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Escape from Conformity:

A Marcusean Reading of *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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SAMUEL BECKETT'S POEM FOR MARCUSE

Samuel Beckett: Poem Dedicated to Herbert Marcuse on His Eightieth Birthday

Translated by Edith Fourier

Pas a pas	step by step
Nulle part	nowhere
Nul seul	not a single one
Ne sait comment	knows how
Petits pas	tiny steps
Nulle part	nowhere
Obstinément	stubbornly

چکیده

بعد از جنگ جهانی دوم آمریکا به عنوان یک کشور بسته ظهور کرد. مکانیزاسیون های عظیم و کارکردهای جدید تکنولوژی مدرن جایی برای آزادی و تنهایی انسانها باقی نگذاشت و این به عنوان ایدئولوژی حاکم در نظر گرفته می شد که به راحتی و به صورت کلی مردم و محیطشان را کنترل می کرد. تجربه ی سلاحهای هسته ای خاستگاههایی نو از ترور به وجود آورد و آنها مردم را متقاعد کردند که انسانها توسط این سلاحها از بین خواهند رفت. صنعتی شدن و پیشرفت بعد از جنگ جهانی دوم مایه ی فراوانی اقتصادی آمریکا شد. این وقایع، به طور کلی باعث از دست داد هویت، فردیت و آزادی مردم گردید. در چنین شرایط خفقان آوری دو نویسنده ی بزرگ ظاهر شدند. هم هربرت مارکوزه و هم جک کرواک از همرنگی جامعه مطلع بودند و در پرداختن به این مشکل رویکردهای خاص خودشان را داشتند. مارکوزه کتابهایی در باب فلسفه، سیاست و زیبایی شناسی نوشته و در این کتابها در باره ی شرایط بد موجود و اینکه چگونه به آنها پایان دهیم می نویسد. از طرف دیگر کرواک از طریق رمان به همان مشکلات جامعه می پردازد و نیز اینکه چگونه باید آن مشکل را حل کرد. در این تحقیق، محقق به بازخوانی رمان "توی جاده" در سایه ی نظریات مارکوزه و مخصوصاً نظریاتش در "انسان تک ساحتی" و همچنین تنها اثر اختصاص داده شده ی وی به هنر یعنی "بعد زیبایی شناسی" می پردازد. اگرچه تفاوتهای زیادی بین افکار مارکوزه و کرواک وجود دارد، در این تحقیق تاکید بر روی ابعادی خواهد بود که بین آنها مشترک است و به خوانش رمان از رویکردی جدید کمک می کند. مفهوم مارکوزه از انسان تک ساحتی در "توی جاده" انعکاس می یابد، توصیف مارکوزه از جامعه ی یکدست در رمان کرواک به تصویر کشیده شده است، شرح مارکوزه از تفکر پوزیتیویستی که از زبان عادی استفاده می کند در نوشتار خودجوش کرواک از بین می رود و در نهایت هم مارکوزه و هم کرواک به امید اینکه نوشته هایشان انسانها را از خواب عمیق همرنگی، سلطه و دربند بودن بیدار سازد نوشته اند.

کلید واژه ها: جنگ جهانی دوم، آزادی، تکنولوژی، انسان تک ساحتی، همرنگی، نوشتار خودجوش

Abstract

After World War II, the United States began to emerge as a closed society. Huge mechanization and new functions of modern technology did not leave any place for people's privacy and freedom, and it was taken as the dominant ideology, which could easily and completely manipulate people and their environment. The experience of nuclear weapons created new origins of terror, and they tried to persuade people that human beings would be destroyed by the power of these weapons. The industrialization and development after the war led the United States into the economic affluence. These events, all taken together, led to a loss of identity, individuality and freedom of the individuals. In that suffocating atmosphere, two great writers emerged. Both Herbert Marcuse and Jack Kerouac were aware of the conformism of the age and in dealing with this problem, they had their own approaches. Marcuse wrote books on philosophy, politics and aesthetics and in these books he talked about the situation at hand and how to end it. On the other hand, Kerouac wrote novels that dealt with the same subject, the problems of the society and how to get rid of. In this research, I reread Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* in the light of Herbert Marcuse's ideas, especially his ideas in *One-Dimensional Man* and his sole work that is appropriated to art, *The Aesthetic Dimension*. Although there are many differences between Kerouac and Marcuse's ideas, my focus is on those aspects that are central to both of them and help me to read Kerouac's *On the Road* in a new approach. Marcuse's notion of one-dimensional man resounds in Kerouac's *On the Road*, Marcuse's description of homogeneous society is depicted by Kerouac, Marcuse's description of positivistic thinking that uses ordinary language is dismantled by Kerouac's use of spontaneous writing and finally both Marcuse and Kerouac wrote that maybe their writings awaken individuals from the deep sleep of conformity, domination and unfreedom

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Chapter One

Introduction

A. General Background

During the 1930s, state monopoly capitalism grew up. Beginning in the late 19th century, a new era of monopoly capitalism started. A form of more organized capitalism with monopolies and a bureaucratic state that developed was completely a new and different stage of capitalism. A good example of this is the gilded age. It was a period of widespread economic growth as the United States passed through industrialization. The United States was rapidly developing its economy into new areas, especially heavy industry like factories, railroads and coal mining. Increased mechanization of industry was a major mark of the 'Gilded ages'. So oil industry, monopolies in copper and steel in railroads, and banks had much more organized economy than unorganized capitalism of previous eras. Moreover, 1930s was an era of depression and therefore

the state played a much more important role in controlling economy so the United States had a form of state monopoly capitalism where the state provided jobs and welfare and also controlled monetary policy to play a much more organized role in everyday life of its people.

There were two main forms of state monopoly capitalism: first, there was German fascism that was a totalitarian mode of state capitalism in which the state completely took over the economy, the political sphere, the cultural sphere and tried to organize and control all forms of social life. The government of Nazi Germany was a fascist, totalitarian state. Totalitarian regimes establish complete political, social and cultural control over their people. Totalitarianism emphasizes the suppression of the individuals to develop the profits of the state and controls all aspects of the citizen's lives.

The perfect totalitarianism state would put out individual freedom and leads all individual energies to a single purpose of the nation itself. In extreme modes, totalitarian control would mean control of every aspect of individual life from what he eats for dinner, to who his friends are, to what books he reads but the concept of totalitarianism is much greater than that. In other words, it goes beyond this that individuals are completely controlled because repression alone cannot achieve subjugation; one cannot subjugate people by controlling them and repressing them. So the idea of a totalitarian state needs not only that the state has the power to control the people's lives but individuals should accept the necessity of this power. So the ultimate goal of the totalitarian state is to completely surrender people's wills to the will of the state. Therefore, the result is total mobilization and not simply passive acceptance of the totalitarian state.

The other form of state capitalism was democratic state capitalism including New Deal and Roosevelt's beginning of a welfare state with monetary policy, new jobs, social projects that tried to help employment that involved a much more active role of the state and the economy.

Features of the welfare state were first the attempt to save the individuals from risk by various governmental safety programs and second, to try to provide full employment by government spending and to trying to advertise opportunity through economic redistribution. The welfare state had founded its roots on the rejection of previous laissez-faire notion of capitalism. The welfare state had accepted the political right conception of greater role for the state in providing social safety programs. Another element of welfare state capitalism is, through the experience of depression era, the development of governmental institutions that were trying to stabilize the capitalist financial system.

The basis of welfare state in the United States was the product of the New Deal. The New Deal came into being with the idea of social justice but the impact was in justice. To some extent government helped people by finding jobs for them, insurance in case of unemployment, old age or infirmity but this impact was also totalitarian. Everything was in the control of government; factories, insurance companies and people could not do anything that government did not want. Here the issue is seemingly similar to what the Nazi German did through its administration. Totalitarianism ruled in both regimes one through a fascist regime and the other through welfare state capitalism and interestingly it had the same effect in both countries.

One of the greatest reactions to these governments, these mentalities, and the way totalitarianism administered in these governments was programmed through the movement called the Frankfurt school. The so-called Frankfurt School developed new attitudes on contemporary civilization with critiques of state monopoly capitalism, advanced industrial society, the culture industry, high technology and consumer society that they were stuck in. The Frankfurt School provided some of the first critiques of modern contemporary era. The term Frankfurt school designates a group of German and American scholars who worked first in

Frankfurt Germany in 1930s. They were Jews and also radicals so when Hitler and the Nazis came into power they were forced to go into exile; they went to the US and they continued their work later in Columbia University where they continued in philosophy, social theory and tried to develop a critical theory of the contemporary era.

The members of the Frankfurt school include people like Herbert Marcuse who emerged as the most important and famous member of the group when he became the leader of the New Left in 1960s and wrote books like *One-Dimensional Man, An Essay on Liberation, Eros and Civilization* and many other very important books. The director of the Institute for Social Research that developed critical theory was Max Horkheimer who is a very important philosopher and social theorist who wrote many books on contemporary philosophy and played an important role in the development of critical theory of society. Theodor Adorno who was another member of the group is a major philosopher and social critic and perhaps one of greatest theorists of music in the 20th century and also one of the greatest critics of mass culture. Another member of the Frankfurt School was Erick Fromm who became one of the most popular writers in the United States writing books like *Escape from Freedom* in 1941, which was one of the first critical books on German Fascism for the English speaking people. Leo Lowenthal was a major literary critic and cultural critic who was another important member of the group and then Jürgen Habermas who continues his work even today as the most influential contemporary representative of the Frankfurt School.

The plan of the Frankfurt School was to develop a critical theory of contemporary society that would integrate philosophy, social theory, economics and cultural criticism in a new form that is call interdisciplinary theory. That was a project in Frankfurt where philosophers, social theorists, economists, and political scientists gathered. They tried to study the institutions of the

contemporary era and to work in order to develop a critical theory of the contemporary era. One of the most important helps in developing and investigating the current situations of the contemporary era is their investigation and analysis of state monopoly capitalism that developed in 1930s when they had gone to the US. What they did was to update the analysis of capitalism that it had been developed by Karl Marx in the 19th century. Marx investigated a situation of market capitalism featuring competition between competitive firms and businesses. Frankfurt school argued that beginning in the late 19th century a new era of monopoly capitalism had started a new form of organized capitalism with monopolies that started a completely different stage of capitalism.

The two main form of state monopoly capitalism include German fascism and Democratic state capitalism. The Frankfurt School stated that in both of these forms of state capitalism, new types of administration, bureaucracy and social oppression appeared and did its best in declining individual freedom and democracy. The result that Frankfurt school claimed was a mass society featuring homogeneity, by standardization and social conformity and, therefore, resulting in the decline of individuality and a rise of massification. The Frankfurt School was the first to see the important roles of science, technology, bureaucracy and the states as instruments of social domination and repression; moreover, in analyzing new mass societies, the Frankfurt school was again the first to see the role of mass media in reproducing contemporary societies and reproducing their ideologies. In Nazi Germany, the Frankfurt school experienced the fascist seizing and controlling newspapers, the radio, the film industry and by doing so indoctrinating German ideology to impress the Germans into fascism, to expand the ideology of their Fuhrer; all of these were reproduced through mass culture and mass communication and they played a central role in German fascism, but when the Frankfurt school

members went to the United States, they saw that in United States the instruments, the institutions of mass culture and communication were playing an equally important role in indoctrinating capitalism, democracy and American way of life. They believed that Hollywood films, radio, advertising, magazine, newspapers were promoting the American ideology just like in Nazi Germany the fascist ideology was being supported by film, radio and in the soviet union communist ideology was the core of film and broadcasting, newspapers and other forms of advertisings. So the Frankfurt School were among the first critical intellectuals of mass culture and mass communication who saw that what is called media was at the center of social life and social advertising; this was not discovered since then as the main role of mass culture and mass production.

Frankfurt school members were also the first to see that the consumer society was a new form of capitalism and a new social institution that was integrating this new consumer class into advanced capitalist societies and creating new consumer needs, value, behavior and even consciousness. During the era of competitive capitalism investigated by Karl Marx, the working class did not have enough money to live let alone to buy refrigerators, cars, etc. ; but it was maybe Henry Ford who began mass productions and assembly lines and who gave the workers a good wage and empowered them to buy automobiles. During the 1920s and 30s union movements got stronger and stronger and accordingly the wages of the workers went up, and particularly after World War II a consumer society arrived in which new needs for automobiles, refrigerators, televisions helped create a new form of consumer capitalism that was very different from the capitalism that Marx investigated . Therefore, they were the first to see the consumer society was a new social form and that consumption, advertising, packaging, design were very important parts of contemporary capitalism. So the Frankfurt school provided many important insights into

contemporary societies by analyzing the role of state and bureaucracy, of science and technology as modes of social control, the roles of culture industry of mass culture and communication, the role of consumer society and new forms of culture. They were analyzing the passage from the era of market capitalism and liberal democracy that characterized the 19th and early 20th cent. to a new era of state monopoly capitalism, a more advanced capitalist society.

In producing theory the Frankfurt school was quite eclectic, using a wide range of figures from a European cultural tradition that focused on characterizing the central features of the modern age. The Frankfurt School attempted to analyze modernity, the modern age, the contemporary era, selecting features which were different from the past. This project began with Hegel and Marx and the Frankfurt school used the dialectical method and a vision of history of Hegel and Marx. The dialectical theory saw history as a clash. So the Frankfurt School took over the dialectic method that analyzed the tensions and conflicts that took history into new historical stages. From Hegel the Frankfurt school also derived the notions of idealism and dialectical method. From Marx they derived an appreciation for the role of material forces, an interest in history and also the role of economics in culture and everyday life. So in this sense they were dialectical since Hegel stressed the role of ideas and spirit in history and Marx stresses the role of economics and material factors; the Frankfurt school brought both together in their dialectical analysis.

Moreover, the Frankfurt school was influenced by Fredrick Nietzsche, the German philosopher of the late 19th century and particularly his critiques of the mass culture and society, his critiques of morality and his critiques of the state and bureaucracy. In fact, in books like *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* published in 1888 he denounced the state as the new idol. So Nietzsche was one of the first to see that the state had become a new idol. Nietzsche was criticizing the idol

of the state that had become a new source of the center of devotion. This of course anticipated German fascism that idolized the state more than any society in history. Indeed the Frankfurt school was impressed by Nietzsche in stating that the state was becoming a new idol and it continued Nietzsche's critique of the modern state. Nietzsche was also one of the first critics of the mass culture and massification and the Frankfurt is famous in developing this notion. Nietzsche decried what he called mass man by which he meant conformity. Everyone is thinking the same at the same time. He was one of the first with the role of journalism in creating mass opinion, homogenization in culture and the Frankfurt school continued this with the studies of mass media, of film, of radio and later of television that was even a stronger form of cultural homogenization and massification.

The Frankfurt school were also deeply influenced by Freud that they thought they had deep insights into the role human sexuality and of course they pursued the agenda of sexual liberation and most famously Herbert Marcuse in his book *Eros and civilization* which anticipated the late 1960s counterculture that wanted to liberate Eros. They talked about love, Eros and art and play as emancipatory activities that would cultivate the human senses, emancipate the human mind and body and to create healthier and happier personalities. They were also influenced by Freud's theory of the unconscious that we often weren't aware of what causes our behavior, certain unconscious forces in human life. They were impressed by the analysis of the role of the family and socialization in everyday life that often the problems of the family create neurosis or trauma that create personality distortions that the family plays a very major role in forming and shaping of individual. On the other hand the Frankfurt School was among the first to argue that the family is not playing the key role in socialization that Freud and Marx sociological theorists argued that mass culture and communication, state and social

institutions were playing a stronger and stronger role in socializing their individual and the family was declining in importance. In society of conformity where the people conform to the ideals of mass media often individuality was on the decline and this was one of the main themes of the Frankfurt school which wanted to save, to preserve the culture and individuality.

The Beat Generation emerged in the United States in 1950s, which was a frightening age. The huge industrialized civilization resulted economic affluence but also led to mental illnesses. People did not have individuality and freedom anymore. The beat movement not only howled the era of a new literary birth but also predicted a complete liberation of mind and body. And much important thing was their choice of the type of their lives in such hard times. Nearly all the members were gays, and had the experience of drug smoking. They howled extreme individualism, and chose being crazy as a means to break the limits of conventional moral and life system.

They wrote the experience of themselves and revealed the truth through their works, screaming a long howl of pain to the modern civilization, which was grasping the human freedom. In their point of view, the arts and behaviors were closely related; the arts reflected the behaviors, and the behaviors exhibited the arts. Among the most important members were Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac. The term "beat generation" was introduced by Jack Kerouac around 1948 to describe his social movement. The major beat writings included Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* and William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*.

Allen Ginsberg was probably one of most important contemporary poets of 20th century. He was born in 1926 in Newark. Many of his writings were read as controversial and obscene. The reading of *Howl* resulted in the arrest of Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the owner of City Lights Books, because of obscene content of the poem. The experts and critics in charge objected to

Ginsberg's openness about his homosexuality and also his use of sexual language. Many of his other writings deal with subjects such as strong illegal drugs and subjects like this.

William Burroughs was born in 1914 in St. Louis. He was well known for his openly homosexual tendencies and his experiments with illegal drugs. Most of his writing focused on the underworld and using drugs and his novel, *Naked Lunch*, clearly shows these aspects of his view.

Jack Kerouac was born in 1922 in Lowell, Massachusetts. He is the author of the greatest novels of the beat generation and also of the 20th century America. He was the author of the infamous novel, *On the Road*, and he became a leader and a spokesman for the Beat Movement. The beat movement began their work in special social and political background in the United States. After World War II, the United States began to emerge as a closed society. Huge mechanization and new functions of modern technology did not leave any place for people's privacy and freedom, and it was taken as the dominant ideology, which could easily and completely manipulate people and their environment. The experience of nuclear weapons created new origins of terror, and they tried to persuade people that human beings would be destroyed by the power of these weapons. With the increasing power of the United States, many military tools were created all over the world to find a way for the domination of the United States' ideology. The traditional conception that there should be enough space of all different ideas to exist had declined to the benefit of political and social conformity which was led by the United States. The respect for individuality had been overshadowed and was replaced by the suppression of the public opinion and censorship for writing works (for example the poem *Howl* by Ginsberg). This industrialization and development led the United States into the economic affluence but also led

it to the mental lack and loss of honesty, identity, and individuality. In this suffocating atmosphere, the beat movement surprisingly emerged. It started and howled for a new mode full of freedom and individuality. The beats were known as a group of pessimists, addicted to the drugs, crimes and homosexuality. They called themselves as a clique of tramps who had abandoned the dominant culture of the day, a clique of tramps creating a new and eccentric view point on morals; a group of writers writing against the orthodox culture and creating new morals which was in complete opposition to what other people had took for granted.

The viewpoint of beats on life was rooted in the radical romantic philosophy. They were also influenced by William Blake, Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau. They continued Thoreau's attitude to life that is radical idealism, which was full of the pessimism and hatred toward the industrial civilization and a strong desire for the return to natural idyllic life. Just like Whitman and Blake, they praised all creatures and advocated the typical American style of purity, simplicity, and freshness.

The beats rejected the prevailing American middle class values, which tried to continue an easy and comfortable life. They showed strong contempt for the comfortable but at the same time very dull and platitudinal life style of middle class, and believed it to be a stagnant world full of people feeling suffocated without individual freedom and happiness. They rejected conventions and started the new exciting life full of the adventure and happiness, which would go beyond the restrictions of orthodox conventional morals. The beats flooded themselves with drugs, alcoholic drinks, and took these as the bliss of life and called themselves the champions for the liberty. But society did not accept them when they reached to the extreme; so the beats' too much violation of convention and fight against orthodoxy brought slander and censure from

many authorities and critics. They were called "desperados", a group of culprits who broke the laws to satisfy their bestial desires. The beats tried to prove their faith in the freedom with the unorthodox views on life. But their lifetime attempt resulted to be in vain, getting almost a little approval and compassion.

B. The Argument

Second World War was a catastrophe, one in which more than 50 million people lost their lives. It influenced everything from world history to philosophy, science, technology, art and literature. The United States emerged from the wreckage of the war as a winner and also the leader of Western world. In 1945, American troops returned home from Europe and Asia to their homes, families, schools, and jobs. The United States became one of the greatest economic powers in the world history.

In the United States before the war, the New Deal Policies applied by Franklin Roosevelt had proven to be temporarily successful, but the United States' economy still faced other problems. War quickly sent the United States' labor force into employment through "high rates of output growth and investment"; in other words, its economy was busy, with factories employing many workers, producing many products and having a high rate of productivity. This active growth had started by industrial production for the war, then by the increase of production for export. The American economy thus improved by industrialization and went into the Golden Age of post-WWII capitalism. The pervasiveness of homogenizing ideology, technologizing of the contemporary system, and a new attitude towards human beings are the most important

aspects of America in 1950s. Most importantly the first domain of society that started to react against the bad effects of the features of the so-called golden age of capitalism was literature:

Significantly, occasional dissenting voices did start to rise during 1950's, particularly in the literature era. Among these voices were authors such as J.D Salinger, Ralph Ellison, and Jack Kerouac. These texts came into prominence by questioning the dominant conditions of the decade. (Simmons, 2008, 14-15)

During the post-war era, the oppressive conformity in middle-class white American culture was too high, so the reaction against that conformity which was resounded by the beat generation was both famous and notorious. It was at that time that the Beat generation also came into prominence:

Beat writers identifies a group of poets and novelists, writing in the second half of the 1950s and early 1960s, who shared a set of social attitudes including antiestablishment, anti-political, anti-intellectual and opposed to the prevailing cultural, literary, and moral values in favor of unrestrained self-realization and self-expression. The Beat writers often performed in coffeehouses and other public places and to the accompaniment of drums or jazz music. "Beat" was used to signify both "beaten down" (that is, by the oppressive culture of the time) and "beatific" (many of the Beat writers cultivated ecstatic states by way of Buddhism, Jewish and Christian mysticism, and/or drugs that induced visionary experiences). The focus here would be on the beaten down dimension of the term. (Abrams, 2011, 24-25)

Jack Kerouac, "a self-proclaimed spokesman for the beat generation," wrote books that challenged the concept of conformity in the period following the Second World War. For example, his *On the Road* takes its two main characters, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, in many journeys across America and to Mexico as well. These journeys, that take them back and forth from east to west, show the rebellious notion that Kerouac had towards the idea of conformity. Through these journeys, Kerouac was conveying the idea that living life means the