vision of better days, this initial inner motivation, however, gradually shifted to selfishness. According to Pokorná, who analysed Bradford's work *Of Plimouth Plantation*, the tone of Bradford's writing slowly became condemning when writing about the settlers' turn in desires from celebrating the possibility to live a satisfying life where one does not lack anything to the pursuit of wealth.⁶⁸

The 1800s were years of industrialization in Europe as well as Northern America. According to Hillstrom, the North was experiencing a great rise of urbanization and industrialization, which, alongside with new rules concerning business as well as with building infrastructure, enabled businesses to prosper. With new roads, railroads and canals,

⁶⁴ Lawrence Ferlinghetti, "I am waiting" in *A Coney Island of the Mind* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1958), 50.

⁶⁵ Johnston, *Consumption, Addiction, Vision, Energy: Political Economies and Utopian Visions in the Writings of the Beat Generation*, 116 – 117.

⁶⁶ Gregory Corso, "The Mad Yak", In *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, ed. Bill Morgan (New York: New Directions, 2003), 17.

⁶⁷ Crèvecoeur, "What is an American?", 20-22.

⁶⁸ Marie Pokorná, *Vliv puritanismu na životní postoje v románu N. Hawthorna The Scarlet Letter* (České Budějovice: Jihočeská Univerzita, 2011), 27.

businesses were able to deliver their products to their consumers.⁶⁹ New products became accessible to consumers, allowing them to make more purchases and thus consume more.

Since consumerism is narrowly connected to the consumer's thinking, Southern America of the 19th century is a good example of the utter indifference to the overall impact of one's pursuit of wealth. Back then, as Hillstrom mentions, South's economy was greatly dependent on slavery, slavers and legislators perceived it as a perfectly moral institution, justifying their reasons for enslavement and putting into practise laws that made death penalty for spreading abolitionism on South's soil possible.⁷⁰ Such selfish attitude wasn't exceptional, when one considers the Indian Removal act, which, according Caryl-Sue was a „forced relocation of native Americans“ put into practise because there was a great demand for the fertile soil Indians lived on⁷¹ or the slavery not being abolished for many years since, as Hillstrom adds, even Northerners were afraid of the economical impact it would have on their lives and financial status,⁷² one can see how people become indiferent to whether they are behaving ethically when their wealth and well being is at stake.

Furthermore, well being and consumption itself was later on advertised when Wilson became the president. According to Hillstrom, private businesses and their selling of goods was greatly supported by the president, who aimed to spread the American capitalism throughout the world,⁷³ only to be suppressed during the USA's participation in the Great War, when conserving food and saving of resources was demanded.⁷⁴ Such acts make it seem that individuals actually did these things for greater good and that they are able to put aside their need for abundancy, but when it comes to businesses and their consumption of materials necessary for war production, this wasn't the case. According to Schaffer, only one tenth of businesses actually decreased their material consumption and civilian production, and those who did did it mostly because of the threats imposed on them by the government.⁷⁵ Meaning they would rather choose to be able to consume and earn money than help in winning the war.

Even though the businesses' consumption restrictions were not voluntary, civilians weren't aware of such fact and according to Schaffer, the outcome of this situation was such

⁶⁹ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 13.

⁷⁰ Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 20.

⁷¹ Caryl-Sue, National Geographic society, May 28, “1830 CE: Indian Removal Act“, National Geographic, last updated April 6, 2020, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/thisday/may28/indian-removal-act/>.

⁷² Hillstrom et al., *American civil war, Almanac*, 20.

⁷³ Ronald Schaffer, *America in the Great War: The Rise of the War Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), XV.

⁷⁴ Ronald Schaffer, *America in the Great War: The Rise of the War Welfare State*, 47.

⁷⁵ Ronald Schaffer, *America in the Great War: The Rise of the War Welfare State*, 47-50.

that large corporation, though feared before, became more trustworthy in the civilians' eyes for serving greater good.⁷⁶ Such outcome can be linked to the evolution of consumerism due to the fact that large corporations often produce goods and commodities on a large scale. Furthermore, Schaffer believes that the Great War was beneficial for the USA's overall economy⁷⁷ and as was previously mentioned, the economical state of a country links straight to its buying power.

However, after the most prosperous period of 1923-1929 in America⁷⁸ there came the Stock Market crash in the year of 1929⁷⁹. According to Vedder, the economic state of the country was a disaster, the unemployment was at its peak with its 20% of unemployed people and the citizens were going through miseries and poverty as they were not provided with a "comprehensive governmentally provided safety net"⁸⁰. On the other hand, as Vedder claims, not all of the Americans suffered, there were many of those who lived on normally, without little income loss, others, however, lost such a great part of their income that they were threatened by starvation,⁸¹ while Vedder further mentions, that "it was this misery, this inequality, reflected rigidities and imperfections in the markets for goods and resources."⁸²

In 1931 prices fell significantly and thus wages actually rose⁸³, because the purchase power was higher. However, there came a decline in productivity, autonomous consumption and exports, which resulted in the Great Depression.⁸⁴ On the other hand, other researchers claim that there are no substantial indications of massive underconsumption that would be associated with declining labour productivity.⁸⁵

According to Howe, there were many intellectuals who did not believe that capitalism would be revived⁸⁶, however, Vedder claims that the Great Depression was not "a tragic example of market failure" as capitalism is based on the free market that is to regulate itself,

⁷⁶ Ronald Schaffer, *America in the Great War: The Rise of the War Welfare State*, 50.

⁷⁷ Ronald Schaffer, *America in the Great War: The Rise of the War Welfare State*, 63.

⁷⁸ Richard K. Vedder, Lowell E. Gallaway, and MARTIN BRONFENBRENNER. "From New Era to New Deal." In *Out of Work: Unemployment and Government in Twentieth-Century America* (New York; London: NYU Press, 1997), 82. Accessed March 23, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qg19k.10.

⁷⁹ Vedder et al., "From New Era to New Deal.", 76.

⁸⁰ Vedder et al., "From New Era to New Deal.", 75.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Vedder et al., "From New Era to New Deal.", 104.

⁸³ Vedder et al., "From New Era to New Deal.", 81.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Vedder et al., "From New Era to New Deal.", 89.

⁸⁶ Irving Howe, "This Age of Conformity", *Dissent Magazine*. January 1, 1954.

https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/irving-howe-voice-still-heard-this-age-of-conformity

rather than that, the government was to take the blame.⁸⁷ To help purchasing power, Henry Ford and many other businessmen of large manufactories decided either to elevate wages or to at least not lower them,⁸⁸ which, according to Vedder's analysis of several scholars' examination of the Depression era, actually hurt the situation by postponing the economy's recovery with the real high wages contributing to the Depression and unemployment,⁸⁹ while it took longer for America "to recover from the crisis than it took the rest of the world."⁹⁰ In other words, the affected citizens had to endure the hardship for longer, thus suffering from lack of resources and therefore goods and commodities for longer, which also contributed to the upcoming consumer behaviour as there was all of a sudden the possibility and resources to make purchases and consume.

Furthermore, as Vedder claims, during the war, the set economy "lead to price distortions, waste, inefficiency and the loss of consumer surplus", while there was a probable drop in real wages due to the impossibility to purchase "many desired goods at controlled prices" and thus the war economy was not as efficient as is believed,⁹¹ and while the general belief was that of the country transitioning into depression after the war was over, America „entered a boom“, probably thanks to the "pent-up demand for consumer goods",⁹² and with the „consumption together with investment spending“ creating full employment opportunities, consumers could make purchases of cars, house equipment and other goods⁹³, which surely contributed to the rise of consumerism, since everything was so within reach after a period of deficiency.

3. American society

American society of the 1950s can be described in several ways. First of all, the 1950s, as will be further mentioned in the 'American history' part of this thesis, were the time of various events such as the rise of McCarthyism, economical growth linked with the growth of

⁸⁷ Vedder et al., "From New Era to New Deal.", 90.

⁸⁸ Vedder et al., "From New Era to New Deal.", 92-94.

⁸⁹ Vedder et al., "From New Era to New Deal.", 101.

⁹⁰ Vedder, Lowell E. Gallaway, and MARTIN BRONFENBRENNER. "The New Deal.", In *Out of Work: Unemployment and Government in Twentieth-Century America*(New York; London: NYU Press, 1997), 129. Accessed March 23, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qg19k.10.

⁹¹ Vedder, Lowell E. Gallaway, and MARTIN BRONFENBRENNER. "The Impossible Dream Come True.", In *Out of Work: Unemployment and Government in Twentieth-Century America*(New York; London: NYU Press, 1997), 157. Accessed March 23, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qg19k.10.

⁹² Vedder et al., "The Impossible Dream Come True.", 158-160.

⁹³ Vedder et al., "The Impossible Dream Come True.", 164.

consumption, the fights for woman rights, the rights of the afro-american community and also the rights of the homosexual community.

Firstly, the 1950s, being an era of the Cold War between the USA and the Soviet Union, as well as the communist totalitarian regime epoch, was the time of fear of communism itself in the USA. As Halliwell claims, Americans perceived the Middle East as terrorists aiming to ‘disintegrate American society from within‘ through the use of spies, which was followed by Joseph McCarthy’s list of Department of State employees who were believed to be allegedly communists, followed by several political processes, one of them being the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in the 1953 without proper conviction.⁹⁴ The so called ‘witch hunt‘ ‘inflamed the anticommunist hysteria burning strongly for the next eight years‘⁹⁵

Second of all, this decade is the time of economical growth. Halliwell believes that the prosperity, which already started during the WWII, started to project itself on the middle-class life, using as an example Hillary Clinton’s reflection on the excellent state of schools, new houses as well as highlighting the “unprecedented availability of cultural products“.⁹⁶ Not only cultural, but all products became more available than before, allowing or even prompting consumers to make purchases at any time of the day without previously planning to in newly built shopping centres. For instance Bocoock claims that such shopping centres already offered a wide range of products varying from groceries, furniture, kitchen utensils to electrical devices, leaving the door open for mass production and therefore mass consumption of such products to come.⁹⁷ Furthermore, Halliwell mentions the magazine *Life* and its proclamation that such social abundance was never seen before together with the mention that in the year of 1955 the greatest number of cars were bought to that day.⁹⁸ Shopping then became much easier for the general public, not limiting the consumers with a narrow choice of goods and commodities and allowing them to choose when and what they want to buy, often for a very reasonable price.

Moreover, people were already greatly influenced by mass media to spend money on products and services, which should allegedly equal ‘enjoying life‘. According to Halliwell, people weren’t really searching for the origin of the sudden prosperity and what political

⁹⁴ Martin Halliwell. *American culture in the 1950s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 2.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Bocoock, *Consumption*, 15.

⁹⁸ Halliwell, *American culture in the 1950s*, 7.

decisions led to it, rather than that, mass media provided them with motivation to simply spend their earnings and enjoy the prosperity.⁹⁹ Such behaviour is to be seen at any time. When one does not lack resources and can therefore indulge in whatever brings joy to them, they might become indifferent to the actual state of the country's political and social situation. According to Johnston, these times are to be perceived even as totalitarian, since "the American capitalism has consumed all pre-capitalist sources of opposition, resulting in a closed society,"¹⁰⁰ while he further mentions, quoting Martineau, that any negative and critical perception of the system changed into "cohesion and affirmation"¹⁰¹ However, even though this was mostly accepted by the society, the Beat Generation felt great opposition towards the way economics functioned and as Johnston claims, even though the writers of the Beat Generation did not directly attack the political system, their work often "involved a desire to escape from the socioeconomic conditions that the Beats felt subordinated people to mere objects."¹⁰²

Additionally, the fifties laid basis for the upcoming fights for the women rights, rights of homosexuals as well as the rights of the afro-american community as mentioned in the previous paragraph. According to Halliwell, from the perspective of women and Afro-american, but also homosexuals¹⁰³, as according to Trask, homosexuality was not only considered to be an illness, but was also widely censored¹⁰⁴, the decade was perceived as rather conservational, when discussed retrospectively in the 1960s.¹⁰⁵ As May mentions, it was still believed that life after the World War II would get better with children in their marriages¹⁰⁶, obviously meaning that children would 'repair' their marriage, further adding that people then tended to accept the traditional gender roles as well as to prioritize being married over divorced¹⁰⁷, which is already a rather conservative view, however, one should also take into account the fact that people were influenced to believe in such attitudes, May, for instance, presents an example where Richard Nixon, at that time a vice president, claimed that the gist of American freedom was a household where the man figured as the breadwinner

⁹⁹ Halliwell, *American culture in the 1950s*, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Johnston, *Consumption, Addiction, Vision, Energy: Political Economies and Utopian Visions in the Writings of the Beat Generation*, 107.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Halliwell, *American culture in the 1950s*, 4.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Trask, "Gay and Lesbian Literary Culture in the 1950's." In *American Literature in Transition, 1950-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), edited by Steven Belletto, 157.

¹⁰⁵ Halliwell, *American culture in the 1950s*, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound – American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 14.

¹⁰⁷ May, *Homeward Bound – American Families in the Cold War Era*, 15.

and the woman was a full-time housewife, both having plenty of consumer goods at hand.¹⁰⁸ Women were therefore still perceived as those who should give up their careers, if having any, to take care of the house, children and their husband.

According to May, it was the white middle class that played the greatest role in shaping the political and economic institutions influencing all Americans¹⁰⁹, further commenting on the pursuit of the American dream in the form of life in suburbs¹¹⁰ (which was, as was previously mentioned in this paper, very popular also due to the fact that housing in the suburbs was much cheaper than renting an apartment in the city), however mentioning the lack of access to such housing for Americans of color or single women and men.¹¹¹ Moreover, according to Woods, Afro-Americans and citizens of colour in general, often living in ghettos or in rural areas, were excluded from the opportunity of leading an ordinary rich life, let alone reaching the American dream. Not only were they lacking resources, they were also constantly reminded through advertisements what they're missing out¹¹²

To conclude, such attitude left women, Americans of colour, singles and other people who did not fit into the 'norm' excluded from social events, gradually leading to the movements for civil rights in the 1960 to fight the rooted stigma.

3.1. American society and consumerism

The growth of consumerism can be linked to the initial migration across the Atlantic ocean. According to Bocoock, the processes leading to the arise of consumerism in the twentieth century were all influenced by values of those, who initially migrated, though often forced to do so, from the European continent to Northern America. Among these were the Dutch and British capitalists, whose migration was the first step to forming the modern United States of America that became 'the modern consumer's dreamland'¹¹³. Every next step taken while forming the country was therefore based on their values, beliefs and dreams, eventually leading to the desire of fulfilling the American dream, which is present in the United states up to nowadays.

¹⁰⁸ May, *Homeward Bound – American Families in the Cold War Era*, 20.

¹⁰⁹ May, *Homeward Bound – American Families in the Cold War Era*, 15.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Randall Bennett Woods, *Quest for identity: America since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 143.

¹¹³ Bocoock, *Consumption*, 10.

When further focusing on the American dream, it is possible to say that the pursuit of its fulfilment is also the reason for the society's consumerist behaviour. As Barone explains in his article, the American dream is the confidence that people themselves are capable of achieving success and that there is no dependence on where or to which class they were born and that through diligence, sacrifice and taking risks they themselves can reach the American dream.¹¹⁴ It was therefore quite natural to concentrate on the material achievements since for hard work the reward takes usually financial form.

Furthermore, the consumerist behaviour cannot be solely blamed on the consumers as the longing for finances, material objects and plenty of everything is presented to them as an example from a young age. As Jacobson presents, consumers, ever since the 1920s, were exposed to advertisements even at their schools, which were in exchange supplied with needed school materials¹¹⁵ and as was previously mentioned, a lot depends on where and how one is brought up and the environment surrounding an individual. When one is continuously exposed to brand products at school and according to Jacobson, being offered special prices when winning a contest based on writing an essay and praising a company's product¹¹⁶ for instance, they can become greatly influenced, adopting such material values themselves and keeping them for a lifetime. Furthermore, these values were very easy to adopt if not impossible not to adopt, because as Johnston mentions, quoting Ewen: "The vision of freedom which was being offered to Americans was one which continually relegated people to consumption[...]"¹¹⁷

To add, education is highly important in the field of goods consumption, be it the matter of the quality of products or the unwillingness of consumers to invest in products that are of a more ethical origin. According to Jacobson, the indifference of consumers and their disability to judge the product's quality comes from the inadequate education on this matter, leaving consumers prone to persuasion coming from businesses¹¹⁸ and whatsmore, not taking into account what are the ethical costs such as child labour or byproducts dangerous for the

¹¹⁴ Adam Barone, "American Dream", Investopedia, updated November 21, 2019.

<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/a/american-dream.asp>

¹¹⁵ Lisa Jacobson, *Children and consumer culture in American society: A Historical Handbook and Guide* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2008), 125.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Johnston, *Consumption, Addiction, Vision, Energy: Political Economies and Utopian Visions in the Writings of the Beat Generation*, 105.

¹¹⁸ Jacobson, *Children and consumer culture in American society: A Historical Handbook and Guide*, 130.

environment linked to the production of a product, because as Masvelt claims, many consumers will choose low price over quality or ethical manufacturing.¹¹⁹

In addition, that the longing for reaching the American dream played a great role in the growth of consumer behaviour amongst the US citizens can be concluded from the fact, that the United states aimed to be a country of plenty and abundance. As Barone cites Adams in his article, life in such a dream country should be “better and richer and fuller for everyone,”¹²⁰. Furthermore, as Amadeo claims in her article, the American dream is an ideal in which the right of each citizen to achieve their economic prosperity is protected by the government. Even though the American dream was first meant to give the U.S. citizens the opportunity to lead a better life, it gradually shifted to the aspiration to obtain material objects.¹²¹ It is thus possible to believe that people still aspired to lead a better life, but that, as was previously mentioned, their perception of the term ‘better life’ changed to the assumption that material abundance means fuller, easier and happier life.

Furthermore, as was previously written, people need to feel like they belong and need to be recognized. It is possible that not only it is the feeling of people that they need to possess something to be a part of the society they want to be part of, but that it actually is that way. Baudrillard believes that there is a psychological and social pressure imposed on the country’s citizens to compete on the level of income as well as prestige and to achieve the life that is presented as the desirable, model way of living¹²², leaving people convinced that to pursue material objects is normal and even desirable, or as Smart claims, it is becoming the purpose of modern life, embodying the meaning of social life as well as a virtual duty, which when fulfilled, leads to freedom, power and happiness.¹²³ Thus signifying the necessity of consumer behaviour to be a valuable part of the society.

Such behaviour leaves people captives of such persuasion, never truly achieving their dream happy life, even if they fulfilled their American dream, since the gist of consumerism is basically the pursuit of more than one already possesses. One’s life thus focuses on earning and spending money, achieving material goals and pursuing their perfect life rather than enjoying life, which was the case from the 1940s, as Smart mentions, when people started to

¹¹⁹ Mansvelt, *Green Consumerism*, 83.

¹²⁰ Barone, “American Dream“.

¹²¹ Kimberly Amadeo, “What is the American Dream? The History that Made It Possible“, The Balance, updated January 09, 2020. <https://www.thebalance.com/what-is-the-american-dream-quotes-and-history-3306009>.

¹²² Jean Baudrillard. *The Consumer society – Myth and structures* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 41.

¹²³ Barry Smart, *Consumer Society - Critical Issues & Environmental Consequences* (London: Sage Publications, 2010), 7.

be encouraged to lower the amount of free time to be able to consume more goods and services, with Smart further pointing out that ‘more was never enough’¹²⁴, which led to the vicious circle of wanting more while not cherishing what one already has, which does not exactly define the term ‘happy life’.

4. Literature in the 1950s

To begin with, it is essential to define what popular culture is and in which way it is linked to the behaviour of the American society of the 1950s and why it was so opposed by the artists of the Beat Generation. According to Storey, popular culture can be perceived either as a synonym to “poetry, the novel, opera, ballet and fine art” or as a way of life in general. It can be further described simply as a “culture that is widely favoured or well liked by many people. And, undoubtedly, such a quantitative index would meet the approval of many people.”¹²⁵ There is thus no wonder that popular culture was opposed by the Beat Generation as the artists disagreed with most of the things that were favoured by the society.

However, what made the Beat Generation oppose popular culture so greatly was probably the way popular culture influenced people’s lives. Storey intentionally defines the term ‘ideology’ when writing about popular culture. In Storey’s words, „ideology is used here to indicate how some texts and practices present distorted images of reality. They produce what is sometimes called ‘false consciousness’.”¹²⁶ In the 1950’s, popular culture was already widely used to advertise what was to be perceived as ‘right’ by the society it mostly prompted people to consume products in order to show their status and pursue the American Dream, all of which were the opposite of what the writers of the Beat Generation perceived as important in life.

Furthermore, Storey writes that even though the society is manipulated and exploited in this manner, those who are exploited do not feel that way just as those who dominate them do not feel they’re oppressing those less powerful.¹²⁷ Americans thus did not perceive consumption to be forced upon them, they themselves felt that purchasing material objects as well as food consumption brought them genuine joy and experience.

¹²⁴ Smart, *Consumer Society - Critical Issues & Environmental Consequences*, 8.

¹²⁵ John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 21 – 28.

¹²⁶ Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, 23.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

As Nowaki claims, popular culture was used to infuse U.S. propaganda as well as to spread the American culture to other parts of the world, choosing wisely on whom the publications should be oriented, sparking a desire to consume material goods through presenting consumerism as true freedom.¹²⁸

The reason for consumption, materialism and the American dream to be celebrated in the publications was also that writers were becoming more influenced and even blinded by the persuasion that real freedom lies in comfortable life full of abundance. America became a place where mass education was taking place and according to Howe, American writers, instead of “facing the world together“ started to prefer moving to the suburbs and country homes, which ensured them a rise in social status.¹²⁹ This was not, however, the case of the authors of the Beat Generation.

According to Essif, however, the authors of the Beat Generation were not as positive about popular culture’s motivation towards conformity in production and consumption. On the contrary, they believed people to be prisoners of the everlasting circle of production and consumption, while the purpose of both of these was only the existence of the other. Such perception found Essif clear in Kerouac’s *The Dharma Bums*.¹³⁰ And as is further discussed, they chose a completely different life to the one acceptable by the society.

As Johnston claims, even though the writers of the Beat Generation did not directly attack the political system, their work often „involved a desire to escape from the socioeconomic conditions that the Beats felt subordinate people to consumer objects“, while they also suggested a disagreement with the life acceptable by the society being rather “commodity driven“ and de-individualizing.¹³¹ To add, the negative perception of de-individualization appears in the texts discussed further on in the thesis.

¹²⁸ Rochelle Nowaki, *American Idol: American Pop Culture and Soft Power in Cold War Europe* (University of Hawaii at Hilo: HOHONU 2015), 1.

¹²⁹ Howe, “This Age of Conformity”.

¹³⁰ Amien Essif, "Beat Consumption: The Challenge to Consumerism in Beat Literature," In *Pursuit - The Journal of Undergraduate Research at the University of Tennessee: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 3* (University of Tennessee, 2012), Available at: <http://trace.tennessee.edu/pursuit/vol4/iss1/3>, 3.

¹³¹ Johnston, *Consumption, Addiction, Vision, Energy: Political Economies and Utopian Visions in the Writings of the Beat Generation*, 107

5. Gregory Corso

In both his letters, which were later edited into Corso's autobiography, and poetry, Corso often reacted to the behaviour and values of the contemporary society. Motives concerning consumerist behaviour often addressed in his work are materialism, the treatment of nature and animals, televising and also consumption itself.

According to Olson, who knew Corso personally, Corso often contemplated the act of consumption of food itself in his poems as it seemed to contradict his perception of spirituality.¹³² He wasn't the only one though, since as Woods claims, priests were the ones to criticise people for their materialistic values and their perception of a life of abundance as the desired life after the World War II¹³³ and the contradiction of consumption and spirituality was already being addressed not only by Corso and the priests, but also by other members of the Beat Generation.

5.1. Gregory Corso and the consumption's impact on nature

Firstly, rather than perceiving Corso's spirituality as in alignment with frugality, one can witness him contemplating whether eating animals was in alignment with religion. As Olson mentions, Corso wondered whether it was acceptable to „bake and eat“ animals when all animals were to be „considered our brothers“ and one was „supposed to love all beings“. ¹³⁴ His positive attitude towards animals can be also identified in the letters he wrote to his friends, once expressing his disability to go to Afghanistan because of his cats that are used to each other and he does not wish to divide them¹³⁵. In another letter he mentions going to the ZOO to work on his poems¹³⁶, which might point to the fact that he found himself more inspired when working among animals, further mentioning bringing some candy for the rhinoceros as they enjoy it.¹³⁷

However, Corso's dilemma concerning the consumption of animals does not mean that Corso would not be a consumer himself or that he would condemn people for eating animals.

¹³² Kirby Olson, *Gregory Corso: Doubting Thomist* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 28.

¹³³ Woods, *Quest for identity: America since 1945*, 141.

¹³⁴ Olson, *Gregory Corso: Doubting Thomist*, 28.

¹³⁵ Gregory Corso and Bill Morgan. *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso* (New York: New Directions, 2003), 3.

¹³⁶ Corso et al., *An accidental autobiography: the selected letters of Gregory Corso*, 18.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Rather than that he considered it natural and inevitable part of human life. According to Olson, he often wondered about the person being a part of the food chain, presenting humans as predators who inevitably need to eat other animals to survive, considering it a bitter truth.¹³⁸ Thus even though Corso found interest in such topics, it was not necessarily criticism of consumption of animals that he expressed in his work.

What is to be identified as criticism in one of his poems called *The Mad Yak*, however, is the treatment of animals which necessarily accompanied the production of animal products. This poem is written from the point of view of an animal, a yak, who is “watching them churn the last milk they’ll ever get from her”¹³⁹ This directly motions to the production of milk, according to the U.S. Department of agriculture, people in the 1950s consumed by 35 per cent more milk than in the 1998¹⁴⁰ and with the ethical side of the production of milk and the use of animals for other purposes being discussed and sometimes opposed nowadays, one can see similar attitude in this poem as well.

Not only does Corso use personification in the poem, he even makes the yak become the narrator of the poem, thus portraying it somehow closer to the reader, who can then understand the feelings of the animal better. In the poem, Corso addresses the problem of treatment of animals by evoking pity for the yaks by having the yak think or say “They are waiting for me to die; They want to make buttons out of my bones.”¹⁴¹ expressing the animal’s fear and understanding of what is going to happen, further continuing with “Where are my sisters and brothers?”¹⁴² showing that the cow somehow knows that they are gone, probably slaughtered for meat consumption or the production of leather, which people can purchase.

In the following lines, Corso brings the picture of a bull used for loading, as the cow tells the reader: “That tall monk there, loading my uncle, he has a new cap, [...], Poor uncle, he lets them load him. How sad he is, how tired!”¹⁴³ Here one can see the state of the animal, the bull is probably used for work too much and is exhausted, however, as long as it brought

¹³⁸ Corso et al., *An accidental autobiography: the selected letters of Gregory Corso*, 34 - 35.

¹³⁹ Gregory Corso, “The Mad Yak“, In *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, 17.

¹⁴⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Agriculture Facts Book*, 2000, 4.

¹⁴¹ Corso, “The Mad Yak“, 17.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

profit, people do not care about the animals' sufferings. Corso thus evokes pity again by bringing up the emotion the animal feels.

In these lines one can again identify the consumer behaviour as opposed to the lack of compassion for animals. The object of attention the narrator presents to the reader is that the monk has a new cap, pushing what actually matters, which is the state of the animal, to the background, just as the society did when purchasing objects, they did not care what accompanied its production, though one does not really know whether the Monk's cap was made from leather, as one could predict thanks to the previous line „Where are my sisters and brothers?“¹⁴⁴

Furthermore, to bring consciousness to what accompanies production including animal cruelty, Corso presents to the reader, through using the cow as the narrator, that animals know what is awaiting them when they are part of the production, based on the lines „I wonder what they'll do with his bones? And that beautiful tail! How many shoelaces will they make of that!“¹⁴⁵ with the last line foreshadowing the overlooked conditions provided for animals and their treatment when it comes to producing a great amount of shoelaces or more generally, any animal products.

Additionally, Corso brings to his poems the topic of nature suffering in the name of production and consumption. In his poem *Elegiac Feeling American*, which was written as a tribute to Corso's deceased friend Jack Kerouac. However, even though the poem's primary topic is Kerouac, Corso does compare him to a tree while commenting on America, he foreshadows the nature's state as well. Concerning for example Corso's writing, he writes: “and even this elegy, dear Jack, shall have a butchered tree, a tree beaten to a pulp, upon which it'll be contained – no wonder no good news can be written on such bad news-“¹⁴⁶ which points to the fact that to be able to write a tribute to Kerouac, one needs paper and to produce paper, a tree needs to be cut down. Through the following line one can interpret the sadness of butchering the trees in order to make paper, which is to be consumed by people in the form of books, or used for education, on the other hand, Corso does not express a completely negative standpoint, but finds it rather inevitable.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Gregory Corso, “Elegiac Feelings American“, Poemhunter. Submitted April 15, 2010. Available at: <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/elegiac-feelings-american/>

Further on in the poem, Corso writes: “How alien the natural home, aye, aye, how dies the tree when the ground is foreign, cold, unfree“¹⁴⁷ pointing not only to the death of Jack Kerouac, but also to the death of nature. By ‘foreign‘ one can imagine the concrete surfaces, large corporations or suburbs, all of these constructed in the name of the society’s comfortable consumption of products as well as housing or commuting to work, however posing a great threat to nature, to which such environment is unnatural and alien, thus leaving it to die if it was not already destructed on purpose.

Furthermore, Corso mentions the unnaturalness of the contemporary world, writing that they “breathe in stampedes of pollution“¹⁴⁸ and obviously, pollution is narrowly connected to mass production, mass consumption and consequent disposal, further writing that the human “spirit cries out in nature’s sake the horrendous imbalance of all things natural“¹⁴⁹, which can not only mean the poor state of nature itself, but also the nature of people, who turned away from what is natural for them to seeking experience and comfort in unnatural material things.

5.2. Consumption and materialism in Corso’s letters

Firstly, as was previously mentioned, Corso was wondering what to do with his cats as he wanted to leave for Afghanistan and even though he expressed his care for the cats, when the cats got lost and never came back, Corso felt sudden surge of freedom¹⁵⁰. Such statement does not necessarily point to his intention of getting rid of the cats, but more than that it points to the fact that a person is able to do anything they want when they have nothing holding them back, expressing the freedom that comes with the lack of possessions, as pets are considered possessions as well. Here one can see some similarity to Ferlinghetti’s poem *Don’t let that horse*.

That Corso’s youth was filled with lack of resources is to be identified all the time throughout the letters. Be it the lack of money to go to Afghanistan or to come back from Mexico, there was nothing left for him but to wait for somebody to send him money. As he stated in one of the letters, he even contemplated going to work, but quickly forgot it as he did not feel work would be right for him.¹⁵¹ As was previously mentioned, the Beat Generation

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Corso et al., *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, 4.

¹⁵¹ Corso et al., *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, 4.

were not exactly fond of going to work, seeing it only as a part of the circle of work and consumption that was so typical for the society.

Additionally, as was already written in this paper, ever since large corporations started using assembly lines for enhancing production, work has become rather monotonous and workers kept doing the same task the whole shift, becoming detached from the final product. The Beat Generation perceived work as something special and by no means wanted to be detached from the outcome, which is why, as Essif claims, they tried to limit their time as workers to the minimum¹⁵². Corso himself claims in his poem *Marriage* that „it is a time in which no man is extremely wondrous“¹⁵³ which points to the fact that people did not do anything special anymore, they consumed the same things as anybody else and their work was not something that would differentiate them from others either, as many people worked in factories and were thus part of the mass production of similar objects.

In Corso's letters, he himself mentions not being suitable for ordinary work. That he cared for the outcome of his working on something can be identified from his proclamations that he needed to work on his poems and constantly re-write them, which he claimed he hated¹⁵⁴, until he sent them to Ferlinghetti to get them published.¹⁵⁵ His poems were thus by no means an outcome of the typical mass production compared to popular literature, which was according to Storey intended for mass consumption as it was produced on a massive scale and was rather commercial¹⁵⁶. At one point, he even mentions in a letter some artist's work's lack of individuality¹⁵⁷ and perceiving it as something that should not be happening when it comes to art. Further on, he also foreshadows his belief that one's work should be valued more than just a part of the production and consumption circle as in one of his letters, he is about to receive money for his poems and even though he had no money, he writes: “21 dollars? Fuck them, let the railroads keep them.“¹⁵⁸ Therefore he is giving up the possible opportunity of consumption the money would bring, as he does not feel the amount of money is enough for the outcome of his work and chooses to leave rather than wait for the money.

¹⁵² Essif, “Beat Consumption: The Challenge to Consumerism in Beat Literature“, 7.

¹⁵³ Gregory Corso, “Marriage“, Poemhunter. Poem submitted April 15, 2010.

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/marriage-35/>

¹⁵⁴ Corso et al., *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, 13.

¹⁵⁵ Corso et al., *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso* 31.

¹⁵⁶ Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 6.

¹⁵⁷ Corso et al., *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, 19.

¹⁵⁸ Corso et al., *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, 29.

However, his opposition towards work caused him great troubles throughout his life, especially throughout his youth. Many times did he mention his lack of money when writing to his friends, be it to buy food¹⁵⁹, to get back home from Mexico, to go to Afghanistan or to pay rent in Paris, however, not considering paying rent as something important and simply stating: „I leave without paying rent.“¹⁶⁰ This points to his attitude towards contemporary housing, he did not perceive it as important to pay somebody for having a place to stay, at one point, he even mentioned being homeless for a while¹⁶¹, while he did perceive the need for money to fulfill one's dreams, such as travelling or doing something that one enjoys and is good at, in one letter for instance, Corso mentions his desire to open a book shop, similar to those he encountered in Paris, but he decided otherwise, as „it takes money and all that nonsense.“¹⁶² This statement, contrarily to those concerning paying for food, shows his attitude towards money, perceiving it as unimportant and illogical, by labelling it as „nonsense“, while considering it necessary to pursue non-material dreams. This differs from the pursuit of happiness through obtaining money and consuming material objects and food in such a way that Corso would like to have money to be able to enjoy life freely, realising that it is necessary in the society he lived in, while the Beat Generation opposed experiencing happiness directly from materials and food, meaning that people would be happy if they bought something new, if they tried a new dish or if they watched movies on their new television.

On the other hand, that is not to say that Corso always expressed himself as anti-material. There were instances where even he praised material objects and expressed his want to make money. One instance, Corso depicted one painter's house that he has visited in Mexico, describing it as large 17th century house with stone walls.¹⁶³ As was previously mentioned, housing and house equipment made a great part of the 1950's purchases and having a nice house, preferably in the suburbs was also a part of the American Dream. However, Corso's standpoint does not indicate any pursuit of the American Dream nor did he express himself as the typical consumer as he did not express any need or desire for having a similar house, rather than that, he expressed his admiration for somebody else's work done in the house.

¹⁵⁹ Corso et al., *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, 40.

¹⁶⁰ Corso et al., *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, 36.

¹⁶¹ Corso et al., *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, 46.

¹⁶² Corso et al., *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, 34.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

Additionally, for his disinterest with consumption of materials and overall materialistic values speaks the fact that he did not own many material objects nor did he dwell on his clothing. At one point, he describes his coming back to Cambridge, where he met a girl he knew a little bit, writing: “I just met the most obnoxious Radcliffe girl. Dear God, where do they come from?”¹⁶⁴ already foreshadowing his disagreement with her behaviour, which was highly shallow and materialistic as to greet him, she told him: “Hello, you back. Ah, still wearing P.Y’s jacket from last year – and R.S.’ shoes? What [did] you do, come back for a new wardrobe?”¹⁶⁵ Thus showing his bewilderment with her mockery and her judging people based on their possessions, replying to her: “Sometimes I have money, you know,” while regretting not saying “Of course I’ve come back for a new wardrobe, why not? Am I not beautiful? Are we not all beautiful?”¹⁶⁶ Such reply shows that he would not value people based on their possessions as was typical for the consumer society, but that he perceived everyone to be beautiful, whether they were rich or poor, while carrying strong emotions towards her behaviour, saying: “I hate myself for saying that. Well, next time I see the bitch, I’ll bite one of her buttocks real hard,”¹⁶⁷ calling her names for insulting somebody based on their lack of possessions, which was and still is typical for the contemporary society.

Furthermore, Corso’s lack of possessions proves that he was not influenced neither by the mass media nor by the society to consume goods and commodities. He himself names the very few pieces of clothes he is packing to go to Mexico¹⁶⁸, thus not dwelling on having many outfits with him or other things, thus his experience is simply about getting to know the country and its culture and therefore is simply immaterial, when in Mexico, though, Corso expresses his horror when witnessing the young prostitutes in the streets¹⁶⁹, expressing his pity for them. Here one can see the opposition to the fact that people were becoming a part of consumption as well, thus perceived as objects, just as these young girls could be purchased, and in a way, consumed.

5.3 Consumption and materialism in Corso’s poems

Gregory Corso’s expression of spirituality through writing about material objects – Destiny – The messenger does not need to knock on the door, ring the bell or the telephone to

¹⁶⁴ Corso et al., *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, 5.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Corso et al., *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, 13.

¹⁶⁹ Corso et al., *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, 15.

deliver the message.¹⁷⁰ The reason can also be the same as Ferlinghetti's – to show that people have lost their spirituality and connection to God and are now relying on the material objects, that is why he explains that to deliver the message the messenger won't use a telephone and he can go through the door if he needs to.

Another poem that shows Corso's attitude towards consumption and materialism is called *Marriage*. The line "And the neighbors all toothless and dry haired like those hag masses of the 18th century all wanting to come in and watch TV The landlord wants his rent"¹⁷¹ not only shows the neighbours' desire to spend their time in front of the television, exposed to media or experiencing their life through watching movies, all of these convincing them about the good material life one can have, but it also depicts the neighbours in a nasty way, thus adding on the negative feeling it brings to the reader. Further on, there is a mention of the landlord, his only function in the poem is to show his desire for receiving money, thus the landlord himself represents the contemporary society.

Further on, Corso wonders about what it would be like if he did not marry, which is completely against the society's perception of a fulfilled life. However, in the poem, he writes: "Because what if I'm 60 years old and not married, all alone in furnished room with pee stains on my underwear and everybody else is married! All in the universe married but me!"¹⁷² and the mention of a furnished room together with loneliness can't go unnoticed as it is again connected to the American Dream and the people's desire to have a nice, equipped house that would be recognized by the society. Corso contrasts this furnished piece of housing to his loneliness, when he is there alone, which can also point to the fact that people often prioritize their pursuit of wealth over socialising, which leaves them "all alone in furnished room".

Additionally, as Olson claims, Corso was not too fond of the typical marriage that the poet considered to be an "institutionalized cliché"¹⁷³ and in the poem *Marriage* the writer indicates the link between marriage, status and materialistic values. He believed it to be an imprisonment even if he would have married a "a beautiful sophisticated woman tall and pale wearing an elegant black dress and long black gloves holding a cigarette holder in one hand

¹⁷⁰ Gregory Corso, "Destiny", Poemhunter. Poem submitted January 13, 2003.

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/destiny-2/>

¹⁷¹ Gregory Corso, "Marriage", Poemhunter. Poem submitted April 15, 2010.

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/marriage-35/>

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Olson, *Gregory Corso: The Doubting Thomist*, 6.

and highball in the other” and even if they would have lived in “high up a penthouse with a huge window from which we could see all of New York and even farther on clearer days.”¹⁷⁴ However, later on he believes that he could marry if there “were a woman possible as I am possible”¹⁷⁵ and thus Corso believes that marriage is not about material things, as it would be in the first example, with the woman all dressed up in beautiful clothes and that their common life would not be any better in a beautiful house, because people should not experience life through material objects as was previously mentioned, but that for marriage to work it take two people who are suitable for each other and who genuinely want to share their lives together.

Furthermore, as was previously mentioned, mass media played, and to this day play, a great role in manipulating the society. In the line “They are televising the gift of healing and the fear of hell in America under their tents in their Sunday campaigns”¹⁷⁶ Corso, similarly to Ferlinghetti, expresses his disagreement with the abuse of religion for one’s personal purposes, which was at that time possible thanks to television that could have been used to persuade people to become consumers of anything from food as in “I am telling you the American Way is a hideous monster eating Christ making Him into Oreos”¹⁷⁷ to the promises of a political party.

However, the reason for such manipulation to work was the American’s call for conformity. People believed in American togetherness and wanted to be like others in order to belong. As Corso writes in his poem, Americans were not only convinced to purchase the same clothes and other objects, they were eventually convinced that conformity is to be taken as a matter of behaviour and thinking as well as is visible in the following line: “Replica production make all the young think alike dress alike believe alike do alike Togetherness this is the American Way”¹⁷⁸ while “Replica production” is relatable to the contemporary mass production, which was due to its lack of individuality opposed by the Beats as was previously mentioned.

Furthermore, the line “Everything is fine, just drink Coca Cola, and everything will be all right.’ This is true, and is on record Did not American advertising call for

¹⁷⁴ Corso, “Marriage“.

¹⁷⁵ Corso, “Marriage“.

¹⁷⁶ Gregory Corso, “The American Way“, Poemhunter. Poem submitted April 15, 2010. <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-american-way-2/>.

¹⁷⁷ Corso, “The American Way“.

¹⁷⁸ Corso, “The American Way“.

TOGETHERNESS?”¹⁷⁹ shows how America used the call for togetherness to prompt consumption while convincing people that it is the right thing to do as the pent-up demand was contributing to the economic prosperity, which was what the Beat Generation did not want to be a part of. Further in the poem, Corso writes: “The Beats are good example of this They forsake the Way's habits and acquire for themselves their own habits”¹⁸⁰ which is a plain proof that the Beat Generation (including Ferlinghetti and Corso) simply did not agree with the influence media had on the society.

6. Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Ferlinghetti’s poetry is overall rather different compared to the poetry typical for popular literature, Carruth compared popular poetry to the one which Ferlinghetti created based on various criteria, arriving at a conclusion that Ferlinghetti’s poetry greatly differs from popular poetry based on the comparison of their rhythm, length as well as their supportive contribution to the “national, racial or [...] social myth“, while evaluating Ferlinghetti’s poetry as somehow negative in attitudes, rather than supportive.¹⁸¹ The statement that Ferlinghetti’s poetry is moreover negative is quite agreeable. Many of the poems analysed in this paper contain a hint of a negative attitude towards contemporary world and society and the problems are presented in a very cynical manner. On the other hand, as Essif claims in his essay on the Beat Generation, the artists posed themselves against the popular culture of that time and opposed its excessive consumption¹⁸². It therefore makes sense for an artist, whose art is based on their attitude or opinion, not to create work similar to the one they oppose.

As for Ferlinghetti’s attitude towards the consumption of popular culture, there is a hint of disagreement as well as mockery to be identified in the poem I am waiting in the line “I am waiting for reconstructed Mayflower to reach America with its picture story and tv rights sold in advance to the natives”¹⁸³, which points to the addiction of people of that time to whatever media presented to them and the line “and I am waiting to see God on television

¹⁷⁹ Corso, “The American Way“.

¹⁸⁰ Corso, “The American Way“.

¹⁸¹ Hayden Carruth, "Four New Books." In *Poetry* 93, no. 2 (1958): 116. Accessed March 2, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/20587235.

¹⁸² Amien Essif, "Beat Consumption: The Challenge to Consumerism in Beat Literature," In *Pursuit - The Journal of Undergraduate Research at the University of Tennessee: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 3* (University of Tennessee, 2012), Available at: <http://trace.tennessee.edu/pursuit/vol4/iss1/3>

¹⁸³ Lawrence Ferlinghetti, “I am waiting“, In *A Coney Island of the Mind* (New York. New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1958), 51.

piped onto church altars if only they can find the right channel to tune in¹⁸⁴ pointing to the reality of most of the experience Americans enjoyed being on television and not in their real lives. It is therefore logical for Ferlinghetti to structure his poems differently to those of popular culture, consumption of which he clearly disagreed with.

6.1. Don't let that horse

The poem *Don't let that horse* written by Lawrence Ferlinghetti is a recreation of Chagall's painting where two people are riding a horse that is chewing a violin. As was previously mentioned, in a consumer society, expensive material objects are highly valued. The poem *Don't let that horse* shows Chagall's mother, who obviously dwells on material objects, crying at Chagall not to let the horse eat the violin in the picture Chagall's painting, whereas Chagall 'keeps on painting', because it does not matter to him whether the violin is going to be destroyed and by not dwelling on the violin and finishing the painting as such, he becomes famous, and is therefore rewarded for not following the social pattern, then he mounts the horse and rides away, giving the violin to „the first naked nude he runs across“¹⁸⁵ – according to an anonymous analysis the nude is also rewarded for not following the social pattern and thus for their non-conformity¹⁸⁶, however, if this analysis was to be Ferlinghetti's aim, it would mean that the nude would be rewarded for their non-materiality with a material object. The non-conformity part of the analysis is on point, because in the 1950s, just as much as it is now, clothes were used to show one's status, therefore *the nude's* status can't be distinguished, even hinting that *the nude* does not aim for it to be distinguished, which is certainly not to be associated with the 1950's society and therefore the nude shows some opposition to the 1950's values.

According to the same anonymous analysis, the last line “and there were no strings attached“¹⁸⁷ can have multiple meanings. Either there were no strings attached to the violin as the horse chewed on it, or there were no strings attached from then on.¹⁸⁸ One can thus interpret it as once Chagall let go of material objects – the violin in this case - and left on the

¹⁸⁴ Ferlinghetti, “I am waiting“, 50.

¹⁸⁵ Lawrence Ferlinghetti, “14“, In *A Coney Island of the Mind* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1958), 29.

¹⁸⁶ Poetry Analysis 1, Louis George English, accessed April 2, 2015. <http://louisgeorgeenglish.weebly.com/louis-georges-blog/poetry-analysis-1>

¹⁸⁷ Ferlinghetti, “14“, 29.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

horse, he became free. As was previously mentioned, the persuasion that material consumption is the gist of life, which is a very close description of what people believed not only in the 1950s, only makes people captives and takes away the real experience of life, Ferlinghetti thus expresses the necessity to let go of the pursuit of material consumption to truly live freely.

Another interpretation can relate the horse to the contemporary society. The horse is chewing on and therefore trying to ‘consume‘ a violin, which is an object completely useless for basic survival and does not serve as food, the horse thus shows similarities to the typical consumer, who also purchases objects that they do not need purely for the feeling they obtain from excessive consumption, only for the objects and food to be thrown away later. The horse, presented as a regular consumer, poses as a model for Chagall’s work, while the materialistic and consumer society posed as an inspiration for the members of the Beat Generation.

Furthermore, there were already two possible interpretations of the line „and there were no strings attached“ mentioned before, however, when the horse is believed to be a metaphor for society and Chagall’s letting go of the violin is to show his detachment from materialism, he figures in the poem as somebody opposed to the typical values of the American society, just like the Beat Generation did. Chagall’s leaving on the horse with „no strings attached“ could also show the coexistence of the Beats and the society with whom the Beats felt no positive identification, but were still part of it, as Essif claims in his work: „Beats did not attempt to retreat from civilization entirely.”¹⁸⁹

In summation, each interpretation points to the fact that Ferlinghetti expressed his attitude towards the rooted values of the society, both criticizing the consumerist behaviour and material values through the characters of the horse and Chagall’s mother, and expressing the admiration of values of individuality and lack of dwelling on material objects through Chagall’s success. Ferlinghetti further expresses the everyday coexistence of the typical material and consumer society and a person who disagrees with their values.

6.2. I am waiting

As was previously mentioned, television was a part of everyday’s life of Americans in the 1950’s already and it certainly did its part in enhancing the pursuit of the American Dream

¹⁸⁹ Essif, “Beat Consumption: The Challenge to Consumerism in Beat Literature“, 7.

and the materialistic values of the citizens. As the following lines suggest, Ferlinghetti's attitude towards the content televised was rather negative, in the poem *I am waiting* he writes: "and I am waiting to see God on television piped onto church altars if only they can find the right channel to tune in on and I am waiting for the Last Supper to be served again with a strange new appetizer and I am perpetually awaiting a rebirth of wonder."¹⁹⁰ In these lines, Ferlinghetti chooses to depict the society as pathetic, forgetting their religiousness and modesty. As was previously mentioned in this paper, when the settlement started in the 1600s with the arrival of the ship *Mayflower*, the pilgrims arrived to the continent with a clear vision of building a better life for themselves, a life where they could practise their religion, however, according to Pokorná's analysis of Bradford's work, this vision of sufficiency gradually changed into the desire of self-enrichment¹⁹¹, further on leading to the consumer and materialistic society the American society had become by the time of the 1950s. Ferlinghetti further brings up the topic of the last supper, only now mentioning it as something people would consume, as consumption provides them with excitement. The experience that the Last Supper provides here is physical rather than spiritual.

In addition to the life spent in front of the television or while pursuing happiness in the form of consumption of goods and commodities, aiming to lift themselves in the eyes of others, Ferlinghetti further writes: "and I am anxiously waiting for the secret of eternal life to be discovered by an obscure general practitioner and save me forever from certain death and I am waiting for life to begin"¹⁹² with the "waiting for life to begin" suggesting that people are only surviving, not experiencing life in the way it could and should be, rather than that, they spend most of their lives at work to earn money that they can exchange for things and food to consume.

The desire to earn money that accompanied the popularization of media is to be identified in the following line: "and I am waiting for a reconstructed *Mayflower* to reach America with its picture story and tv rights sold in advance to the natives."¹⁹³ The author mocks the desire for money that is so typical for the American society, *Mayflower* crew at this time would not be sailing towards America in search for religious freedom and away from an environment where they were not welcomed, but to earn money by starting their business that is based on getting money from consumers, for they know that people love to

¹⁹⁰ Ferlinghetti, "I am waiting", 50.

¹⁹¹ Marie Pokorná, *Vliv puritanismu na životní postoje v románu N. Hawthorna The Scarlet Letter*, 27.

¹⁹² Ferlinghetti, "I am waiting", 51.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

‘consume’ movies rather than live their own movie. Furthermore, as was previously mentioned, “Television was a huge medium for spreading popular culture. These movies were supposed to entertain the viewers as well as educate them and reinforce religiousness and patriotism”¹⁹⁴

Furthermore, the line “and I am awaiting perpetually and forever a renaissance of wonder”¹⁹⁵ apart from further showing that the whole poem is a satire on the American society, who were only waiting for something to happen, while consuming objects, movies, anything that they are manipulated to ‘wanting’, rather than experiencing life and making something happen, in fact only wasting their life away, it also shows that nothing was wondrous anymore, which can also be due to the fact that everything was produced on a massive scale and was thus similar, and that people did the same task the whole shift, not really creating anything new, which is what Corso also mentioned in his poem *Marriage*.

6.3. Junkman’s Obbligato

The whole poem focuses to some extent on consumerism. The narrator is urging the recipient (probably the reader) to leave everything that is typical for the American society of that time (such as appointments, payments etc.) behind and leave with the narrator, they would visit a place where garbage is thrown away, garbage has a lot to do with consumption as excessive consumption results in excessive disposal. People were also finally able to purchase more objects, thus allowing them to get rid of the old ones, yet perfectly functionate. Furthermore, the author brings up the existence of ‘automobile graveyards’, where the narrator and his follower will disappear¹⁹⁶, possibly pointing to the large amount of cars that were disposed there. As was previously mentioned, automobiles were becoming more affordable thanks to Henry Ford’s assembly line and his overall business management and therefore the 1950s was already a time where most people could afford to buy new car models, thus getting disposed of the old ones to make space for the new ones. Cars at that time were and are to this day a way of showing one’s status.

¹⁹⁴ “Popular culture and mass media in the 1950s“, Khan Academy, Accessed April 3, 2020. <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/postwarera/1950s-america/a/popular-culture-and-mass-media-cnx>

¹⁹⁵ Ferlinghetti, “I am waiting”, 53.

¹⁹⁶ Lawrence Ferlinghetti, “Junkman’s Obbligato“, in *A Coney Island of the Mind* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1958), 54 – 59.

The form of the poem is rather disorganized, which might add to the feeling of wanting to alienate from the society, whose life was the opposite of disorganized as worthy Americans were punctual with payments and appointments, their lives were boring, without any surprises. Young people of the 1950s, instead of living and enjoying lives, were moving to the suburbs, thus 'consuming' very financially accessible housing, rather than experiencing life. The line in the previous poem 'I am awaiting perpetually and forever a renaissance of wonder' can thus even express the author's disagreement with the stability – both existential and material - young people choose instead of their mobility and opportunity to enjoy simple stable life, as urges the narrator of the poem *Junkman's Obbligato*.

In the lines "Sleep in phone booths, Puke in pawnshops, wailing for a winter overcoat."¹⁹⁷ Ferlinghetti expresses his aim to sleep in a phone booths, pointing to the fact that he himself has no access to accommodation, which he probably chose himself and uses it to distinguish himself from the society's standards, which included the housing in the suburbs and overall emphasis on nice furnished houses.

Furthermore, Ferlinghetti mentions puking in pawnshops. Pawnshops were and still are stores where one can sell their possessions in exchange for money. The act of puking in the pawnshops can show the author's negative attitude towards the business done in pawnshops which allows people to get temporarily and often finally rid of their possessions to be able to spend more.

That the Beat Generation were not keen on spending much on anything was already mentioned and it is to be identified in the line "Let's go smelling of sterno where the benches are filled" as well. Sterno is an alcohol in a can used in kitchens as a fuel, however, it is sometimes abused by people who want to intoxicate themselves. This line is an example of the Beat Generation's consumption of inexpensive goods. Sterno is a cheap way of intoxicating oneself, nevertheless, Essif classified the Beat Generation, based on Kerouac's characters, as good price hunters, while explaining that their pursuit of inexpensive objects was not based on any material values, but mostly to ease their escape from the society and the circle of work and consumption.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Ferlinghetti, "Junkman's Obbligato", 55.

¹⁹⁸ Essif, "Beat Consumption: The Challenge to Consumerism in Beat Literature", 5.

Furthermore, in the line “leaving our income tax form behind and our waterproof wristwatch with it”¹⁹⁹ the narrator and their follower let go of their materialistic values, the narrator expressing his lack of need for luxurious objects such as the waterproof wristwatch, disobeying the country’s rules about handing in the income tax form, which points to the fact that the Beat Generation wanted to escape the economic system.

Additionally, Ferlinghetti did not perceive the values of the society as worthy. In the line “our tincan cries and garbage voices trailing. Junk for sale!”²⁰⁰ the author uses the phrase “Junk for sale!” to mock the American society’s urge to make purchases of objects of no genuine value and as Essif claims, objects that will end up in the trash soon after the purchase²⁰¹, thus one can perceive them as “junk”.

Lastly, one can even witness the disagreement with materialism and consumption of material objects in the poem in the line “I wish to descend in the social scale”²⁰² as Ferlinghetti writes, while expressing him leaving behind for instance the waterproof wristwatch. When one thinks about it, it points to the fact that getting rid of possessions and not participating in the economical system of America, as mentioned above when focusing on leaving behind the tax formula, necessarily meant being someone lesser in the eyes of the society.

Conclusion

To conclude, both Ferlinghetti and Corso reacted to the nature of consumerism, capitalism, American conformity and materialism and their consequences in their work. Rather than describing the way typical Americans lived, both writers foreshadowed it by expressing their opposition to the American values in their work through expressing their wishes, their feelings and perceptions of the values of the society, the surroundings, the circle of production and consumption and the way people handled material products.

In Ferlinghetti’s poems, one can see the call for individuality and detachment from the typical society and their material values in the poem *Don’t let that Horse*, where he praises Chagall for acting differently than desired by the society, while his behaviour leads him to becoming famous and thus rewards him. What’s more, the writer also depicts the horse as a

¹⁹⁹ Ferlinghetti, “Junkman’s Obbligato“, 56.

²⁰⁰ Ferlinghetti, “Junkman’s Obbligato“, 56.

²⁰¹ Essif, “Beat Consumption: The Challenge to Consumerism in Beat Literature“, 3.

²⁰² Ferlinghetti, “Junkman’s Obbligato“, 57.

typical consumer, who tries to consume a violin, even though it is not intended for basic consumption.

Furthermore, Ferlinghetti expresses his disillusionment with the contemporary world in the poem *I am waiting*, where the author expresses his disagreement with the way people are constantly waiting for something, often in front of their televisions, living the lives of those on screen instead of living their own lives and focusing on earning money, spending it and making purchases.

Additionally, Ferlinghetti prompts the reader to leave the typical materialistic and consumerist values of the society and go and descend in social status by giving up the luxuries of life in America, while using these acts to express his belief that social status is based on possessing and consuming products. The narrator completely avoids fulfilling the for the society desired life of abundance through choosing to live without luxurious objects, pointing to the way these commodities are handled, which is mostly as junk, as they are of no genuine value. Furthermore, the writer himself presents some detachment from the society both in the poem *Don't Let that Horse and Junkman's Obligato*, just as was desired by the writers of the Beat Generation.

Concerning the attitude of Gregory Corso towards the exploitation of nature, the writer expresses his quite clearly against the people's behaviour towards animals both in his letters and in his poems. In the poems, he tries to offer a closer understanding of the emotions animals, which are used for animal products production, to the reader in the poem *The Mad Yak*, he further brings attention to the state of nature in the poem *Elegiac Feelings American*, but Corso is also very straightforward with his perception of animals in his letters, be it his cats, animals in the ZOO or his disagreement with people not feeding sheep enough, saying: „I don't understand people's attitudes toward animals.“²⁰³ Animals simply became only a part of mass production and were used as a way of enriching oneself, which was similar to the selfish way slaves were used in the 19th century.

All in all, even though the Beat Generation did not aim to attack the political system and cause any uprisings, both Ferlinghetti and Corso implement their disagreement with the contemporary consumer society and the Americans' materialistic values. Both authors felt disappointed with the way Americans based the value of their lives on the possession and consumption of goods and commodities, completely omitting what really matters in life and

²⁰³ Corso et al., *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, 17.

rather than living it, Americans chose to spend their lives in front of the television, exposed to brainwashing and manipulation, which prompted them to consume even more while presenting it as American togetherness, which was exactly what Ferlinghetti and Corso did not feel to be a part of, rather than togetherness, they encouraged individuality, originality and living one's life fully.

Resumé

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analýza básní amerického spisovatele a nakladatele Lawrence Ferlinghettiho a básní a dopisů amerického básníka Gregoryho Corsa z hlediska jejich postoje ke konzumeristickým a materialistickým tendencím Americké společnosti padesátých let. Oba dva spisovatelé byli představiteli generace Beatníků, kteří ve svých dílech často přinášeli čtenářům negativní pohled na hodnoty a chování tehdejší společnosti za pomoci projekce svého bohémského života do svých děl.

První kapitola přináší vysvětlení pojmu konzumerismus a pojmů s ním spojených jako je spotřeba, produkce, kapitalismus, ale také potřeba. Zrovna právě potřeba hraje velkou roli v identifikaci konzumeristického chování, kde právě konzumenti často konzumují mnohem více, než potřebují. Často ale nejsou schopni své potřeby rozlišit od svých tužeb, právě díky manipulaci médií, která jsou v této kapitole také projednána jako prostředky k prezentaci konzumerismu jako správného životního stylu. Masových médií využívají firmy právě za účelem zisku, který jim dovolí další nákupy a tudíž další konzumaci, která jim v takovéto společnosti dovolí postup na sociálním žebříčku. Dále je v této kapitole nastíněn negativní dopad konzumerismu na životní prostředí, ke kterému docházelo právě také kvůli pohodlnosti Američanů, kteří byli na honbě za svým Americkým snem.

Dále kapitola ukazuje jak lidé vnímali zboží jako prostředek k vyjádření jejich sociálního statusu a hodnotili sebe i své okolí na základě příjmu, majetku a přepychovosti. V kapitole je také ukázáno jak například Henry Ford nastartoval masovou produkci a tím pádem i spotřebu tím, že zboží (v jeho případě automobily) zlevnil tak, aby si je mohli dovolit i jeho pracovníci, kterým zvýšil plat. Ukazuje se zde právě i vzájemná závislost produkce na spotřebě zboží.

V další kapitole je práce zaměřena na vývoj konzumeristického chování v USA od jejich počátku až do padesátých let 20. století. Mimo projevy chování, jako je sobeckost a bezohlednost za účelem se obohatit, které jsou velmi snadno identifikovatelné právě za dob

otroctví, jsou zde vytyčeny události, které dovolily konzumerismu jeho rychlý rozvoj. Mezi tyto události se řadí průmyslová revoluce, ale také obě světové války, které přispěly k rozvoji Americké ekonomiky, což je také důležitý faktor. V souvislosti s otroctvím je zde krátce pojednáno také o etice, jak ve vztahu chování jedince k dalšímu jedinci, tak k přírodě a zvířatům, na které masová produkce měla a stále má velký dopad.

Z hlediska vlivu průmyslové revoluce na rozvoj konzumerismu je v práci psáno hlavně o pásové výrobě, která nejenže umožnila levnou výrobu ohromného množství výrobků za krátkou dobu, ale také ochudila pracující o dobrý pocit z dokončené práce, protože prováděli stále jeden a ten samý úkon celou směnu. Na tento problém reagovali právě představitelé Beat Generation, o čemž je později v práci také pojednáno.

S ohledem na historii USA, druhá kapitola poskytuje stručný přehled vývoje Amerických dějin od příjezdu prvních osadníků, jejich důvodů k migraci a postupného vývoje od vidiny náboženské svobody, přes možnost pracovat za účelem zajištění sebe a rodiny, sobeckého využívání otroků za účelem sebeobohacení a prosperity Jihu, války Severu proti Jihu a následné éry Rekonstrukce, která znamenala právě také rozvoj obchodu a infrastruktury i Amerického Jihu. Dále pád burzy na Wall Street a řešení tehdejší vlády, obě světové války a jejich dopad na ekonomiku a vnímání velkých korporátů, kteří se zapojili do válečné produkce, občany USA, až po konzumeristickou společnost padesátých let.

Třetí kapitola se zabývá Americkou společností v padesátých letech, jsou zde krátce zmíněny okolnosti jako McCarthyismus a studená válka, více je ale kapitola věnována prosperující ekonomice, dosažitelnosti produktů a jejich propagaci v masových médiích, což ovlivnilo nárůst konzumeristických tendencí. Dále je zde pojednáno o nadcházejících protestech v 60. letech, na které mělo také vliv to, že tato nadměrné spotřeby a dosažitelnost Amerického snu nebyla umožněna všem Američanům nebo Američankám bez výjimky.

V podkapitole je poté psáno o tom, jakou roli hraje vzdělání, když přijde na přílišnou spotřebu, a to nejen s ohledem na schopnost vlastního úsudku ohledně kvality produktů a etičnost jejich výroby, ale také s ohledem na ovlivňování žáků ke konzumaci již od jejich útlého věku. Dále je podkapitola věnována honbě Američanů za Americkým snem, který se odchytil od původní vidiny soběstačnosti k prahnutí po bohatství, nadbytku a spotřebě, které Američané začali vnímat jako pravý smysl života.

Čtvrtá kapitola je věnována vztahu populární kultury a Beat Generation, jejíž představitelé se vůči populární kultuře a společnosti celkově vyhrazovali. Populární kultura

byla celkově míněna pro velkou škálu lidí, často je silně ovlivňovala a vytvářela jakési falešné vědomí a realitu, často oslavující produkci a spotřebu, s čímž představitelé Beat Generation nesouhlasili a vnímali je jako svazující. Dále je zde nastíněn odpor Beat Generation k takzvanému ‚Americkému přizpůsobení‘.

Praktická část se poté zabývá dílčími projevy odporu Lawrence Ferlinghettiho a Gregoryho Corsa k Americké pospolitosti, ovlivnění Američanů k právě materialistickým hodnotám a velké spotřebě. Tyto problémy jsou zde vysvětleny na jednotlivých básních těchto spisovatelů, ale i dopisů, které Gregory Corso psal svým přátelům a které byly upraveny do jeho autobiografie.

Nejčastěji se Corso i Ferlinghetti vyhrážejí právě vůči materialismu, protože spotřebu produktů a vlastnictví majetku v žádném případě nevidí jako pravý smysl života. Vyhrážejí se také vůči populární kultuře, hlavně pak té vysílané v televizi. Ferlinghetti i Corso ve svých básních naráží právě i na úpadek duchovnosti a zbožnosti Američanů, kde to, co bylo dřív považováno za svaté, je nyní zneužíváno v televizi jako prostředek manipulace publika k větší spotřebě.

Oba spisovatelé naráží na dopad konzumerismu na životní prostředí, Gregory Corso se ale věnuje i zacházení se zvířaty, například v jeho básni *The Mad Yak*, kde vyobrazuje utrpení zvířete, které je součástí produkce zvířecích výrobků. Oba spisovatelé se pak vyjadřují ke stavu přírody, Corso mluví o znečištění přírody a Ferlinghetti se vyjadřuje o Americe jako o betonovém kontinentu. Toto je velmi silná součást konzumerismu, protože masová produkce a rozvoj infrastruktury za účelem rozvozu zboží, aby bylo dosažitelné pro všechny a zisky mohly růst, měly a stále mají velký vliv na zdraví naší planety.

Díla obou spisovatelů vyobrazují nespokojenost s chováním tehdejší společnosti a jejich manipulovatelností. Oba spisovatelé viděli smysl života v jiných aktivitách, než je spotřeba a vidina Amerického snu - života plného přepychových produktů a klidu na předměstí. Přestože však díla vnímají padesátá léta z tohoto hlediska negativně, nedají se považovat za přímý útok na politický systém, ale jedná se spíše o vyjádření negativních pocitů těchto spisovatelů.

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